

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

Post by "Cassius" of October 21, 2019 at 10:18 AM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

So eudaimonia / happiness is a legitimate Epicurean philosophical inquiry.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

Can you explain in what way one deprecates pleasure by rescuing the meaning of eudaimonia?

Exactly in the way that the Lampe quote that you included implies - in the great majority of modern conversations, "happiness" is an abstraction, a platonized alternative to the real experience of pleasure."

Eudaimonia is a Greek word that means nothing to most people not schooled in ancient Greek, and it has all the hazards of confusion in using an untranslated words. But even "Happiness" has the same ambiguities: it is often used to mean totally different things to different people, even though the only real commonality that is going on in that discussion is the issue of finding it pleasurable.

But if someone means "pleasure" then why don't they SAY pleasure? Is it not because the word has been so slandered and despised by the mainline religions and philosophies (both before and after the time of Epicurus) that it is a word that is shied away from in "polite company"? This is exactly what Cicero said when he wrote that you could not appeal to pleasure in the Senate or in the legionary camps, and it is exactly the issue.

Anti-Epicurean philosophies prevail over Epicurus largely because they have convinced people that "pleasure" is disreputable. Using a non-translated word just papers over the problem, and this is similar with "ataraxia," which is also a term that has no well-defined meaning, but people throw around with a wink and a nod as if it is the answer to every question.

So the answer to your question is that using a term like "happiness" and "edaimonia" is perfectly acceptable, just like using the term "gods" is acceptable, if you are explicit in your definition. And just as with "gods" we have a context today in which no one understands "gods" in the Epicurean way, and no one understands "happiness" or "eudaimonia" in the Epicurean way either.

Use of happiness/eudaimonia without full contextual definition introduces the same ambiguities and issues that use of "absence of pain" ataraxia / aponia does, and I would reply to that in the same way. Used without definition in standard discussions among people who cannot be expected to know the full context is a prescription for disaster, just like Ataraxia / absence of pain has led commentary on Epicurus down the road of asceticism and minimalism, which is why Epicurus has been kicked to the curb throughout the world. And Epicurean philosophy won't come off the curb so long as we follow along in the standard discussion which conveys to the minds of most normal people that Epicurus isn't worth the time of day to discuss.