

# Pleasure vs Happiness (?) Discussion of Hiram's "In Defense of Eudaimonia"

Post by "Cassius" of October 20, 2019 at 4:52 PM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

Do I take your meaning, Cassius, to be that Eudaimonia becomes a problem only when removed from the Greek and set into English?

Joshua I think there are a couple of levels of problem here. Epicurus used the word eudaimonia himself, but had his own definition and context, just as he had for "gods." So there was potential dispute even when used in Greek among Greek-speakers, and we see that issue going on even today among the supporters of Epicurus in Greece. It is my understanding that even today there are factions within the Epicureans in Greece who engage on this very same issue, with some being much more comfortable with "eudaimonia" and "happiness" to the extent that they rarely if ever even mention pleasure, and spend little if any time examining what "happiness" really means, or how it is connected to pleasure, just as Hiram's article glides over that point.

I think that debating the meaning of the word even between and among the Greeks is implicit in Diogenes of Oinoanda's inscription, and also in the statement by Torquatus (which is of course Latin), in the examples given above.

I think the same issue arises when we discuss it in English in translating from the Greek. Pleasure is a feeling for which we need no explanation, as Epicurus held:

*(Hence Epicurus refuses to admit any necessity for argument or discussion to prove that pleasure is desirable and pain to be avoided. These facts, he thinks, are perceived by the senses, as that fire is hot, snow white, honey sweet, none of which things need be proved by elaborate argument: it is enough merely to draw attention to them. (For there is a difference, he holds, between formal syllogistic proof of a thing and a mere notice or reminder: the former is the method for discovering abstruse and recondite truths, the latter for indicating facts that are obvious and evident.) Strip mankind of sensation, and nothing remains; it follows that Nature herself is the judge of that which is in accordance with or contrary to nature. What does Nature perceive or what does she judge of, beside pleasure and pain, to guide her actions of desire and of avoidance?)*

... but "happiness" is a much broader concept which cries out for a precise definition. We generally use Aristotle's "flourishing" as an example of a compound concept that is not at all the same as the "life of pleasure" advocated by Epicurus. As the Wikipedia definition above

indicates, it appears that Stoics and others pre and post Epicurus used the term eudaimonia to mean very different things, although I am not proficient in quoting Stoics so I am not able to provide any examples at the moment.

The ultimate issue in this discussion, as I see it, is the polemical issue of how to explain the ultimate goal of life as clearly as possible. Epicurus clearly held PLEASURE as the single term which fits that single word to describe the ultimate goal, but he also used eudaimonia within his own context, likely to indicate that a "happy" man will also experience some pains at time, and also that the happy man experiences many different types of pleasures -- in the Lampe's words above, "happiness is a collection of pleasures" which I think is correct - a combination of every kind of physical, mental, and emotional pleasure which we can possibly experience. If an experience is deemed by us to be desirable, it is solely because it is, or leads to, pleasure.

So the real issue is that those who disagree with Epicurus, and who want to appeal to real normal people (we can exclude the Stoics from this) realize that normal people feel instinctively the pull of Nature and therefore want to "be happy." The manipulation and deception game of other philosophers is to pull in an ambiguous concept like "happiness" and redefine it to suit their own tastes in virtue, in nobility, in worthiness, or in whatever other high-sounding word is calculated at the moment to persuade the unwary. That way they deprecate pleasure as the feeling which is the ultimate guide given us by Nature, which is exactly what Hiram's article leads toward in deprecating the role of "pleasure" even though he denies that that is his intent.

This is an issue that has been discussed at length in public and in private in the past, and that is what I read into the message of the article. Some people believe that "pleasure" is such a disreputable word that they cannot tolerate riding under its banner, and that is in my humble opinion a very huge mistake