

# Multiple Components Comprise the Epicurean Life

Post by "Cassius" of October 22, 2021 at 6:10 AM

## [Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Multiple components comprise the Epicurean life. There is more to laud in the "sweetest life" than just pleasure. To say that there is only one highest good, is like saying you can only have one favorite food.

Kalosyni - I think you are having an issue with something that I recall you also brought up on the 20th, though I am not sure I can recall exactly how. I think it was in reference to your questioning how Epicurus was dividing up all feelings into pleasure and pain.

Don may have some comment on what I am about to say here, but the following is my interpretation of the issue you are questioning. The root of the issue, as I see it, gets back to the fact that Epicurus fighting against earlier philosophers (Socrates Plato Aristotle et al - let's call them SPA in this post) on issues of "dialectical logic."

We know from a variety of sources that Epicurus rejected the idea that "dialectical logic" is the key to truth. But we also know that Epicurus did not reject "reason," and we know he in fact embraced "reason."

Epicurus did not simply say: "I reject, and I advise you to reject, dialectical logic and the analysis of SPA and the rest as to the great issues of life." He provided a full explanation for his position and how to reason your way out of the SPA word-game trap. IMHO the best way to interpret the meaning of the 40 doctrines, and the 12 fundamentals of physics, is by examining them in relation to what the SPAs had taught, and considering them the key premises which, when understood, make the position of SPA impossible to accept.

And the SPAs had taught everyone up to that point to analyze the big issues of life in terms of looking for a single "greatest good" - looking for a single thing which we can define as the ultimate goal for which reason we do everything else in life.

Now IMHO what you are doing, Kalosyni, is rejecting that framework of analysis in which only one thing can be the "ultimate goal." And I think you are correct to do that, and I think Epicurus agreed with you in rejecting that. The most clear statement of this issue in the texts is this from Cicero's On Ends:

## Quote

[29] IX. 'First, then,' said he, 'I shall plead my case on the lines laid down by the founder of our school himself: I shall define the essence and features of the problem before us, not because I imagine you to be unacquainted with them, but with a view to the methodical progress of my speech. The problem before us then is, what is the climax and standard of things good, and this in the opinion of all philosophers must needs be such that we are bound to test all things by it, but the standard itself by nothing. Epicurus places this standard in pleasure, which he lays down to be the supreme good, while pain is the supreme evil; and he founds his proof of this on the following considerations.

[30] Every creature, as soon as it is born, seeks after pleasure and delights therein as in its supreme good, while it recoils from pain as its supreme evil, and banishes that, so far as it can, from its own presence, and this it does while still uncorrupted, and while nature herself prompts unbiased and unaffected decisions. So he says we need no reasoning or debate to shew why pleasure is matter for desire, pain for aversion. These facts he thinks are simply perceived, just as the fact that fire is hot, snow is white, and honey sweet, no one of which facts are we bound to support by elaborate arguments; it is enough merely to draw attention to the fact; and there is a difference between proof and formal argument on the one hand and a slight hint and direction of the attention on the other; the one process reveals to us mysteries and things under a veil, so to speak; the other enables us to pronounce upon patent and evident facts. Moreover, seeing that if you deprive a man of his senses there is nothing left to him, it is inevitable that nature herself should be the arbiter of what is in accord with or opposed to nature. Now what facts does she grasp or with what facts is her decision to seek or avoid any particular thing concerned, unless the facts of pleasure and pain?

So what Torquatus was saying is that "in the opinion of all philosophers" you must go looking for a definition of the single ultimate good before you can organize the rest of your thoughts.

It appears that Epicurus may not have really endorsed that approach himself, but what is clear is that he \*certainly\* did not endorse the approach of approaching the question as a long logic puzzle. Epicurus said it is sufficient to prove the point through feeling, and to look at how all other animals rely on feeling to justify their pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain.

But the point for now is that Epicurus was faced with the analysis that everyone else in his time had been taught, and he answered the question of "What is the greatest good?" by looking to nature and feeling to give the answer.

I think the way to interpret this is that he was saying "in the big picture, nature gives us pleasure and pain alone as the general categories of feelings as to what to pursue and what to avoid." Now did Epicurus know that there are many different types of feelings of pleasure (and of pain)? Certainly he did. But for purposes of dealing with the logical arguments of SPA he simply categorized them all as either pleasant feelings or unpleasant (painful) feelings.

So going back to your question here is the heart of your problem:

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

To say that there is only one highest good, is like saying you can only have one favorite food.

Logically speaking, you *can* in fact, depending on how you define "favorite" have only *one* favorite food!

If you define *favorite* as "best" or "highest" then if you apply rigorous logic you can have only one of those.

You may not choose to define "favorite" that way, and you may definite "favorite" as "one of many things that you life a lot" but that is a definitional choice within the human mind, and nature itself does not require us to use one definition or the other.

For the same reason, Epicurus was not compelled by nature to talk about "the highest good" - but he was surrounded by students who had been taught by SPA that they had to do that, so he had to show them a way out of the dilemma.

I will stop there, but it is important to know that it *is* a dilemma. Once you accept the logic game that there is only a single *highest good* that can be captured in words/definitions, you have a real problem. This is the problem set forth in [Philebus](#) and it is the way Plato sought to destroy the idea of Pleasure being the guide of life. The core issue is that once you accept the necessity of playing word games, the "[art of playing word games](#)" - which is dialectical logic (what SPA defines as wisdom) necessarily becomes "the greatest good."

Anyone who accepts that premise will - like [Philebus](#) - lose the game of defining the highest good. That is why Epicurus rejected dialectical logic and why he placed the senses (including "feeling") at the center of the "canon of truth."