

Neuroscience of Happiness and Pleasure -- Morten L. Kringelbach and Kent C. Berridge

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[Quote from Matteng](#)

In positive psychology, a distinction is made between hedonistic, happiness(Pleasure) and Eudaimonia. Do I understand it correctly that Eumonia happiness is also hedonistic happiness at its core?

Most of the Hellenistic philosophers can be described as "*Eudaimonic*" in their ethics. Overwhelmingly, they agreed that "*happiness*" (being the general translation with which we are largely comfortable) was the goal in life. Their definitions of "*happiness*", *however*, (and how to obtain it) differed **drastically**, so the word was employed in differing, technical ways.

We might prefer to call Socrates "pre-Hellenistic", but, as per Plato's dialogues, he (and Plato) discuss *eudaimonia* often. For them, it was a function of temperance (in particular, I would argue, *self-restraint*, or *self-denial*). Socratic *happiness* strikes me as tending toward asceticism. From this, Plato argues that a *eudaimonic* person has an organized soul, in accordance with the Form of the Good, so this sort of happiness is highly abstract (and I question if it can actually be *felt*).

Aristotle saw *eudaimonia* as "**excellence**", exemplified by a Man of Action, an engaged, public figure (typically male; he wasn't convinced that females were intellectually capable of pursuing philosophical excellence). The *excellent* Aristotelian can be evaluated as a function of their moral adherence to the Golden Mean, and the utility they provide to their *polis*. For Aristotle, a person could not enjoy *excellence* without engaging in a reputable, profitable occupation. Simply clearing one's mind of anxiety, and enjoying simple pleasures of life was not enough.

Epicurus, of course, thought this was all malarky. *Eudaimonia* for the Epicureans was "**pleasure**", pure, unadulterated, unapologetic pleasure, fearlessness of the mind, and painlessness of the flesh. The happy Epicurean was not limited by political duties or occupational obligations. Of course, nature compels a happy person to be practical, have integrity, and treat others with decency, so he was not alien to civic engagement. However, having a prosperous career was not seen as being necessary to happiness, and politics was seen as being (usually) anti-thetical.

Pyrrho (the Skeptic) said this was all nonsense. *Eudaimonia* for him was a kind of epistemological "**tranquility**" and was only attainable by suspending all alleged judgments, having concluded that no dogma can be justified. He doesn't trust sensation, pleasure, or, for that matter, the possibility of reliable knowledge through logical inference. His type of

eudaimonia strikes me as being *unpleasant*, or, perhaps, cold, unfeeling, and unrewarding. That bring me to the Stoics.

For the Stoics, *eudaimonia* is "**virtue**", cold, calculated *virtue* (I don't think they'd like the "cold" description, so forgive my clear, Epicurean bias). The happy life of the Stoics may not be a pleasurable life, but is definitely a life in which one's behavior is governed by the conclusions of logical propositions, and never by the pleasurable or painful consequences of actions.

Of all of these philosophers, few equated "*happiness*" with "*physical pleasure*". Largely, *happiness* was associated with *prosperity* or *self-denial*, and usually not "*feeling happy*".