

The Sweeping Nature Of The Word "Pleasure"

Post by "Cassius" of July 26, 2022 at 2:17 PM

[Cicero's "Torquatus," from On Ends, Book 1. \[54 - Rackham\]](#) "If then even the glory of the Virtues, on which all the other philosophers love to expatiate so eloquently, has in the last resort no meaning unless it be based on pleasure, whereas pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically attractive and alluring, it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final Good and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure."

[Diogenes of Oinoanda Fr. 32...](#) [the latter] being as malicious as the former. I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now. If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

Today I rotated the first of these two quotes to the top of the home page because I regularly come back to it as one of the most clear statements of "Pleasure" as the Epicurean goal of life.

Although I value these for their clarity, it seems to me that reading them compels an obvious followup question as to "which pleasures" (I'll presume for a moment that we take for granted that we accept pleasure as a feeling, and that this feeling is given to us directly by nature without need or possibility of a simple single definition).

It always seems to me that the immediate and necessary answer to that question involves explaining that "Pleasure" is a sweeping concept which includes everything we feel to be pleasurable in life, which includes every instance of mental and physical pleasurable experience. Maybe one of the most important points to clarify here is that we don't mean just immediate physical or even mental "stimulation," but also any other way we would like to define our physical or mental consciousness of an experience that we find pleasurable rather than painful.

All that introduction is to introduce this question: What "authoritative" textual references do people think it makes sense to cite to establish that when Epicurus spoke of Pleasure he was

speaking in sweeping terms of ALL pleasurable experiences, mental and physical?

The first that I always remember is where Diogenes Laertius says at 34: "The internal sensations they say are two, pleasure and pain, which occur to every living creature, and the one is akin to nature and the other alien: by means of these two choice and avoidance are determined." To me, I think that sentence makes a direct case that "if you feel it, it is either pleasure or pain" and from that it is easy to extrapolate "if you feel it..." to "if you feel anything."

But are there other good references that say something similar that can be used to buttress this point that when Epicurus was talking about "pleasure" he was referring to a sweeping set of mental and physical experiences and not just to ones which are caricatured as sex and drinking and fine food?

Lets list in this thread the best passages usable for this point. In talking to people new to Epicurus, I would think that this is one of the first and most important points to establish.

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 29, 2022 at 7:47 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Diogenes of Oinoanda Fr. 32... [the latter] being as malicious as the former. I shall discuss folly shortly, the virtues and pleasure now. If, gentlemen, the point at issue between these people and us involved inquiry into «what is the means of happiness?» and they wanted to say «the virtues» (which would actually be true), it would be unnecessary to take any other step than to agree with them about this, without more ado. But since, as I say, the issue is not «what is the means of happiness?» but «what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?», I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

Not only do we need to understand the word pleasure, but also "virtues" and "happiness" -- as then how do you know you are happy? Is happiness a kind of feeling of pleasure? And then what virtues lead to that feeling?

So this brings up questions for me. Because it would make more sense to say that virtues lead to satisfaction.

We would never say that virtues lead to sex, drinking, and fine food.

For example, if I substituted a word in the follow sentence:

I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that **satisfaction** is the end of the best mode of life, while the virtues, which are inopportunately messed about by these people (being transferred from the place of the means to that of the end), are in no way an end, but the means to the end.

This makes more sense to me. I'm curious to hear what others think?

Post by "Don" of July 29, 2022 at 9:29 AM

Good questions, [Kalosyni](#) .

Broken record that I am, when anyone says something like "Not only do we need to understand the word pleasure, but also "virtues" and "happiness"" I immediately think "Back to the source material!" I agree with [Kalosyni](#) , so what words does Diogenes of Oenoanda (DO, for short) use that are translated as pleasure, virtue, and happiness. And how were the words DO used understood by him in the period he was writing. That's the rub from my perspective.

I'm using this resource:

[DCLP/Trismegistos 865216 = LDAB 865216 \(papyri.info\)](#)

Pleasure is the familiar hedone ἡδονῆς (which the Latin writers translated to voluptas)

Virtue is arete ἀρετή

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ἀρετή \(tufts.edu\)](#)

Arete is a slippery word that's accumulated a LOT of baggage over the centuries. The more literal meaning is "excellence" as in displaying excellence in character or deed. It came to take on the idea of "virtue" due to this original meaning.

As for happiness...

the word DO uses is eudaimonia ευδαιμονία, and even more slippery word than arete!

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ε , εὐγλάγ-ετος , εὐδαιμον-ία \(tufts.edu\)](#)

As anyone who's been around these parts for any time knows, eudaimonia has sparked any number of discussions on this board, with both pro and con advocates. I personally like the word, and my preferred translation is "well-being". To me, that's almost a pun on the literal eu "good/well" + daimonia "daemon, 'in-dwelling spirit'" (you could have a "good" spirit (eudaimon) or a "bad" spirit (kakodaimon)) Socrates talks about taking advice from his daemon. But enough about him.

So, I think [Kalosyni](#) 's "satisfaction" isn't too bad as a translation. Other translations include "well-being, prosperity, good fortune, true full happiness." Mr. Roger's theme song literally just popped into my head, especially the first few lines that, to me, describe eudaimonia. Never thought of Fred Rogers as an Epicurean 😊 hmmm:

It's such a good feeling,

To know you're alive,

It's such a happy feeling,

You're growing inside,

And when you wake up, ready to say,

"I think I'll make a snappy new day."

It's such a good feeling,

A very good feeling,

The feeling you know,

That I'll be back,

When the day is new,

And I'll have more ideas for you,

And you'll have things you'd want to talk about,

I will too.

You always make each day such a special day,

You know how, by just you being you,

There's only one person in the whole world

Exactly like you, and that's you yourself,

And people can like you exactly how you are,

It's such a good feeling,

A very good feeling,

The feeling you know,

That we're friends.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 29, 2022 at 2:36 PM

Personally I would stick to the word "pleasure" where DO uses hedone, and consider using "satisfaction" where he uses eudaimonia. But I much prefer [Don](#)'s "well-being" to satisfaction: well-being seems much more complete to me, if that makes any sense. As for substituting satisfaction for pleasure, I can't imagine running around and shouting to everyone about satisfaction!

Also, I think over time we've been getting to a more specific definition of "pleasure" as one part of the faculty of feeling. I don't think that this specificity takes away anything from the meaning of pleasure, but actually is helpful to fully understand it. That's why I wouldn't substitute another word for hedone. I think that Epicurus and DO were being very specific when using that word. The word eudaimonia, to me, has more wiggle room to try out other English words.