

Sunday November 2, 2025 - Zoom Discussion 12:30 PM EST - Continuation of Discussion of Nature of Pleasure

Post by "Robert" of November 2, 2025 at 10:18 AM

Sorry to jump in late here--many insightful points have been made already. In reflecting on the topic during the week, I had another look at the essays by Annas ("Epicurus on Pleasure and Happiness") and Sedley ("Epicurean vs. Cyreniac Happiness"). I also spent some quality time with Gassendi's "[Happiness](#)," in which he set out to present Epicurean hedonism to a 17th-century (Christian) audience.

All three of these writers relate Epicureanism to the broader philosophical topic of "eudaimonia." I like Annas's formulation:

"Epicurus is telling us that we will be happy, have the best overall life, by having pleasure as our final aim, and that we shall achieve this by living according to the Virtues." [We could add some other elements here, such as the tetrapharmakon, understanding of nature, etc.]

Gassendi begins his essay by explaining the relationship between eudaimonia and the summum bonum:

"Although happiness is properly the same thing as the enjoyment of the chief good, and therefore the best experience which may be desired, nevertheless because this state of enjoyment includes the chief good, happiness itself was made to be called the chief good. It is called the "chief of goods," "the ultimate good," "the end of the ends," and "the end *par excellence*," because all other things are desired and sought after for its sake, while happiness itself is ultimately desired for its own sake."

He subsequently builds the argument that pleasure is a valid "chief good." In doing so, he draws on the idea of pleasure as a broad category, as [Kalosyni](#) has done earlier in the thread.

I'm wondering, then, if the "branding" issue might be addressed simply by contextualizing the term--as these authors have done--and also explaining its relationship to Epicurean materialism, and to nature. While [DaveT](#) rightly expresses concerns about over-complexity, we could look to examples like Annas's above in order to see how to express things more pithily. If there are only two sensations (pain/pleasure), and Epicurean philosophy is about lived experience (that is, experience characterized by sensation), then it seems to follow that *any* summum bonum would necessarily revert to pleasure.

I haven't had a chance to re-read DeWitt, but am wondering if "life itself" might be a somewhat loose way of referring to *eudaimonia*. Since life happens regardless of philosophy, it might

make sense to specify "the good life" or "the well-lived life" or even "the pursuit of happiness" as a more precise goal.

Looking forward to today's discussion!