

Inferential Foundations of Epicurean Ethics - Article By David Sedley

Post by "Cassius" of January 23, 2026 at 2:00 PM

Joshua it would probably help people reading along if you could elaborate on these two when you get time:

[Quote from Joshua](#)

Not only do I reject the Ethical side of this argument except insofar as it is restricted exclusively to pathos, I also notice that this is exactly the kind of absolutism that Cicero employs himself:

At least as I am understanding the discussion, all we are talking about here is that Epicurus held there to be only two feelings, pleasure and pain, and every feeling of every kind falls within one or the other categories. That might be read by some people to be a form of absolutism, but you specifically say that you are not talking about pathos so I don't think you mean to be read as saying that Epicurus was engaging in the kind of absolutism to which we all object.. agree that Cicero is being an absolutist in his (and the Stoics) rankings of good and bad by a criteria other than pleasure and pain.

So it would probably be good to clarify what you mean in referring to "the ethical side of this argument" (?)

[Quote from Joshua](#)

So I say again, it is no good blaming Cicero for this!

Again someone may ask what "this" refers to in terms of blaming someone for something.

I don't think Sedley is "blaming" Cicero and in fact he's endorsing his terminology. And if a Latin / Greek scholar like Sedley can say that using "summum bonum" for "the good" is good Latin, then I would not hazard to disagree.

So if there's any "blame" to go around as to "summum bonum," that blame doesn't belong to Cicero or Sedley or Dewitt but to modern confusion. If there's blame to assign, it is to those people who read "highest good" as "highest pleasure" and think that this means there's a specific pleasure that's the highest. That's what I read a lot of people to be doing with "katastematic pleasure" or "tranquility" or even "ataraxia" or "aponia" and that's why object so strongly to reaching those conclusions, which are almost everywhere in modern writing about

Epicurus.

I'm reading Sedley's point to be that in using *summum bonum* Cicero was just intending to translate Epicurus saying essentially "the good is pleasure" in the sense of "the good is pleasure as a class of feelings."

The problem comes when people start reading "*summum bonum* / highest pleasure" to mean a *particular type of pleasure* when Epicurus has not said that. He's talking about pleasure as a class, not a specific mental or physical pleasure.

Now if there are sections in Cicero where he talks about "*summum voluptatem*" then that would require further discussion. I wouldn't be surprised if Cicero said exactly that when he debates Torquatus in Book Two of *On Ends*. But even there I would explain that terminology as referring to "the highest degree of pleasure as a class" or "the highest quantity of pleasure as a class" (as in [PD03](#)) rather than meaning that Epicurus was singling out a *particular* pleasure as the *single best pleasure*.