

# Mako's Epicurean Outline

Post by “Mako” of February 2, 2018 at 11:39 AM

I apologize for another regular absence, especially when there was such great discussion going on here. What's been said so far suggests to me that I need to reexamine my understanding of Epicurean truth. Sound understanding is proving to be most elusive to me.

## [Quote from Hiram](#)

What our tradition teaches is that **pleasure and aversion are true experiences, but they are true in a way which is different from how the things reported by our five senses are true. Within the canon, each set of faculties has its own jurisdiction over one function. Only EYES can see, only EARS can hear, and only PLEASURE-AVERSION can report what is pleasant or not. So each has jurisdiction over one aspect of reality.**

I can see now how truth from the senses versus truth regarding pleasurable should not be confused, although this has now left me somewhat confused. How can pleasure-aversion confirm to you what is truthfully pleasurable *without* using the truth that is provided by the senses? Is my misunderstanding originating from the wording, or am I confusing how the input of sensual truth plays in to forming truth regarding pleasure, which is now starting to seem like personal preference rather than truth.

Forgive my extremely simplistic and potentially biased example, I am not well versed in philosophical exchange (or I'm simply failing to see the big picture): I enjoy looking at some categories/forms of art. My eyes perceive two pieces, one I enjoy looking at and one I do not enjoy as much. My sense of vision confirms for me that there are two pieces of art that are wholly separate from one another. Past experience/knowledge of looking at these two forms of art identifies that one belongs to one category, and the other to another category (woodwork versus ceramic pottery, for example). Similarly, experience of what is personally pleasurable to me allows me to immediately identify which one I like, even though these pieces are individuals out of a group. I could not have formed any of this experience without the observational truth provided from my eyes over separate experiences of looking at them. Therefore, I could not have formed the truth that I find greater pleasure in one form of art without the truth that is provided from my observational senses. *That is, unless sensual truth only goes so far as to confirm that there are two pieces of art in front of me, and truth from pleasure-aversion tells me I prefer one of them over the other - and that's it.*

I welcome and greatly appreciate anyone with the inclination to dissect this example and point out which, if any, parts of my reasoning are in line with how I should be holding truth from the

senses and truth from pleasure-aversion together. A somewhat revised outline follows:

### 1. Nature / Physics

1. All matter is composed of bodies, which travel within the void.
2. The senses receive matter and allow the body to perceive it.
3. Nothing can be created from nothing, and similarly, nothing may be rendered to nothing.
4. (\*)

### 2. Knowledge / Truth

1. Nature allows us to perceive truth from the senses. The senses observe and confirm what is and is not true.
2. For those things that the senses cannot confirm, reasoning rooted in experience and evidence of what is known to be true is applied. This is the process for reasoning on things that are imperceptible or unknown, though "*truth*" that is the solely the product of reasoning should not be considered absolute.
3. The *experience* of the senses, which identifies what is pleasurable and what is painful, suggests to us what is to be pursued and avoided. Nature confirms that this is the impetus for choice and avoidance since other life, unable to reason beyond sensations of pleasure and pain, acts solely based on experience. (\*\*)
4. Nature provides that the ultimate goal of life is to live pleurably. This is proven by the reasoning above, that life unable to reason chooses pleasure over pain.
5. Reasoning should be in line with the ultimate goal of life, and should use the senses and observations as its criteria for ~~determining what is painful and pleasurable~~ determining what things to choose and avoid.
6. There are limits imposed by Nature, such as mortality and the limits of pleasure. We must not attempt to overcome these limits.
7. It is the nature of life that we experience inherent pain by need, such as need of food and water.

### 3. Ethics / How to live

1. The highest state of pleasure is when all pain, be it need or desire, is removed. After this, we experience no greater pleasure.
2. All choice and avoidance should be made to achieve and maintain a pleasurable life, free of pain. We should act to avoid pain and fear firstly.
3. To obtain the highest state of mental pleasure, you must reflect on pleasure, pain, your choices and observations in regards to the ultimate goal of life, the limits of life, and what can be confirmed as true.
4. You must enjoy your present blessings while recalling happiness past, without worrying for the future, which is uncertain. However, you must actively choose to make your future happier than your present.
5. Pleasure should always be chosen for pleasure's sake, but simplicity should only be chosen if it begets pleasure. In the same way, we must accustom ourselves to simplicity so that we are happy when we have little, and enjoy luxury all the more.

6. The wise man will live pleasantly, well and justly only if each of these virtues are present simultaneously.
7. Friendship will secure lasting happiness, but the wise man may protect himself from men and the prison of ignorance by living quietly and withdrawn from the public.
8. Good, evil and justice are subjective constructs. Nature truly defines what is good and evil as what is pleasurable and painful, respectively. Justice is a contract not to cause pain to one another.

(\*) I am inclined to assume the idealistic view on the gods. Without confusing the rest of my early foundation, it is much simpler for me to comprehend the gods as such in this early stage of studies, but I hope to review all viewpoints later.

(\*\*) Does "instinct" appear anywhere in Epicurus' discussion? The entire principle that animals choose/avoid based on pleasure/pain is key to how we apply it, but is it ever suggested that they are given an imprint or suggestion of this to start with? For example, aposematism or "warning coloring" on certain predators gives immediate, inherently-provided feedback to potential predators to stay away from another organism, thus allowing both organisms to avoid harm.