

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

Post by "Don" of February 16, 2022 at 7:23 AM

## [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Quote from Don

It seems to me that the "actual linguistic meaning" of "good", at its most basic, is simply "that which provides pleasure." "Evil" is "that which causes pain."

I'm pretty sure we can all agree on this.

Okay, good! 😊 Now, we're getting somewhere. So, as a generic adjective or noun in common speech, we all(?) can agree on this this meaning of good and evil.

Oh, and I have to applaud the use of "goodies" in #39! That was good 😊

## [Quote from Godfrey](#)

To me it becomes questionable when it's stated as "the Good", and that seems to be just a philosophical argument which leads down a rabbit hole and is of limited or no practical use. All of the examples in post #37 are "lower case" goods and make sense both practically and philosophically as far as I can tell.

One of the issues then is talking about pleasure as the capital G Good and not just a lower-case g good. The caveat for that is that I don't think there was any way to capitalize Greek in the time period in which were talking, or Latin in the sense we're capitalizing words for "philosophical" purposes. So, maybe I should quit that. Capitalizing is just a convenient modern shorthand for emphasis. So, no more Good, just good. That still leaves the point of contention of characterizing pleasure as the "greatest good."

I am glad [Godfrey](#) cited "practical wisdom is the greatest good." Do we have problems with that statement? We could also translate it as "practical wisdom is the greatest good thing." You certainly can't have two greatest things. 132e. Τούτων δὲ πάντων ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν φρόνησις.

"and so the foundation (ἀρχὴ) of all these and the greatest good (τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν) is φρόνησις."

Of course, elsewhere Epicurus says:

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ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν.

"We say pleasure is the foundation (ἀρχὴν) and telos of the blessed life."

So, are there two foundations? Or is practical wisdom just the foundation of our choices and rejections, and pleasure is the foundation of the blessed life?

I'm still limiting is to one work of Epicurus's so as not to be overwhelmed. Within the letter, Epicurus defines pleasure as:

\* pleasure is the foundation (ἀρχὴν) and telos of the blessed life.

\* pleasure is the telos (the end, the fulfillment, the goal)

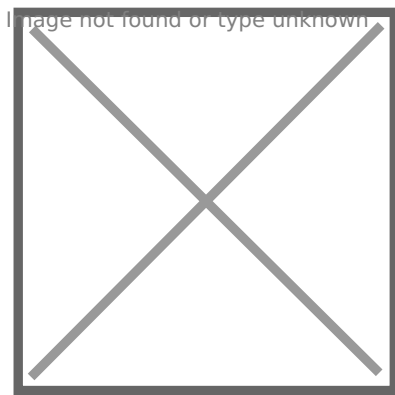
\* pleasure is the fundamental and inborn good

Greek: "Καὶ ἐπεὶ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο καὶ σύμφυτον"

σύμφυτον (symphyton) carries the idea of inborn or "born with"

πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν (prōton agathon), on the other hand, comes very close to the idea of "greatest/highest good" in that prōton is the superlative of proteros and means "first, primary, most superior, foremost-est" <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l...os1&i=1#lexicon>

and



[G4412 - prōton - Strong's Greek Lexicon \(kjv\)](#)

G4412 - πρῶτον prōton, pro'-ton; neuter of as adverb (with or without ); firstly (in time, place, order, or importance):—before, at the beginning, chiefly...

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Translating this literally as "this(pleasure) is both the primary and inborn good (thing)" pulls out that emphasis on pleasure being set apart - primary, superior - as a good thing. \*Or\* is he saying pleasure is our \*first\* good thing as in "we are born having this good thing, ie. pleasure"? The Kai... Kai... "both x and y" may be used here to convey that meaning. Hmmm. Just thought of that possibility.

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PS: πρῶτον is the exact word that Epicurus uses to introduce the first topic in the letter about the gods. I see that also as "primarily, first in rank or importance, something foundational." Some translators just use "First,.." as number one, number two, in that context, but Epicurus doesn't use any other numbers as if it's an outline. My feeling is that he's using the sense "this is important so I'm telling you this up front!"

Thoughts?