

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

Post by "Cassius" of October 20, 2019 at 7:36 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

How do you reconcile this with Epicurus' advocacy of clarity of language, and using words in the sense that immediately comes to mind?

I think that that answer is found in looking at the full context of the texts and seeing the many many references to "pleasure." I don't think that those foreclose the use of terms like "happiness" as well as long as the fundamental statements that "pleasure" is the only thing desirable in itself are kept in mind. I can easily imagine Epicurus believing that he had been so clear in laying down fundamentals that he could not be misunderstood by his own student (who presumably Menoceus was, not an outsider or someone unfamiliar with the thrust of the philosophy.)

Your comments are not sidetrack at all 😊

And as you referenced I think this is similar to the "gods" issue. It is useful to have a term for beings which constitute what we would truthfully consider divine, and Epicurus would also have known that he could not enforce his own terminology on everyone.

But i don't think this comes down to questioning his use of "happiness" a few times in relation to the many times "pleasure" is clearly designated. It is a matter of starting at the basics, building consistently on them, and keeping the big picture consistent as he surely would have done himself.

And there's no better example that we need to take things into account than the sentence which reads "By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul." That sentence is as counterintuitive and potentially contradictory to so much else that was written that it demands to be taken contextually and explained by reference to the whole. In that case the issue must be traced to the underlying premises of only two feelings (so therefore absence of one is presence of another by definition) and even further, tracing down why Epicurus was concerned about "only two" in the first place (which I think ties to Plato's arguments against pleasure).

The "happiness" question is much easier than that one. There are only two feelings, only pleasure is desirable in and of itself, and no one thinking in Epicurean terms is ever going to suggest that "happiness" is ultimately tied to any necessary requirement other than "pleasure."

All the other tools and alleged requirements of happiness with Aristotle and others alleged to be necessary would, if true, blow the theory of "pleasure as the ultimate good" out of the water. Because if something besides pleasure is required, how do we know what that is? Admit that the goal requires something other than pleasure and Plato will lead you down the primrose path that he led [Philebus](#), and you will end up admitting that knowledge/wisdom that enables you to identify and obtain this non-pleasure element is an essential part of the goal itself, and you will end up admitting Plato's ultimate aim - that "wisdom" is the most important thing in life.