

Eudaimonia and Makariotēs in the Letter to Menoecus

Post by “Don” of May 31, 2026 at 8:43 AM

I will be among the first to advocate for the word "pleasure" to be foremost in a description of Epicurus' philosophy, but I have come around to seeing this "war of words," among those sincerely trying to incorporate Epicurean philosophy into their lives, to be more divisive (on both sides) than it needs to be. Sure, the "bread and water" crowd need to be addressed, but...

From my perspective after reading and commenting and responding to Jack Gedney on Substack, I don't believe his view and mine (I am speaking ONLY for me here!) are really that far apart. To use an analogy I used over there, we're two blind men describing the elephant by focusing on the trunk and tusks respectively. Even Epicurus felt the need to explain what he meant by pleasure: "*whenever we say repeatedly that "pleasure is the τέλος," we do not say..."*" Within "pleasure" there is tranquility, blessedness, painlessness, joy, delight, happiness. They're all related, because "the feelings are two." To give the "camp" that emphasizes the absence or removal of pain their due, Epicurus *does* teach us to work to remove the pain of fear of gods, death; remove the pain from empty desires. Why? To live a pleasant, happy, blessed life, but that also means a life free from unnecessary pain, fear, and anxiety. That "freedom from pain" doesn't necessarily equate immediately hyperbolically to asceticism or "living in a cave." The absence of pain IS pleasure, and the absence of pleasure IS pain. We can't have one of those without the other. Do I personally prefer focusing on the pleasure? Yes. Is there an insurmountable problem with focusing on the philosophy as giving one a life free from pain? No, I don't think so. But BOTH those positions require explanation. From my perspective, it's not enough to use "pleasure" as a shibboleth to identify the "real" Epicureans. All that said, I do not agree with those who say "Epicureans lived on bread, water, and the occasional cheese." I'll push against that all day long. But I'm tiring of the fortified camps on both sides of this "war of words." Do misconceptions still exist out there? Absolutely. However, in the end, for those sincerely trying to incorporate Epicurean philosophy into their lives, I believe there is much more that unites us than divides us. I would much rather see a dialogue than a war.