

What Is Happiness? How Does Our Conception of It Derive From Eudaemonia and Felicitas? Should Happiness Be The Goal of Life?

Post by "Don" of December 16, 2025 at 10:26 PM

As far as subjective vs objective, I do think it's up to the individual to assess their sense of well-being with their life. This is why Epicurus can write he could be "happy" with his life on his last day.

But wait...

Let's look quickly at what he wrote, since it is a quote that is often, and rightly, brought up:

22] And when near his end he wrote the following letter to Idomeneus :

"On this *blissful* (μακαρίαν makarian, same word to describe the life of the gods) day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could augment them ; but over against them all I set *gladness of mind* (ψυχὴν χαῖρον, psykhe khairon, joy of the mind/spirit/heart - joy = one of the kinetic pleasures) at the remembrance of our past conversations. But I would have you, as becomes your life-long attitude to me and to philosophy, watch over the children of Metrodorus."

So, he does NOT use happy/eudaimonia here. He uses makarios and khairos, blissfulness and joy. μακάριον is often translated as "blessed, fortunate, wealthy, 'well-off.'" There appears to be no certain etymology of the root [makar] or the longer form [makarios/on]. It appears to possibly have something to do with "being wealthy," either literally or figuratively.

So he felt blessed, well-off, surrounded by friends and students and his household. He felt joy - a fleeting pleasure - in his mind at his memories. And though he doesn't write it, I would bet that he felt a sense of well-being and satisfaction as to how he had lived his life.