

Episode 333 - EATAQ 15 - Epicurus Disputes The Stoic View Of The Sensations And The Anticipations

Post by "Cassius" of May 9, 2026 at 2:25 PM

Welcome to Episode 333 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world. Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

This week we start are continuing our series reviewing Cicero's "Academic Questions" from an Epicurean perspective. We are focusing first on what is referred to as Book One, which provides an overview of the issues that split Plato's Academy and gives us an overview of the philosophical issues being dealt with at the time of Epicurus. This week will continue in Book Two, where we will take up [Section 8](#)

Our text will come from

[Cicero - Academic Questions - Yonge](#) We'll likely stick with Yonge primarily, but we'll also refer to the Rackam translation here:

- [Cicero On Nature Of Gods Academica Loeb Rackham : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

[media]<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/72006643/media>

Post by "Cassius" of May 9, 2026 at 2:40 PM

Draft Outline of this episode, We ourselves should be so lucky as to get half of this in, but the outline may be helpful to others and for the next several weeks:

Podcast Outline: Cicero Academic Questions Book 2, Sections 8-9

Opening Frame (5-10 minutes)

Recap the battle map from Section 7:

- Three players: Stoics (some impressions reliably true), Academic Skeptics (no impressions reliably true), Epicurus (senses neither right nor wrong — judgment always in the mind)
- Lucullus in Sections 8-9 shifts tactics: he stops defending the kataleptic impression directly and instead argues that *practical life, virtue, and wisdom require certainty*. This is a different kind of argument — from consequences rather than from epistemology. Flag this shift for listeners.

Major Point 1: The "Virtue Requires Knowledge" Argument (Section 8)

Lucullus argues that the virtuous person who endures torture to preserve duty and faith must have *comprehended something true* — otherwise what grounds the commitment? If nothing can be known, why would anyone hold to anything at all?

Epicurean Response to develop:

- Epicurus agrees entirely that virtue requires knowledge — but the knowledge required is the Canon's knowledge, not the Stoic's rational grasp of a kataleptic impression.
- The wise person who endures pain does so because they have correctly understood through sensation, anticipation, and feeling that certain goods (friendship, integrity, the conditions of genuine pleasure) are genuinely worth preserving.
- The Epicurean grounding for moral commitment is empirical, not rationalist. The commitment doesn't require certainty in the Stoic sense — it requires honest attention to what sensation and feeling actually report.
- Key distinction to make: Lucullus is assuming that the only alternative to Stoic knowledge is Academic paralysis. The Epicurean is a third option he hasn't considered.

Major Point 2: Wisdom Knowing Itself (Section 8)

Lucullus asks: if wisdom doesn't know whether it is wisdom, how does it act with confidence? How does it know what the highest good is?

Epicurean Response:

- This argument proves too much. The Epicurean has a perfectly clear answer to "what is wisdom?" — wisdom is prudence (*phronesis*), the practical ability to calculate what produces genuine pleasure and genuine pain correctly over time. This is grounded in the Canon, not in rationalist self-certification.
 - The Stoic account of wisdom as self-certifying rational grasp is precisely what the Academic Skeptics demolished. Epicurus never needed that account. Wisdom for Epicurus is the correct use of the natural criteria — not a mystical rational state that validates itself.
 - Lucullus is caricaturing the Skeptic position and then implying that any opponent of the kataleptic impression must share it. The Epicurean does not.
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Major Point 3: The Impulse (*Hormē*) Argument (Section 8)

Lucullus argues that the impulse (*hormē*) to act — the desire that moves us — must be set in motion by something "seen and trusted." If what is seen cannot be distinguished from what is false, the impulse has no reliable foundation and action becomes impossible.

This is actually Epicurean-friendly territory — develop carefully:

- Epicurus completely agrees that desire (*hormē* in Stoic terms, appetite/desire in Epicurean terms) is set in motion by what is seen and felt. This is precisely the role of sensation and the feelings in the Canon.
 - The difference: for the Stoics, the triggering impression must be a *kataleptic* impression — a rational state that certifies its own truth. For Epicurus, the sensation simply *registers* what is there, and the feelings of pleasure and pain provide the evaluative signal. No rational self-certification required.
 - This is where the *alolon* point is crucial: sensation is non-rational, which is why it is reliable. The Stoic impression is rational — which is exactly why it can be deceived, as the Academics showed.
 - Lucullus's argument therefore inadvertently supports the Epicurean Canon as the better foundation for action.
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Major Point 4: If Perceptions Could All Be False, Reason Collapses (Section 9)

Lucullus argues that if all perceptions are potentially false and indistinguishable from false ones, then:

- No syllogistic conclusion (*apodeixis*) is reliable

- Inquiry becomes impossible (you can't discover what is false)
- Philosophy itself, which proceeds by reason, is destroyed

Epicurean Response:

- Agree with the conclusion, reject the premise. Epicurus *does not* hold that perceptions could all be false. The Academics say nothing can be known; the Stoics say some impressions are certified; Epicurus says sensation is universally reliable as a registering mechanism.
 - The key Epicurean point: "discovery" and inquiry are possible precisely because sensation reports accurately. The *apodeixis* — reasoning from the perceived to the unperceived — is exactly the Epicurean sign-inference doctrine (*semeia*). Sensation provides the reliable input; reason draws inferences; those inferences are tested against further sensation.
 - Lucullus is scoring points against the Academics here that Epicurus would largely endorse — but he assumes Epicurus is in the Academic camp, which is wrong.
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Major Point 5: The Self-Refutation of the Skeptics — Carneades vs. Antipater (Section 9)

The famous exchange: Antipater demands that the Skeptic admit that *at least one thing* can be known — namely, that nothing can be known. Carneades resists: the Skeptic who says nothing can be known excepts nothing, not even this claim.

Develop for the podcast:

- This is an internal Academic debate that Epicurus is not part of — but it matters because it shows that the Skeptical position is genuinely incoherent on its own terms.
 - The Epicurean observation: both sides are trapped because they accepted the Stoic premise that impressions are rational states with truth-values. Epicurus stepped outside that debate entirely. The senses don't *claim* anything, so the senses can't be self-refuting.
 - The Carneades move (the Skeptic excepts nothing) is logically consistent but practically disastrous — it produces exactly the paralysis Lucullus is worried about. This is why the Epicurean account is superior: it avoids both the Stoic overreach and the Academic paralysis.
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Major Point 6: Antiochus's Sharpened Version — The Dogma Problem (Section 9)

Antiochus argues that the Academics have adopted a *dogma* — the rule that nothing can be perceived — and that this dogma must itself be perceived to be held and acted on. The

Academics are therefore self-undermining.

Develop:

- This is the strongest argument in the section and deserves extended treatment.
 - The Epicurean parallel: the Canon is not a dogma in this problematic sense. It does not require its own prior certification. Sensation is already operating before any philosophical reflection on whether sensation is reliable — which is DeWitt's point about the natural criterion. You don't first certify your senses and then use them; you use them and the use itself is the evidence of their reliability.
 - Contrast with the Stoic position: the kataleptic impression *does* require a prior definition (Zeno's four-clause definition - SEE BELOW) and the Academics correctly identified that the third clause can never be satisfied. The Epicurean criterion requires no such definition — it is built into the nature of sensation as *alogon* registration.
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Closing Frame: What Lucullus Gets Right and Where He Goes Wrong

Where Lucullus is correct:

- Academic Skepticism is self-defeating
- Wisdom and virtue *do* require some form of reliable knowledge
- Action requires that the triggering perception be trustworthy

Where Lucullus goes wrong:

- He assumes the only alternative to the Stoic kataleptic impression is Academic paralysis — the Epicurean Canon is the third option he ignores
- His insistence that there is "truth in the senses" remains a category error — the senses are the *criterion* by which truth is tested, not themselves *containers* of truth (DL X.31: sensation cannot add to or take from what it receives)
- His account of wisdom as self-certifying rational knowledge is exactly what the Academics demolished — Epicurean wisdom grounded in the Canon avoids that demolition entirely

The textual citation to anchor the close: DL X.31 on sensation as *alogon* — non-rational, non-judging, therefore perfectly reliable as a registering mechanism. This is what Lucullus cannot say about his own criterion, and why the Epicurean position survives the Academic attack that destroys the Stoic one.

Suggested Episode Structure

1. Recap battle map (5 min)
2. The virtue/wisdom arguments — Epicurean response (15 min)
3. The *hormē* argument — where Lucullus inadvertently supports Epicurus (10 min)
4. Reason and discovery — sign-inference as the Epicurean answer (10 min)
5. Carneades vs. Antipater — why the Epicurean avoids both traps (10 min)
6. Antiochus's dogma point — why the Canon needs no prior certification (10 min)
7. Closing assessment — what Lucullus gets right and where he goes wrong (5-10 min)

NOTE:

Zeno's four-clause definition of the kataleptic impression (*phantasia kataleptike*) runs as follows:

1. The impression arises from an existing object
2. It is formed in accordance with that existing object
3. It is of such a kind as could not arise from a non-existing object
4. It is stamped and impressed upon the soul with all the characters of the object

The first two clauses are relatively uncontroversial — most impressions, even false ones, arise from something and bear some correspondence to their object. The philosophically load-bearing clause is the **third**: that a kataleptic impression is one that *could not have arisen from a non-existing object* — meaning it carries built-in certification of its own accuracy.

This third clause is where the Academic Sceptics drove their wedge. Arcesilaus and then Carneades argued with great effectiveness that no impression satisfies it, because hallucinations, dreams, and perceptual deceptions produce impressions that are phenomenologically identical to veridical ones. The madman who sees a phantom horse and the sane man who sees a real horse have impressions qualitatively indistinguishable to the perceiver. If the impressions cannot be distinguished from the inside, the third clause can never be satisfied — there is no class of impressions that could not have arisen from a non-existing object.

The fourth clause — the impression is "stamped and impressed upon the soul" — is Zeno's attempt to give the kataleptic impression a kind of quasi-physical character, suggesting it bears the precise contours of the real object the way a seal bears the shape of the signet ring. The Academics attacked this too, arguing that a false impression could be equally "stamped and impressed" without any difference the perceiver could detect.

The entire debate plays out within the shared assumption that impressions are rational states with truth-values — which is exactly why Epicurus, by making sensation *alogon* (non-rational, non-judging), steps outside the battlefield entirely. The Epicurean senses cannot have a kataleptic impression because they have no impressions with propositional content at all. They simply register. You cannot attack a registering mechanism with the indistinguishability

argument, because the argument requires that the mechanism be making some kind of judgment about whether what it receives is real — and Epicurean sensation makes no such judgment.

Post by “Joshua” of May 10, 2026 at 11:35 AM

Thanks to [Don](#) for finding Martin Ferguson Smith's recent and updated work on his findings at the archaeological site at Oinoanda:

<https://www.tabedizioni.it/web/content/462840>

As I mentioned in the recording, it isn't always easy to keep up with fresh developments in the study of ancient Epicureanism. Most of us will be familiar with Martin Ferguson Smith's work through his revision of the Loeb edition of Lucretius, as well as through his prior translations of the text of an inscription by Diogenes of Oinoanda.

Post by “Cassius” of May 14, 2026 at 11:03 AM

Episode 333 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available. This week our episode is entitled: "Epicurus Disputes The Stoic View Of The Sensations and the Anticipations."

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