

# Visualizing Principal Doctrine Three

Post by "Cassius" of December 27, 2021 at 7:33 AM

[Quote from camotero](#)

Are you, or somebody, so kind as to tell me why is the quantity of pleasure relevant to us; and how is this particular doctrine helpful? (Other than recommending you to believe that for pain to go away you must seek pleasure).

This is a perfect example of the problem we are discussing - that of understanding the depth of the issues without first having sufficient background.

The issue of quantity of pleasure relates directly to the critical issue of the LIMIT of quantity of pleasure. Plato and others had firmly established (such as in [Philebus](#)) that the "highest good" must have a limit. Plato's argument is that in order for something to be considered "the highest" that thing must be something that cannot be improved - because it has a highest "limit" of which there is no higher - no greater quantity. This is a definitional word game but it makes sense in a definitional way if you think about it.

PD3 therefore refers to the limit of quantity of pleasure - and asserts that that limit is reached when every ounce of your experience is pleasurable (which means, by definition, that all pain has been expelled from your experience).

It is only by identification of this logical limit that Epicurus can defeat the logical argument that pleasure cannot be the highest good since (Plato alleges) pleasure has no limit.

This argument is not familiar to most of us today because we do not read [Philebus](#) and the details of Plato and we do not know of this argument against pleasure being the highest good.

And in my view this is why people go wrong and think that Epicurus has identified some new kind of pleasure that is the highest good - which is not what he is saying at all. But if you don't know why he is talking about a limit of pleasure it is easy to make that mistake and go totally off course - and think that he is identifying tranquility as the goal of life, which is not the case at all. Epicurus never takes the focus off pleasure, but if you think he is doing that in PD3, then you also conclude that he must be redefining pleasure as equal to tranquility in every respect, which is absurd, but is what many modern writers have concluded.

This - the subtlety of even the third doctrine on the list - is not going to be readily understood by most nonprofessional modern readers because they are not familiar with the argument in [Philebus](#). That's why I assert that it is best to start with DeWitt to acquaint yourself with the issues Epicurus was combatting. And on this specific issue, which relates to the "katastematic" issue, I also urge you to read [Nikolsky](#).

I am glad you raise these points because this is a discussion that needs to happen at the earliest possible stage with every single person who tackles reading Epicurus. And this problem is not limited to the Doctrines - it applies especially to the letter to Menoecus too.