

Epicurean Prolepsis / Canonics vs Stoic Katalepsis

Post by “Cassius” of April 16, 2026 at 11:52 AM

in coming weeks on the podcast we are going to be making a decision how much further to go into Cicero's "Academic Questions" and when to turn our attention to Philodemus' "On Signs."

A key aspect of when we will be ready to do that will involve our decision as to how much effort to put into Cicero's explanation of Stoicism, especially of their theory of knowledge involving "katalepsis." This is the theory which is famously explained by analogy this way: (from wikipedia quoting from "Academic Questions.")

[Cicero](#) relates that [Zeno](#) would illustrate *katalepsis* as follows:

Quote

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 *katalepsis*, 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]

My purpose in starting this thread is that in deciding how much of Cicero's explanation to read before we go to Philodemus, I think we need our own "working ability to explain" what the Stoics were really after. Of course their view of the universe is ultimately one of intelligent design, and they place huge reliance on "logic," so I think we can expect that *katalepsis* is going to be profoundly influenced by those viewpoints.

This is apparently in large or wholly contrast to Epicurus' view of the role of "prolepsis" in canonics, all of which is entirely natural and ultimately tests for truth against the sensations, anticipations and feelings.

We're not going to be able or want to become experts on every detail of this topic, but we need a working knowledge adequate to use analogies and give examples of the differences in approach.

In this post I'm not going to post any additional AI summary or links to other pages, but in this thread both of those are probalby going to be useful. I'd just like to restate the goal that sort of like with Torquatus' use of Chrysippus' hand analogy in "On Ends," we need to be able to give a coherent explanation of what this "kataleptic grasp" is supposed to represent.

Efforts to help get us there are welcome!

Edit: there are many questions here, but before i close the post I note the final clause that this katalepsis *is within the power of no one except the wise man*. That in itself probably has huge implications, over and above what this imagery regarding the hands is supposed to mean.

[Katalepsis - Wikipedia](#)