

10-Minute Talk Given at Library Conference: Epicurean Librarians and Stoics in the Stacks

Post by "Don" of April 5, 2020 at 12:47 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The Stoics and Epicureans, on the other hand, believed *eudaimonia* was achievable by everyone.

There are so many details of the philosophy to drill down to verify. Is the Epicurean goal properly described as "eudaimonia?" Would they have maintained that their goal, whatever the term used to describe it, was achievable by everyone?

I am not sure either of those statements apply to either the Stoics or Epicureans....

Sorry it's taken so long to respond to your comments. I greatly appreciate your taking the time to read that talk (warts and all).

There's a lot I would change in this talk, but I think I'll stand by this statement, at least in principle. I'll answer with my understanding from my readings in reverse order:

1. Would they have maintained that their goal, whatever the term used to describe it, was achievable by everyone?

I would say fairly strongly, Yes. Even DeWitt uses the term evangelical to describe their philosophy. There would have been no need to evangelize if the philosophy wasn't applicable to the world. Both the Stoics and Epicureans made their philosophy available to - and attracted to their respective schools of thought - all kinds of people: citizen, slave; Greek, non-Greek; men, women (at least in the case of the Epicureans). The Garden was open to all who sought it out. The philosophy of both schools was taught, as far as I can see, as a way of life open to all. I don't think either school would say *everyone* who tried to live the Stoic or Epicurean life would do it successfully. However, the teachings themselves were made available to all who were curious and asked for instruction. The Academy and Lyceum, on the other hand, were more of exclusive clubs. The Stoic and Epicurean ways of life were achievable by all in the sense that the philosophies were taught for the good of all people and, as far as Epicurus was concerned, the goal of living a pleasurable life was achievable for those who applied his teachings steadfastly.

2. Is the Epicurean goal properly described as "eudaimonia?"

Again, I would say, Yes. Eudaimonia is simply, from my reading, another term for living joyously or pleasantly. "Happiness" is such a watered-down definition. [Wikipedia seems to do half decent job of getting at the nuance of the term.](#)

PD 20 and 21 talk about the "the life complete and perfect" (τὸ ... βίον παντελῆ) and PD 5 about the joyous/pleasant life (ἡδέως ζῆν). Eudaimonia is spoken of in similar terms in several places in Epicurus' own works.

The Letter to Menoikos talks several times specifically about eudaimonia:

Quote

Someone who says that the time to love and practice wisdom has not yet come or has passed is like someone who says that the time for **happiness** [eudaimonia] has not yet come or has passed.

ὁ δὲ λέγων ἢ μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ὥραν ἢ παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν, ὁμοίος ἐστὶν τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς **εὐδαιμονίαν** ἢ μὴ παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτι εἶναι.

Quote

Reflect on what brings happiness [eudaimonia], because if you have that you have everything, but if not you will do everything to attain it.

μελετᾶν οὖν χρὴ τὰ ποιοῦντα τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν [happiness], εἴπερ παρούσης μὲν αὐτῆς πάντα ἔχομεν, ἀπούσης δὲ πάντα πράττομεν εἰς τὸ ταύτην ἔχειν.

Quote

Third, keep in mind that some desires are natural whereas others are groundless; that among the natural desires some are natural and necessary whereas others are merely natural; and that among the necessary desires some are necessary **for happiness [eudaimonia]**, some for physical health, and some for life itself.

ἀναλογιστέον δὲ ὡς τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ κεναί, καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον· τῶν δὲ ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν **πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν** εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν.

The Letter to Pythocles also stresses the importance of eudaimonia:

Quote

For such folly as this would not possess the most ordinary being if ever so little enlightened, much less one who enjoys **perfect felicity [eudaimonia]**.

"All this, Pythocles, you should keep in mind...

οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰς τὸ τυχὸν ζῶον, κἂν <εἰ> μικρὸν χαριέστερον εἴη, ἢ τοιαύτη μωρία ἐμπέσοι, μὴ ὅτι εἰς **παντελή εὐδαιμονίαν** [translated as "perfect felicity" above] κεκτημένον.

"Ταῦτα δὴ πάντα, Πυθόκλεις, μνημόνευσον:

παντελή is the word meaning "complete and perfect" in PD 20/21. So, here eudaimonia is getting the same modifier: complete and perfect eudaimonia.

Likewise, in VS 33, we read:

Quote

The body cries out to not be hungry, not be thirsty, not be cold. Anyone who has these things, and who is confident of continuing to have them, can rival the gods for **happiness [eudaimonia]**.

σαρκὸς φωνή τὸ μὴ πεινῆν, τὸ μὴ διψῆν, τὸ μὴ ῥίγοῦν· ταῦτα γὰρ ἔχων τις καὶ ἐλπίζων ἔξειν [hope or expect to have] κἂν <δι> ὑπὲρ **εὐδαιμονίας** μαχέσαιτο.

Also in Fragment 548, Epicurus writes:

Quote

Happiness [eudaimon] and bliss are not produced by great riches nor vast possessions nor exalted occupations nor positions of power, but rather by peace of mind, freedom from pain, and a disposition of the soul that sets its limits in accordance with nature.

τὸ εὐδαιμον καὶ μακάριον [happiness and blessedness] οὐ χρημάτων πλήθος οὐδὲ πραγμάτων ὄγκος οὐδ' ἀρχαί τινες ἔχουσιν οὐδὲ δυνάμεις, ἀλλ' ἀλυπία καὶ πραότης παθῶν καὶ διάθεσις ψυχῆς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ὀρίζουσα.

Diogenes Laertius also uses the word eudaimonia when discussing Epicurus' philosophy in Book X:

[121] **Two sorts of happiness** [eudaimonia] can be conceived, the one the highest possible, such as the gods enjoy, which cannot be augmented, the other admitting addition and subtraction of pleasures.

We must now proceed to his letter.

[121] **Τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν διχῇ** νοεῖσθαι, τὴν τε ἀκροτάτην, οἷα ἐστὶ περὶ τὸν θεόν, ἐπίτασιν οὐκ ἔχουσαν: καὶ τὴν <κατὰ τὴν> προσθήκην καὶ ἀφαίρεσιν ἡδονῶν.

Μετιτέον δ' ἐπὶ τὴν ἐπιστολήν.

And in the paragraph directly before he introduces the [Principal Doctrines](#):

Come, then, let me set the seal, so to say, on my entire work as well as on this philosopher's life by citing his *Sovran Maxims*,¹³⁸ therewith bringing the whole work to a close and making the end of it to coincide with the beginning of **happiness (eudaimonia)**.

Καὶ φέρε οὖν δὴ νῦν τὸν κολοφῶνα, ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις, ἐπιθῶμεν τοῦ παντὸς συγγράμματος καὶ τοῦ βίου τοῦ φιλοσόφου, τὰς Κυρίας αὐτοῦ δόξας παραθέμενοι καὶ ταύταις τὸ πᾶν σύγγραμμα κατακλείσαντες, τέλει χρησάμενοι τῇ τῆς **εὐδαιμονίας** ἀρχῇ.

These demonstrate to me that Epicurus saw eudaimonia as equivalent to leading a joyous, pleasant, and complete life, the goal of following the path laid out by Epicurean philosophy