

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

Post by "Cassius" of February 15, 2022 at 10:44 AM

## [Quote from Nate](#)

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

Those are very helpful cites. I am thinking that the issue is not so much the adjective but the noun.

In other words IF we could agree on what "good" means, and that there is more than one, then we could pretty well establish that of all of them, pleasure would be at the top.

But are we really clear on what "good" means, and whether there are more than one "goods" or a "single good?" I'm still remembering a comment that Kevin G made recently that the Stoics held Virtue to be a single unified thing, and DeWitt talks as if Epicurus held that perhaps in some way pleasure is unified as well.

I am afraid we are in the middle of a "one and many" argument that is mostly conceptual and difficult to unwind.

So to recap, I doubt the argument is really so much about the "summum" as it is about the "bonum."

It appears to me that Epicurus started with the observation that all living things pursue pleasure and avoid pain, using "feeling" as the guide, but then he was warning against translating that observation into an improper concept of "good." I feel like we are straying into Frances Wright territory too of needing to be careful in moving from an observation to a conclusion. We can "observe" feeling but it is much harder to be sure that what we are observing is "good." In fact, in Frances Wright terms, is "good" only a "theory"?

It is beginning to appear to me that Epicurus was willing to make that step and talk about "good" but that he was warning to be very careful about it. By talking about a highest good we are presuming that a single highest good can be ascertained, and I am not sure that Epicurus held that. Most of us I think would agree that there are many pleasures, and that it is impossible to rank those pleasures on any kind of absolute scale. But doesn't "highest good" tempt us to do just that, unless we are very careful to observe the differences between the word "good" and the word "pleasure"?