

Episode 334 - EATAQ 16 - Further Epicurean Analysis of the Problems With The Stoic "Kataleptic Impression"

Post by "Cassius" of May 17, 2026 at 6:23 AM

In today's episode I want us to take the time to read Wikipedia's definition of "kataleptis" as I think it's going to help us to keep this in mind as we proceed further:

[Kataleptis - Wikipedia](#)

The current version is relatively short and straightforward so I'll memorialize it here. I note that it's kind of funny and illuminating that the main way the term "cataleptic" has come down to us today is the medical use of describing "pathological bodily rigidity":

Quote

Kataleptis

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For pathological body rigidity described with the same word, see [Catalepsy](#).

Kataleptis (**Greek**: κατάληψις, "grasping") is a term in [Stoic](#) philosophy for a concept roughly equivalent to modern [comprehension](#).^[1] To the Stoic philosophers, *kataleptis* was an important premise regarding one's state of mind as it relates to grasping fundamental philosophical concepts, which was followed by the **assent**, or adherence to the truth thus understood.

According to the [Stoics](#), the [mind](#) is constantly being bombarded with impressions ([phantasiai](#)).^[2] Some of these impressions are true and some false. Impressions are true when they are truly affirmed, false if they are wrongly affirmed. [Cicero](#) relates that [Zeno](#) would illustrate *kataleptis* as follows:

He would display his hand in front of one with the fingers stretched out and say "A visual appearance is like this"; next he closed his fingers a little and said, "An act of assent is like this"; then he pressed his fingers closely together and made a fist, and said that that was comprehension (and from this illustration he gave to that process the actual name of *kataleptis*, which it had not had before); but then he used to apply his left hand to his right fist and squeeze it tightly and forcibly, and then say that such was

knowledge, which was within the power of nobody save the wise man.^[3]

Katalepsis was the main point of contention between the Stoics and the two schools of [philosophical skepticism](#) during the [Hellenistic period](#): the [Pyrrhonists](#) and the [Academic Skeptics](#) of [Plato's Academy](#). These Skeptics, who chose the Stoics as their natural philosophical opposites, eschewed much of what the Stoics believed regarding the [human mind](#) and one's methods of understanding greater meanings.^[4] To the Skeptics, all perceptions were [acataleptic](#), i.e. bore no conformity to the objects perceived, or, if they did bear any conformity, it could never be known.^[5]

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