

From The "Golden Mean" to the "Summum Bonum" - Useful or Deceptive Frames of Reference?

Post by "Eikadistes" of February 15, 2022 at 10:34 AM

Essentially, are we arguing that Seneca's use of "Summum Bonum" (or "highest good") as opposed to another phrase, perhaps the available "Maximum bonum" (or "greatest good") is an indication that Seneca misunderstood a nuanced, yet crucial distinction between "high" and "great"? What leads us to believe that Epicurus recognized such a distinction?

I personally think "Summum" might be a better rendering than "Maximum": the ancient Greek word Epicurus employed to describe the fullness of pure pleasure in KD4 was AKPON, meaning "extreme", "acutest", "intense", "sharpest", "end", with the added connotation of "peak", "highest", and "mountain top". He chose to describe *the limit of pleasure*, not only in terms of a *general* magnitude, but, *specifically*, within the figurative context of "altitude" (i.e. "highest").

That being said, Epicurus is not specific to a single term. There are multiple words in ancient Greek he employed that describe a "magnitude" of pleasure. He uses ΜΕΓΕΘΟΥΣ (KD3) meaning "great", "loudness", "quantitative limit", "maximum", "upper limit", "total power", the "full measurement of greatness", ΠΟΛΛΑΣ (KD4) meaning "much", "many", "often", "might", "great", "strong", ΕΙΛΙΚΡΙΝΕΣΤΑΤΗ (KD14) meaning "great", "abundant", "bountiful", ΚΥΠΙΟΤΑΤΑ (KD16) meaning "essential", "principal", "dominant", "most important", "primary", as in the *Kuriai*, ΜΕΓΙΣΤΑ (KD16) meaning "greatest", ΠΛΕΙΣΤΗΣ (KD17) meaning "most", "greatest", "largest" ... that's just a quick sample of the magnitude-expressing words Epicurus uses. Given this, is there really that big of a difference between "Summum" and "Maximum"?

If Seneca used "Maximo Bonum" (or "loudest pleasure") it could still carry the same meaning of 100%. Epicurus was willing to describe good, full pleasure with ΜΕΓΕΘΟΥΣ, which can connote *the magnitude of audible volume*, instead of AKPON, *the magnitude of altitude*, as well as the *general concept of the greatest measurement of a thing*.

OR, is it our suggestion that *any* adjective implying "greatest" is inappropriate to link to the noun meaning "good"?