

# External "Goods" Impact Eudaimonia

Post by "Cassius" of March 9, 2024 at 10:39 AM

Just so this thread has a target, here's the situation as I understand it:

We translate the Greek "eudaemonia" as "happiness" even though the Greek is really an idiom of an expression that developed along the lines of "having a good demon or spirit."

In our discussions we aren't targeting writing a Greek dictionary, we're targeting the practical concept of "happiness," which "everyone agrees" is the goal of life. The precise question discussed now is something like "To what extent does happiness depend on matters that are outside of ourselves (to what extent are they "external" to us)?"

The issue appears to involve the well acknowledged fact that life requires things that are external to us (food, water, air), and so it is necessary to determine the impact of the observation that no person is entirely self-sufficient.

Some Platonists turned into radicals like the Stoics and wanted to conclude that happiness requires \*nothing\* external to us. To achieve that, they wanted to work through our minds to obtain happiness by obtaining complete virtue, which they defined happiness to mean. Since their happiness is virtue, they say we obtain complete happiness when we obtain complete virtue. (Virtue is an end in itself: there is nothing truer than true or straighter than straight.) Further, they say that once obtained, happiness like wisdom or any other virtue is never lost. (Anything less than true is no longer true and anything less than straight is no longer straight. If something we thought was true or straight becomes untrue or bent, then we obviously misunderstood its perfection in the first place since it had within it the potential for imperfection.)

Aristotle thought that direction was a bridge too far and so he held that some things that must be obtained are indeed outside ourselves and are indeed out of our control. Aristotle focused on virtue too, but in the end Aristotle held that the universe was created by a divine prime mover so whatever happens you can be happy because you are part of the divine plan.

Epicurus held there is no divine mover and no plan and that definitely some things are out of our control, but much is within our control. Epicurus said Nature gives us only pleasure and pain as guides, and that our Natural goal is pleasure. But since we are not "gods" who have the ability to achieve pleasure 100% of the time, sometimes we have to choose pain to obtain pleasure, or avoid worse pain, so Epicurus also talked about happiness as what we are aiming for. Epicurus defined happiness to mean total pleasures predominating over total pains, as he (for example) experienced in his last days while happy but in extreme pain. Therefore the smart

person is going to order his affairs through studying nature and applying the lessons he learns from nature. The smart person is going to use all available means, internal and external, to obtain the goal of happiness (pleasures dominating over pains). Just like you take advantage of all resources to generate pleasure, whether they are internal or external, you work to minimize pains from all sources internal and external. And in the end from the Epicurean point of view you don't obsess over categories like "external goods."

Endlessly looking for definitions of "eudaemonia" or worrying about whether things that lead to happiness are "internal" or "external" is a good way to let the fans of Aristotle draw you into a major waste a lot of time. It seems to me the perspective Epicurus was teaching is that the goal of life is living happily, you live happily when you experience pleasures predominating over pains, and pleasures predominate over pains when you wisely keep your focus on all pleasures and pains, both mental and physical and whether past, present or future, and you use all the mental and physical resources at your disposal to pursue that goal.