

The Difference Between Happiness and Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2023 at 7:57 PM

I think i will add to this old thread to extend the conversation on the distinctions between:

- 1 - "Happiness" as a concept to be defined in words.
- 2 - "Happy" as a mental feeling.
- 3 - "Pleasure" as a concept to be defined in words
- 4 - "Pleasure" as a feeling

Someone called to my attention this illustration from Diogenes Laertius which might be useful as a means of illustration:

Quote

Even on the rack the wise man is happy. He alone will feel gratitude towards friends, present and absent alike, and show it by word and deed. When on the rack, however, he will give vent to cries and groans.

I would say that that is a use of "happy" as a concept. The wise man on the rack may be able to summon up a pleasurable feeling from a good memory of the past as a part of his overall experience, but the overwhelming immediate bodily and mental feelings are almost surely going to be mostly painful, so that he gives rise to cries and moans. This would be an instance in which (if the quote is accurate) Epicurus is using "happy" as a "concept" standing perhaps in the place of some abstract sum or description of the man's total life experiences, but not as a present-moment desirable and conscious state.

That's all well and good and highly useful in conceptual debate, However in more immediate and practical terms, we have many instances where "happiness" or "happy" does not seem to be the word of choice to describe the ultimate objective, but "pleasure":

- Diogenes of Oinoanda - "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."

- Torquatus: This being so, it is plain that all right and praiseworthy action has the life of pleasure for its aim. Now inasmuch as the climax or goal or limit of things good (which the Greeks term telos) is that object which is not a means to the attainment of any thing else, while all other things are a means to its attainment, we must allow that the climax of things good is to live agreeably.

- Torquatus - If then a life full of pain is the thing most to be avoided, it follows that to live in pain is the highest evil; and this position implies that a life of pleasure is the ultimate good.

- Torquatus - 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.

- Lucretius - "Diva voluptus, dux vitae"

This may be more relevant to [another thread currently underway](#), but I also want to put this here as a means of crosslinking the discussions.

I am thinking the take-home point is that BOTH perspectives are valid, but that we must be careful and clear how we are using these words and in what context they are being used. Otherwise we easily make the mistake that Diogenes of Oinoanda is shouting against: that of putting some abstraction (in which "happiness" becomes like "virtue") in place of real-world practical experience by which to guide our lives.