

# Discussion of Article: "On Pleasure, Pain and Happiness"

Post by "Cassius" of July 15, 2019 at 2:38 AM

Speaking of the context of looking to numbers and geometry for the meaning of life, Cicero in On Ends does not seem very interested in that topic. Is it possible that Cicero was able to argue that Epicurus' discussion of limits of pleasure did not make sense because he knew that in the intervening 200 years the philosophical emphasis on geometry had dissipated? Or that the Romans were simply not impressed with the Platonic / Pythagorean fascination with the mystical significance of numbers and limits?

Certainly today the whole issue of "that which is best must be of a type which has a limit" is not something we hear much about.

However in Epicurus' day, issues of quantity and limits were considered crucial. We see that here from [Philebus](#), where Socrates lays the trap of which ultimately defeats Protarchus, the advocate of pleasure as the goal. Here Socrates lays the foundation that things which can always be increased are "in the class of the infinite.". This later compels Protarchus to say that because pleasure can always be increased, it is in the class of things that can be better or lesser - and this means that Pleasure cannot be in the class of things that can be " best.":

SOCRATES: Then, says the argument, there is never any end of them, and being endless they must also be infinite.

PROTARCHUS: Yes, Socrates, that is exceedingly true.

SOCRATES: Yes, my dear Protarchus, and your answer reminds me that such an expression as 'exceedingly,' which you have just uttered, and also the term 'gently,' have the same significance as more or less; for whenever they occur they do not allow of the existence of quantity—they are always introducing degrees into actions, instituting a comparison of a more or a less excessive or a more or a less gentle, and at each creation of more or less, quantity disappears. For, as I was just now saying, if quantity and measure did not disappear, but were allowed to intrude in the sphere of more and less and the other comparatives, these last would be driven out of their own domain. When definite quantity is once admitted, there can be no longer a 'hotter' or a 'colder' (for these are always progressing, and are never in one stay); but definite quantity is at rest, and has ceased to progress. Which proves that comparatives, such as the hotter and the colder, are to be ranked in the class of the infinite.