

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

Post by "Cassius" of October 28, 2019 at 1:22 PM

This thread has pretty much expired but I came across this today from a professor who has written on Epicurus and I want to preserve this so I can find it later:

<https://pages.wustl.edu/ericbrown/research>

Second Research Project: Eudaimonism

Ancient Greek philosophy, at least after Socrates, is first and last obsessed with the question of how one should live. I began taking the ancient Greeks more and more seriously because I thought that what they said about how one should live is more plausible and interesting than modern moral philosophy. So my research and teaching constantly return to the question of how Greek philosophical ethics serves as an alte to modern moral philosophy. In recent years, I have come to be dissatisfied with the standard answer to this question, and much of my research is now focused on redefining Greek ethics as an alternative to modern moral philosophy.

On the standard view, Greek ethics is "eudaimonist," according to which one should act always for the sake of one's own success or happiness (*eudaimonia*). As this dictum is usually understood, one should act always so as to bring about one's own success. So eudaimonism is an egoistic version of consequentialism. Unfortunately, this construal encourages debates about whether this or that Greek really was a eudaimonist, and it discourages the thought that the Greeks have a plausible alternative to modern moral philosophy. But fortunately, it is a misconstrual of most Greek philosophers' views. Only a few Greeks, Epicurus and some misguided Peripatetics being the plainest examples, subscribed to consequentialist eudaimonism. Most, including Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, followed Plato's Socrates and argued that because success is nothing but virtuous activity, one should act for the sake of success simply by acting virtuously.

From the same professor's page:

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1233-pleasure-vs-happiness-discussion-of-hiram-s-in-defense-of-eudaimonia/?postID=5056#post5056>

First Research Project: Cosmopolitanism

Ancient Stoics claim that the world as a whole (the cosmos) is like a city (a polis) and that one should live as a citizen of the cosmos. I first became puzzled about these claims as a graduate student, when I was doing a directed study of Cicero's *De Officiis* one summer with Martha Nussbaum. I wrote an essay on the apparent tension between cosmopolitanism and patriotism in that book, which prompted Nussbaum to share with me the draft of an essay she was writing on Stoic cosmopolitanism. She encouraged me to investigate the Stoics' cosmopolitan claims for my dissertation, and I have been investigating them, off and on, ever since.

I maintain that the Stoics' cosmopolitan claims have three layers of meaning. First, to live as a citizen of the cosmos is a metaphor for living a good human life. Traditionally, a Greek lives well by living up to the norms of his polis. Chrysippus argues that one should live up to the norms of nature by living in agreement with right reason, which is, as rational coherence, the same as the right reason that governs the cosmos. Later Stoics deflate this metaphor. On their view, citizenship in the cosmos is not earned by agreeing with right reason but is conferred automatically to all human beings, by virtue of our rational nature. Second, the Stoics maintain that living as a citizen of the cosmos is not a mere metaphor because it requires showing what I call "cosmopolitan concern," which is the thought that every human being is worthy of special ethical concern. Stoics differ among themselves about what sorts of feelings and actions cosmopolitan concern requires, and about whether these or those special people (friends, family, compatriots in a local community) deserve special concern beyond cosmopolitan concern. But third, the Stoics argue that cosmopolitan concern entails that one should work to benefit human beings as such, at least in some circumstances. The most interesting evidence for this cosmopolitan beneficence emerges in Stoic discussions of what career a person should take up. They favor political engagement because it can benefit more people, and they typically urge that one could emigrate to engage politically and benefit people more readily. But, again, the Stoics disagree among themselves on whether the consideration to benefit humans as such by a political career needs to be balanced against special considerations to benefit these particular humans because they are compatriots in a local community. I argue that the Stoic texts that urge special obligations to compatriots (Cicero's *De Officiis* and various works by Seneca) are problematic, and that the Stoic texts that take a stricter line on benefiting humans as such (fragments of Chrysippus, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*) are more promising than most current discussions of cosmopolitanism would seem to predict.