

The word "eudaimonia" according to Epicurus

Post by "Kalosyni" of April 18, 2024 at 2:24 PM

The word "eudaimonia" comes up in the Letter to Menoeceus, in the Torquatus section of Cicero, and on the wall of Oinoanda. Can we say that Epicurus believed that both pleasure AND happiness were simultaneously the goal of life? Or would we say that eudaimonia is the same as pleasure?

It seems that eudaimonia isn't just a fleeting emotion of giddiness that arises when you get something that you want, but instead it is an expansive sense of fulfillment and completeness.

The word "complete" comes up in the PD's and VS's... [Don](#) or [Bryan](#) if you click on the note below you can see the Greek word μακαρία is used, which is a different word than eudaimonia. (Yet how things are translated depends on the translator).

[PD27](#) (Saint-Andre translation)

Of all the things that wisdom provides for the complete happiness of one's entire life, by far the greatest is friendship. [[note](#)]

ὧν ἡ σοφία παρασκευάζεται εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὅλου βίου μακαριότητα πολὺ μέγιστόν ἐστιν ἡ τῆς φιλίας κτῆσις.



The Love and Practice of Wisdom



Let no one put off the love and practice of wisdom when young, nor grow tired of it when old. For it is never too early or too late for the health of the soul. Someone who says that the time to love and practice wisdom has not yet come or has passed is like someone who says that the time for *eudaimonia* has not yet come or has passed. Young or old, it is necessary to love and practice wisdom, so that in old age you can be youthful by taking joy in the good things you remember, and likewise in youth you can be mature by not fearing what will come. Reflect on what brings *eudaimonia*, because if you have that you have everything, but if not you will do everything to attain it.

Do and practice, then, the things I have always recommended to you, holding them to be the stairway to a beautiful life.

- from the Letter to Menoecus

Post by “Don” of April 18, 2024 at 2:32 PM

τὴν τοῦ ὅλου βίου the whole/entirety of life

μακαριότητα makariotēta "most, highest blessedness" - the superlative of the same word used in PD1 to describe the gods

Post by “Godfrey” of April 18, 2024 at 2:53 PM

A question that I have regarding eudaimonia goes back to the thorny issue of active and static pleasures.

If I understand correctly, Aristotle conceived of eudaimonia as requiring activity. (Compare this to *practicing* wisdom...) My question is: was Epicurus agreeing with this idea, or did he conceive of eudaimonia differently? Perhaps eudaimonia requires action, but blessedness doesn't? My depth of knowledge in this regard is lacking, so I'm just posing the question 🤔

Post by “Bryan” of April 18, 2024 at 3:12 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

It seems that eudaimonia isn't just a fleeting emotion of giddiness that arises when you get something that you want, but instead it is an expansive sense of fulfillment and completeness.

Yes, you must be correct. I think "well-being" has most of the same sense -- it is our deeply internal and long-enduring sense of well-being. Of course, we can easily see how well-being is closely connected with the pleasure of being alive.

Post by “Bryan” of April 18, 2024 at 3:19 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Aristotle conceived of eudaimonia as requiring activity.

Yes Aristotle digs a deep hole for himself when he insists that "Pleasure does not occur except in action!" Eudéméian Ethics, 8.1249a: οὐ γίνεται δὲ ἡδονὴ μὴ ἐν πράξει). I cannot imagine reality (or Epicurus) agreeing with Aristotle on this point!

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Perhaps eudaimonia requires action, but blessedness doesn't?

It seems that being alive requires having sensations of actions as well as sensations of condition.

Post by “Cassius” of April 18, 2024 at 4:19 PM

I don't know that it is clear to me that there is a bright line between being aware of one's actions and being aware of one's condition, because I am not sure what "action" really means here. Our atoms are always in motion and the internals of our bodies are always in motion - is action the same as motion? Then as long as we are alive then we are in motion of one kind or another.

But what does seem clear is that there are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, and that whatever you are aware of, whether it is an action or a condition or any number of other terms, that awareness is either painful or pleasurable. That means that if you are alive, unless you are specifically perceiving a pain, what you are perceiving is pleasure.

By seeing things that way you can always count on, if you are wise, experiencing more pleasure than pain.

But what *specific* pleasures you choose to experience, in all of the many ways they can be divided between parts of the body affected, intensity, and duration, as referenced in [PD09](#), are going to be matters that you have to decide according to your context and your own evaluations.

There's no trophy waiting at the end of the road for anyone, no matter which choices they make on which pleasures to pursue. You can live low to the ground and eke out a life of 100 years on bread and water, or you can live 50 years mountainclimbing. No trophy either way, and I don't think Epicurus is telling us that the 100 years living low is better than the 50 years living high. In fact, he specifically says **not** to look at life solely in terms of time:

Letter to Menoecus 126: "And just as with food he does not seek simply the larger share and nothing else, but rather the most pleasant, so he seeks to enjoy not the longest period of time, but the most pleasant."

In that context it seems to me that "most pleasant" is specifically intended to reinforce that we aren't gods who have unlimited time to do whatever we want, but human beings who have to make choices and go after what is most pleasant for us as best we can.