

The Difference Between Happiness and Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2023 at 9:06 PM

Rather than edit let me restate something from the last post. Not "both" but -

ALL FOUR of the perspectives that I listed in the start of post 16 can be perfectly valid and useful, depending on the context of the discussion.

What I see as a big problem is that "normal people" want to be given a definition so they can know exactly what to do. If we tell them that the goal is "happiness" (or flourishing or eudaemonia or some esoteric or fancy-sounding type of pleasure) then they will inevitably ask: "What does 'happiness' mean? And that's the rub - there is no good way to exhaustively define what it means to be happy to all people all the time. It looks like the Epicureans thought that the best way to define happiness is "a life of pleasure" but that doesn't satisfy someone who is looking for an elaborate definition.

So people who ask that question have to come to understand that what they are looking for does not exist in a Platonic ideal conceptual form. There is no single definition that applies to everyone of what it means to be "happy" other than "a life of pleasure" -- and they themselves are the only judge of what pleasure feels like to them.

I have to think that a lot of the difficulty in discussions of Epicurus' views comes from failure to explain that "happiness" as a concept does not have a single precise definition. And if we try to skate around the issue by substituting other high-sounding words - if we don't make clear that "happiness" means nothing more conceptually than "a life of pleasure" - then we are back on the slippery slope to Platonic idealism.