

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

Post by “Elayne” of October 21, 2019 at 8:46 AM

Here is what I posted from the admins on the Epicurean Philosophy page on Facebook, just now, regarding Hiram's article being discussed in this thread.

The War on Eudaimonia

The admins at Epicurean Philosophy have learned from an article by one of our members here, Hiram Crespo, that there are “some Epicurean circles” who are at “war” against the word eudaimonia! People who somehow think eudaimonia and pleasure are mutually exclusive. This is news to us, although we suppose we should not be surprised, considering how often Epicurus is misunderstood in the modern world. We do not know who these circles are, but we are glad to join with Hiram in roundly condemning such a ridiculous war.

In case any of our other members run across these circles, we’d like to give you some background. Eudaimonia, which in English is generally translated as “happiness”, was used by Aristotle in the way Hiram describes in his article—as “flourishing” or “blessedness”, not as pleasure. In fact, that is what you are still going to find today in all the online dictionaries: Aristotle’s definition. Aristotle’s definition should not be taken as the standard of Greeks for all time even though it persists in our dictionaries. This Aristotelian definition is used by many non-Epicurean groups to say that a “good life” is based on factors other than pleasure, such as virtues or ideals.

But Epicurus did not accept Aristotle’s definition.

No one can understand Epicurean Philosophy who believes that Epicurus used the word eudaimonia in the same way Aristotle did. We encourage Hiram to consider an addendum to his article to make clear that the modern dictionary definitions follow Aristotle, not Epicurus.

Here, instead, is how Epicurus saw eudaimonia, as explained through the words of his spokesman Torquatus (from Cicero, On Ends 🙄 **“it cannot be doubted that pleasure is the one supreme and final Good and that a life of happiness is nothing else than a life of pleasure.”**

Epicurus was proclaiming something truly radical in his time, and it is still radical today—that

we cannot define happiness or a “good life” with abstract or vague concepts but only as one filled with pleasure. The fact that he used two words, eudaimonia and hedone (pleasure) does not mean that he was accepting Aristotle’s definition. It does appear that he used eudaimonia in a more comprehensive, global way—a life filled with ongoing pleasures—rather than to specify a single moment or day of pleasure, but that should not be used to imply that there is some additional element in eudaimonia other than pleasure.

Epicurus “went to war” on Aristotle’s wrong definition of happiness and on the wrong definitions of other philosophers-- not on happiness itself!

Even the neo-Epicureans who have made serious errors by thinking Epicurus advised some sort of rarified tranquility which was not pleasure as we ordinarily understand it have not made the error of confusing Epicurus with Aristotle.

When an error like that occurs, we have to wonder if it was a deliberate mischaracterization, to create a straw man for debate?

In our group, we continue to be at war with Aristotelians and other conflicting philosophies. Why? Because they lead people away from pleasurable lives. You all have only one life each—to waste it missing out on pleasure would be a disaster, and anyone who tells you otherwise is no friend to you. While we join Hiram in wishing Peace and Safety to all Epicureans and kindred spirits, we do not wish the Neo-Epicureans, Aristotelians, Stoics or other misguided philosophers to continue in their errors, and we will not leave them in peace as long as they spread misinformation. We hope, for their sakes, that they will become Epicureans instead.

Today we still shout out loudly, as did Diogenes of Oinoanda, "But since, as I say, the issue is not 'what is the means of happiness?' but 'what is happiness and what is the ultimate goal of our nature?', I say both now and always, shouting out loudly to all Greeks and non-Greeks, that pleasure is the end of the best mode of life"!

If we continue to proclaim Epicurus’ actual philosophy, and if you will join us in doing so, perhaps one day we will find these words of Torquatus in the dictionary for both eudaimonia and happiness: “Let us imagine a man living in the continuous enjoyment of numerous and vivid pleasures alike of body and of mind, undisturbed either by the presence or the prospect of pain: what possible state of existence could we describe as being more excellent or more desirable? One so situated must possess in the first place a strength of mind that is proof against all fear of death or of pain; he will know that death means complete unconsciousness, and that pain is generally light if long and short if strong, so that its intensity is compensated by brief duration and its continuance by diminishing severity. Let such a man moreover have no dread of any supernatural power; let him never suffer the pleasures of the past to fade away,

but constantly renew their enjoyment in recollection, — and his lot will be one which will not admit of further improvement.”

This, my friends, is a happy human, possessing eudaimonia, a life full of pleasure, and this is what we want for you.