

# Episode One Hundred Thirty Eight - Letter to Menoecus 5 - Pleasure Part One

Post by "Don" of September 6, 2022 at 11:05 PM

One of the issues at play here seems to be the use of the words "good" and "bad" which begins to - albeit unconsciously - give desire and pain and pleasure a moral coloring. I don't think that's useful for our discussions, so I would like to steer us away from any deliberate or accidental moral arguments.

In the original, pain is *κακος* *kakos* which is sometimes translated as bad but the original had the following connotations:

*As a measure of quality: bad, worthless, useless*

*As a measure of appearance: ugly, hideous*

*Of circumstances: injurious, wretched, unhappy*

*As a measure of character: low, mean, vile, evil*

As a "measure of character", yes, maybe we could interpret *kakos* as "bad" or "evil" but only because a person with that character is going to cause distress, pain, etc.

But applied to pain itself, we have to look at a "measure of quality", so pain is bad like a piece of rotten fruit has gone "bad." It's worthless, useless, etc. Or as a "measure of appearance," pain leads to unhappiness, to a wretched existence, etc.

But pain is not morally "bad."

Desires are not "bad" or "good." They are "natural" or "*κενος* 'kenos'/empty (like the void)." Empty is not a moral judgement. To me, it beautifully encapsulates the "groundless" nature of those desires. They can never be filled, never be satisfied, it's like trying to fill the void. It can't be done.

Pleasure is our innate "agathos/good" because it elicits the opposite of pain, moving us to health and peace in our mind and body.

Pain is inherently "*kakos*/bad" because it elicits the opposite of pleasure, moving us to sickness and distress in our mind and body.

So, I don't think it's helpful to think of desires as "good" or "bad". They just are. I'm going to address my (current) take on what they are in the next post... always reserving the right to revise and extend my remarks. 😊

PS: Extending and revising already here... One of the connotations of agathos "good" and kakos "bad" are useful and useless, respectively. Another way of saying it is beneficial and harmful. Seeing pleasure and pain in that way may be helpful as well.