

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

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I agree with you that we're not very far apart at all. It sounds to me like it's a matter of emphasis. In fact, I think we agree completely on the idea of the "goal." I think the "pursuit" is the "goal". Happiness, a joyous life, eudaimonia is not really a literal goal - an end-point - but a process. The \*goal\* is to \*lead\* a pleasant life.

As to the use of the word "eudaimonia," I'm truly ambivalent.

On the one hand, I fully agree that we need to understand the philosophy in our own language. It doesn't do anybody any good to use words one doesn't understand. It would be like saying "We should pursue удовольствие" if I don't speak Russian (which I don't... I used Google Translate 😊). That is why good translations are so crucial.

On the other hand, I feel strongly that that's why we should not rely solely on translations and need to return again and again to the actual original Greek or Latin. What did Epicurus, Lucretius, Philodemus and all the others actually write? If there's a discrepancy among translations, what are they translating? Eudaimonia is one of those "untranslatable" words (not really, but bear with me) that pack a lot of meaning into one Greek word but should really be translated as a phrase or several words in English. Eudaimonia is not some cosmic, mysterious, ethereal concept. It's a fine word and meant something concrete to ancient Greeks using it. But when it gets translated simply as "happiness" or "fulfilment" in English those words bring along their own connotations with them, obscuring what εὐδαιμονία actually meant when Epicurus decided to use it in his own works. I gladly use Sedley, DeWitt, Tsouna, Nussbaum, Bailey, and many others to inform my understanding of the original texts, but I'll always try to puzzle out from the original and work forward. Translations are sometimes barriers instead of gates.