

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

Post by "Cassius" of February 17, 2022 at 9:46 PM

In regard to "the same thing"....

When i was editing the podcast this afternoon I became pretty dissatisfied with some of my formulations on "the same thing." I know that we can talk in categories and hierarchies as well, and that pleasure could be in the category of good or virtue, or virtue in the category of pleasure or good, or whatever, so I don't mean to obsess over whether pleasure and virtue and good are entirely the same thing in every respect.

But if they are not the same thing in every respect, but they share something, then we need to be clear about what it is they share, and what that thing is, and describe that thing in a way that makes clear that it isn't either a "Platonic ideal" or an "essence" in Aristotelian terms.

So to get back to sex and filing fingernails, they certainly are not the same thing in every respect, and what they share in common is probably describable only as "a feeling of pleasure." However does that answer whether there are two pleasures, or is it more proper to say two activities that "bring a feeling of pleasure." Is the "feeling" part of those two things really exactly the same though? We might call both feelings pleasure, but I have a hard time believing that both things are identical in every respect. They seem to me to differ at least in intensity, and maybe even in time or other qualities.

This is that vexing "one and many" issue, or "universals" issue. I am not ever sure that we are clear on what Epicurus' position was on whether "universals" exist, or whether he held that there are only discrete experiences which we choose to call by the same names.

I tend to think that Epicurus did not believe in "universals" as having any kind of independent existence apart of the atoms and void involved, so when we start talking about something as High-level (or so it appears to me) as "good" then we really need to understand what it is that unifies "things that are good."

Plato and Aristotle clearly had views of what makes something "good" that differ dramatically from Epicurus, and on their framework it made perfect senses that there are ideals or essences that unify all "Goods" into the category of "good."

But does it make sense to say that Epicurus held anything to be good at all unless it is directly associated with bringing pleasure or avoiding pain? Is Frances Wright correct that we (speaking as Epicureans to Epicureans) can boil all this down to very simple statements that there is nothing good but pleasure, and nothing bad (or evil) except pain?

I'm probably not advancing the ball in this post but I wanted to note that I realize that there are different perspectives in looking at things, and just because two things like virtue and pleasure cannot be dissasociated from each other, which seems to be the point of PD5, does not mean that they are themselves identical. (Or at least I don't think at this moment that it does!)