

# PD19 And The Meaning Of No "Greater" Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of August 11, 2022 at 5:01 PM

## [Quote from Don](#)

Third, I am becoming firmly convinced that we need to do away with bulleted list of [Principal Doctrines](#) and begin to read it as it was written. As a prose text, not a list. If read that way, the answer is in the text. How do we "reason" it out? "the mind, thinking through the goal and limits of the flesh and dissolving fears about eternity, produces a complete way of life and therefore has no need of infinite time." We think through what it means for pleasure to have a limit. Well, it seems to me Epicurus is saying that once we have filled every nook and cranny of our minds with peace and pleasure and rid it of fears and anxieties and troubled thoughts and have a sure confidence of not losing that, you're filled up. You can vary your pleasure, but at that point your perspective on life is unassailable, filled with joy, in fact your mind never flees from joy, that is your default mode of being and interacting with the world. Living in that way is what can make one equal to the gods.

I largely agree with this, especially as to the need to read it as a narrative so as to get the full context.

However I observe that maybe the majority of "scholars" out there are happy to read the sentence in the letter to Menoecus almost as if Epicurus never said anything else:

"When, therefore, we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind."

So I think it would be good training for us to take the most controversial sentences the same way that they are often taken by less-sympathetic writers and look for the best responses.

In this case I do think that the key is going to be found in Epicurus' intent as to the word translated here as "greater." We are regularly hitting a wall in our discussions as to whether one pleasure is "greater" or "better" or "more desirable" than another, and I think the answer is that at least as to the individual, the answer is clearly yes. And as Epicurus said as to the man at the banquet, we don't look for the longest but the "most pleasant."

Ultimately I think we have to dive into the issues involving what "most pleasant" really means. I feel certain that we can eliminate "duration" as the primary meaning, although duration is probably one component of several. We've discussed "intensity" and other words in the past. I

think what you have written Don here is key " once we have filled every nook and cranny of our minds with peace and pleasure and rid it of fears and anxieties and troubled thoughts and have a sure confidence of not losing that, you're filled up..." but I think it takes further explanation to really make that clear -- explanation of the issue of "variation" and our proper attitude towards it, for example.

In fact right now I think "variation" is a prime subject to explore, because a lot of our wording seems to deprecate variation further than I think Epicurus probably intended for us to understand his teaching to be.