

# Epicurus' Response To The Sorites Argument / Paradox

Post by "Cassius" of March 18, 2025 at 4:47 PM

Background note: *(The Sorites paradox (from the Megarian/Stoic tradition) asked: if you remove one grain from a heap, is it still a heap? And another? At what point does it cease to be a heap? Epicurus rejected the entire framework as a linguistic trap rather than a genuine metaphysical problem. His response was characteristically empiricist: the Canon (sensation, prolepsis, feelings) determines what we mean by concepts, and when a question pushes beyond what the Canon can adjudicate, the correct response is suspension of the question itself rather than pursuit of a logical answer into the void. This connects to his rejection of empty dialectical cleverness.)*

Going through Cicero's "Academic Questions" today I came across the following reference to the "Sorites" Argument. There is a lot of interesting material in AQ, and some good reference to Epicurus, but surrounded by a lot of gobbledygook. This is an example of good information:

[Cicero - Academic Questions - EpicureanFriends Handbook](#)

Quote from Academic Questions - Yonge

**XVI.** ¶

Now on all these empty perceptions Antiochus brought forward a great many arguments, and one whole day was occupied in the discussion of this subject. But I do not [pg 046] think that I ought to adopt the same course, but merely to give the heads of what he said.

And in the first place, they are blameable in this, that they use a most captious kind of interrogation. And the system of adding or taking away, step by step, minute items from a proposition, is a kind of argument very little to be approved of in philosophy. They call it sorites, when they make up a heap by adding grain after grain; a very vicious and captious style of arguing. For you mount up in this way:—If a vision is brought by God before a man asleep of such a nature as to be probable (probabile), why may not one also be brought of such a nature as to be very like truth (verisimile)? If so, then why may not one be brought which can hardly be distinguished from truth? If so, then why may there not be one which cannot be distinguished at all? If so, then why may there not be such that there is actually no difference between them?—If you come to this point because I have granted you all the previous propositions, it will be my

fault; but if you advance thither of your own accord, it will be yours. For who will grant to you either that God can do everything, or that even if He could He would act in that manner? And how do you assume that if one thing may be like another, it follows that it may also be difficult to distinguish between them? And then, that one cannot distinguish between them at all? And lastly, that they are identical? So that if wolves are like dogs, you will come at last to asserting that they are the same animals. And indeed there are some things not honourable, which are like things that are honourable; some things not good, like those that are good; some things proceeding on no system, like others which are regulated by system. Why then do we hesitate to affirm that there is no difference between all these things? Do we not even see that they are inconsistent? For there is nothing that can be transferred from its own genus to another. But if such a conclusion did follow, as that there was no difference between perceptions of different genera, but that some could be found which were both in their own genus and in one which did not belong to them, how could that be possible?