

Various ideas of happiness

Post by "Godfrey" of August 13, 2021 at 2:26 AM

There has been some discussion here as to how to define "happiness." Here is a brief article discussing how happiness is thought of in different cultures:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2021/07/happiest-country-definition/619441/>

Four different models of happiness:

- Happiness comes from good relationships with the people you love
- Happiness comes from a higher consciousness
- Happiness comes from doing what you love, usually with others
- Happiness comes from simply feeling good.

A point made in the article is that you can't rank happiness, but you can classify it. It brings to mind the subjectivity of happiness, which in turn makes it difficult to define.

Post by "Cassius" of August 13, 2021 at 5:06 AM

I would say there the "alleged" subjectivity of happiness, and I think Epicurus would say there is in fact an objective answer, best summarized in what remains of his texts through Torquatus (very close to the meaning of PD2, but with the implication stated rather than implicit):

Quote

"For since, if you take away sense from a man, there is nothing left to him, it follows of necessity that what is contrary to nature, or what agrees with it, must be left to nature herself to decide. Now what does she perceive, or what does she determine on as her guide to seek or to avoid anything, except pleasure and pain?"

Post by "Don" of August 13, 2021 at 6:39 AM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2146-various-ideas-of-happiness/>

One of the issues, from my perspective, that the article doesn't address is the simple fact that "happiness" is an English word. They almost start to address it with the Danish hygge but then rapidly move on. If you ask people whose first language is not English to map their non-English subjective experience to the lexical field of English, you have problems. They're going to pick a "feeling" for which they might use a specific word in their language and then agree to use the English word "happiness" to describe it. I bet that if you asked those Japanese respondents what Japanese word they'd use to describe their "happiness" you'd find a much different semantic field covered than an English speaker saying they were "happy."

Which brings me back to my soapbox of translation (C'mon! Y'all knew that was coming 😊). Epicurus didn't use the word "happiness" but ευδαιμονία (eudaimonia). That's why I think it's so important to understand what he meant when he used that word - what semantic field was covered by the Ancient Greek term ευδαιμονία. To say it maps one to one to happiness or well-being or flourishing... Well, you can see right there that there are three English candidates.

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2021 at 7:11 AM

I agree that the analysis you're using is the right track - and I think the destination of those tracks is the realization that all words are concepts and ultimately concepts do not map one to one with feelings, and that nature provides us feelings, not concepts, so that no single concept can ever serve every use case.

I think that's what Epicurus was pointing to and those who insist on pegging a single abstract concept as "the good" are going to forever be at war with Nature and with Epicurus.

And since every single significant religion and philosophy other than Epicurus has "the good" as its goal (whether they admit it or not) - we need to get prepared to continue a very long war.

And that's why being an Epicurean is not for slackers or pacifists / passivists. There is no escaping that "they" will bring the war to us, because Epicurean philosophy is a challenge and offense to their worldview.

Post by “Don” of August 13, 2021 at 7:27 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

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Hmmm. Epicurus equated pleasure (or living a pleasurable life) with the "good", ex., 3rd line in the Tetracharmakos. Lucretius's summum bonum is just the "greatest good." The "good" is just that to which everything else points (again, using an English word for an ancient concept). The difference is the experience of pleasure isn't an abstract concept... Even though the word "pleasure" attempts to capture that lightning in a bottle. The problem isn't that other philosophies point to a "good" (they all do that, including Epicurus) it's that other philosophies ground their goal or "good" in something other than Nature. Virtue is the "good" of the Stoics, but Epicurus says they strive for their "good" just because "being virtuous" brings them pleasure. Aristotelians find their "greatest good" in the philosophical, contemplative life... Because it gives them pleasure.

Or are we saying the same thing different ways, [Cassius](#) ?

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2021 at 8:21 AM

I think we are because I would focus on that fragment where Epicurus is reliably (it appears) quoted as criticizing those who walk around harping uselessly on the meaning of the word good.

I think that's Plutarch and maybe that's a fragment that would be well worth our examining the Greek in detail.

You know the one I mean? I need a better way to lock down the source but it appears to be;

Quote

Plutarch, *That Epicurus actually makes a pleasant life impossible*, 7, p. 1091A: Not only is the basis that they assume for the pleasurable life untrustworthy and insecure, it is quite trivial and paltry as well, inasmuch as their “thing delighted” – their good – is an escape from ills, and they say that they can conceive of no other, and indeed that our nature has no place at all in which to put its good except the place left when its evil is expelled. ... Epicurus too makes a similar statement to the effect that the good is a thing that arises out of your very escape from evil and from your memory and reflection and gratitude that this has happened to you. His words are these: “That

which produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the nature of good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about {a jibe at the Peripatetics}, prating meaninglessly about the good.”

This is an area where I think it is understandable why Cicero framed Torquatus' argument in the way he did, but I question whether Epicurus would fully endorse that interpretation, especially since Torquatus himself seems to be saying that he disagreed with Epicurus.

Those are two sources I would compare and contrast as a way to getting to this issue of the "highest good" problem -- and of course I also think deWitt's points on this are worth incorporating as to multiple meanings of the word good and how "highest" might not be the best way to look at things (at least without lots of explanation) and --- that need for explanation -- is exactly the problem of "concepts not mapping to feelings' that we are talking about.

Post by “Don” of August 13, 2021 at 8:42 AM

Quote

“That which produces a jubilation unsurpassed is the nature of good, if you apply your mind rightly and then stand firm and do not stroll about {a jibe at the Peripatetics}, prating meaninglessly about the good.”

So right there, Epicurus defines "good" as "that which produces a jubilation" (I would like to see some alternative translations there.). Simple, straightforward, pegged to a naturally-occurring phenomenon. He's chastising the "strollers" for adding on unnecessary complications on what should be a straightforward definition. Epicurus seems to have always gone for the most basic definition of words.

Also, here (emphasis added):

Quote

67. I do not think I could conceive of the good without the joys of taste, of sex, of hearing, and without the pleasing motions caused by the sight of bodies and forms. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔγωγε ἔχω τί νοήσω τάγαθόν ἀφαιρῶν μὲν τὰς διὰ χυλῶν ἡδονάς, ἀφαιρῶν δὲ τὰς δι' ἀφροδισίων, ἀφαιρῶν δὲ τὰς δι' ἀκροαμάτων, ἀφαιρῶν δὲ καὶ τὰς διὰ μορφῆς κατ' ὄψιν [those by way of shapes and along with vision] ἡδέας κινήσεις

[pleasing motion].

τάγαθόν "the good" is the same word used in the Tetrpharmakos.

Post by "Cassius" of August 13, 2021 at 10:31 AM

Ok well are we seeing it the same way that he is saying that "good" must be identified with a sensation / feeling, and is not something that can be defined in terms of a particular set of abstract ideas?

I acknowledge that "the good can only be defined in terms of particular sensations / feelings" is itself an abstract sentence, but I think we'd be able to agree that it's about the closest thing you can get to saying something like "Don't look for a definition of "the highest good" (or "the good") - look in yourself for the strongest pleasurable feelings you can experience having."

What say you to that Sir Don?

Post by "Cassius" of August 13, 2021 at 10:32 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

pegged to a naturally-occurring phenomenon

I note you used the term "naturally-occurring phenomenon" rather than "pleasure" - but do we agree that "pleasure" or "the feeling of pleasure" is the ultimate meaning of the reference?

And I agree that drilling down into what is translated as jubilation would be highly useful.

Post by "Don" of August 13, 2021 at 10:39 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I note you used the term "naturally-occurring phenomenon" rather than "pleasure" - but do we agree that "pleasure" or "the feeling of pleasure" is the ultimate meaning of the reference?

Yes, The "feeling of pleasure" *is* the "naturally-occurring phenomenon." Living things feel pleasure. I'll try to get to your other questions soon.

Post by “Don” of August 13, 2021 at 11:31 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Ok well are we seeing it the same way that he is saying that "good" must be identified with a sensation / feeling, and is not something that can be defined in terms of a particular set of abstract ideas?

What he's talking about here is not "good" as in just the adjective "good/bad" it's "the good" *ταγαθον* (tagathon) as in the goal, the telos, the Alpha/Omega, the beginning and the end of life. Pleasure = The Good. He's planting his flag for pleasure as The Good in opposition to those who would tout virtue, etc.

Post by “Godfrey” of August 13, 2021 at 2:52 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

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I was going to bring that up.... DeWitt makes a similar point except that as I recall he refers to the "greatest good" as life itself. Pleasure would then be the *telos* if I understand him correctly. Greatest good, good, *telos*, *summum bonum*... oh my!

Post by “Don” of August 13, 2021 at 3:05 PM

I understand where Dewitt is coming from with his "life is the greatest good" (because we can't experience pleasure without being alive as in PD2) but I fail to see how "life" is going to help me make choices and avoidances other than "stay alive." Pleasure - living a pleasurable life - is at least a target to shoot for. We should strive to live the most pleasurable life using pleasure and pain - long and short term - as our guiding principles.

Post by “Godfrey” of August 13, 2021 at 3:52 PM

To me, "life as the greatest good" is a fruitful thing to ponder but I probably wouldn't call it Epicurean, at least as I'm thinking about it at the moment. It begs the question "how do I respond to what is precious to me?" Some replies are: study it, appreciate it, respect it, use it fully, preserve it, learn from it, enjoy it fully.... Also, being overprotective of what is precious can lead to pain.

As an Epicurean I would turn to the guidance of pleasure/pain to understand how to deal with something precious to me: this emphasizes the faculty of Feelings and therefore that maximizing pleasure would be my "goal" in interacting with the precious thing. But a Stoic, for instance, might use virtue or duty as a guide or an end. This could bring them pleasure, but also great consternation.

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2021 at 4:39 PM

And sometimes we would in fact choose death if we can firmly project that living on would be too painful.

But I do think it is a good point to say that "pleasure and pain have meaning only to the living" so that overall context of life does need to be incorporated into the "big picture" somehow.

Post by “Don” of August 13, 2021 at 6:19 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And sometimes we would in fact choose death if we can firmly project that living on would be too painful.

Agreed.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But I do think it is a good point to say that "pleasure and pain have meaning only to the living" so that overall context of life does need to be incorporated into the "big picture" somehow.

So, how do you propose to "incorporate (it) into the 'big picture'"? PD2 does a good job of emphasizing that only the living have sensation and so only the living can experience pleasure and pain. I don't want to dilute the goal of pleasure/living pleurably.

Post by "Cassius" of August 13, 2021 at 7:10 PM

Possibly the direction is just to emphasize that the standards of how to live can come only from the living themselves, not from "gods" or from idealized forms. In other words, and DeWitt points to this one to, there is the vatican saying that he thinks should be translated as "the same span of time is the beginning and end of the greatest good."

Always a translation rabbit to chace, isn't there? 😊

But I think he is on to something, even if his thought is not fully developed. If only the living have any ability to receive Nature's guidance as to what to choose and what to avoid, you do have to view your assessment of pleasure and pain from the point of view of whether you are living to experience the expected pleasure or pain.

Post by "Cassius" of August 13, 2021 at 7:13 PM

i can see the possibility of arguing that every calulation of future pain and pleasure is logically conditioned on your expectation of whether you will be alive to experience that resulting

pleasure or pain.

If for absolutely certain you were sure you would be dead in ten seconds regardless, it might then make sense to jump off the wall of the Grand Canyon to experience the thrill of flight for nine seconds - a calculation that would not ordinarily be valid.

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2021 at 7:17 PM

You know, we have several times touched on the question of "how long is long enough" to live. Maybe the issue we are discussing now was addressed by Epicurus as part of that question - maybe he explored the issue that every calculation of pain and pleasure involves the two major components that seem to me to be the most intuitive - both (1) Intensity (the word we've debated most) and (2) time / extent of the potential pain and pleasure being considered.

I would think given our discussion on that issue so far, it's inevitable that to extend the thought process involves not only measures of "intensity" but measures of "time," with our expected date of death to be probably the most relevant of the potential end dates [limit] of any calculation of future pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2021 at 7:25 PM

So that "the same span of time being the beginning and end of the greatest good" would not necessarily mean that "life is the greatest good": but that - however we ourselves choose to feel our greatest pleasures possible to us -- that feeling will certainly occur between the points of birth and death.

And of course that hits on numbers of relevant issues such as not worrying about gods rewarding or punishing us, how important it is to seek pleasure while we are still alive, that there is no point of reference outside our lives by which to judge our goal of life, etc.

And there's still the issue that "good" can pretty easily be construed as "asset" rather than the next thing I am looking for that I already don't have."

Post by “Don” of August 13, 2021 at 8:31 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

If for absolutely certain you were sure you would be dead in ten seconds regardless, it might then make sense to jump off the wall of the Grand Canyon to experience the thrill of flight for nine seconds - a calculation that would not ordinarily be valid.

I think I've mentioned this elsewhere, but there's a Buddhist saying that: If you were to fall to your death from as great height, it would be a shame to miss the view on the way down.

Post by “Don” of August 13, 2021 at 9:10 PM

Here's the relevant Dewitt passage from The New Hedonism chapter:

Quote

There was for Epicureans no preexistence, as Plato believed, and no afterlife, as the majority of mankind believed. Epicurus himself expressed the thought with stark directness, Vatican Saying 14: "We are born once and we cannot be born twice but to all eternity must be no more." Thus the supreme values must be sought between the limits of birth and death.

The specific teaching that life itself is the greatest good is to be drawn from Vatican Saying 42: "The same span of time includes both beginning and termination of the greatest good." If this seems to be a dark saying, the obscurity is dispelled by viewing it as merely a denial of belief in either pre-existence or the afterlife. As Horace wrote, concluding Epistle i.i6 with stinging abruptness, "Death is the tape-line that ends the race of life." Editors, however, misled by the summum bonum fallacy, equate "the greatest good" with pleasure and so are forced to emend. The change of a single letter does the trick but fundamental teaching is obliterated.¹

Footnote 1 reads: Editors follow Usener in changing απολύσεως to απολαύσεως, "termination" to "enjoyment."

Here's my copy of VS42:

42. At the very same time, the greatest good is created and the greatest evil is removed. ὁ αὐτὸς χρόνος καὶ τοῦ μεγίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀπολύσεως <τοῦ κακοῦ>.

My copy has Dewitt's preferred απολύσεως but still doesn't have his translation. He's leaving the "evil" του κακοῦ out so I'm not sure where that comes in in the editorial process. If you leave out the evil, it does read: At the same time, the greatest good is created and dispelled (terminated per DeWitt).

Post by "Don" of August 13, 2021 at 9:22 PM

I suppose an alternative without the evil is:

The same time the greatest good is both created and ended.

ο αὐτός χρόνος is translated several other places as "the same time".

Here's the LSJ for χρόνος to judge for yourselves:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...7:entry=xro/nos>

Several definitions there have αὐτού (just a declension of αὐτός) and it's always "same time" not "same span of time". It sounds to me more simultaneous. Which makes sense: as the greatest good (pleasure) increases, the greatest evil (pain) is destroyed.

PS: Bailey translates it: The greatest blessing is created and enjoyed at the same moment. T

3. φωνῆς ἢ τῆς αἰσθητικῆς ἢ τοῦ σώματος ἢ τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ τῆς οὐρανίου φωνῆς ἀπὸ ἀλλήλων
σαρκὸς φωνή.

XLII. A rather obscure fragment, which it is impossible to interpret with certainty without its context. τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν must be 'pleasure', and the general sense will then be that pleasure is enjoyed at the moment when it is brought into being: the two processes are simultaneous. Bignone believes it to be an argument against the Platonic doctrine that pleasure is a γένεσις not an οὐσία, and compares it with K. Δ. iii, where Epicurus denies that pleasure and pain can coexist. But it seems difficult to take the present fragment as a representation of the Epicurean point of view, as it can hardly be

reconciled with the importance attached to the pleasures of memory.

Here's his commentary too.

So the context is lost and its hard to piece together the text. Always a problem! But I could see Bailey's interpretation about philosophical study at XXVII. And I believe I mentioned elsewhere that I'm inclined to accept Usener's textual interpretation on the original Greek texts, so maybe I'm leaning to απολαύσεως "enjoyment".

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2021 at 10:31 PM

If this seems to be a dark saying, the obscurity is dispelled by viewing it as merely a denial of belief in either pre-existence or the afterlife.

I am with DeWitt on that, and to the extent that some of the others are using this as a reference to absence of pain= greatest pleasure I do not think they are on the right track -- and at the very least, the way that they would use it is a negative way.

Yes you can state by definition that we achieve the most pleasure-filled life by evicting the last ounce of pain, but that's not what these commentators are suggesting, and this kind of construction "The same time the greatest good is both created and ended." really makes little sense at all -- as dewitt charitably calls it it is "obscure"

Post by “Don” of August 13, 2021 at 10:40 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yes you can state by definition that we achieve the most pleasure-filled life by evicting the last ounce of pain, but that's not what these commentators are suggesting, and this kind of construction "The same time the greatest good is both created and ended." really makes little sense at all -- as dewitt charitably calls it it is "obscure"

That's actually why I'm leaning to Usener's απολαύσεως "enjoyment" and not Dewitt's απολύσεως "termination":

"At the same time, the greatest good (pleasure) is created and enjoyed."

There is no intermediate step between the arising of pleasure and its enjoyment; they're simultaneous. We don't need to think about whether we feel pleasure. We just do. That's my interpretation of this "rather obscure fragment."

That alleviates any need for an extra word (like some add evil/pain with evidently no evidence).

It keeps the standard meaning of "at the same time" and doesn't need Dewitt's "the same span of time" interpretation.

Post by "Cassius" of August 13, 2021 at 10:57 PM

all of these are tentative comments and i claim and allow everyone the right to revise and extend comments without limit 😊

I say that to say that at the moment I don't find "at the same time the greatest good is created and enjoyed" as saying anything really meaningful -especially given what I think is the firm premise that pleasure is a feeling and I don't see Epicurus being concerned about whether we think about it or not.

Suppose it could be some kind of variation of the Plutarch statement about the greatest joy arising from escape from the greatest evil?

I just am not sure on this one, other than to reject any contention that it supports the "absence of pain is a full statement of the greatest pleasure" side. *who I am always on the lookout as lurking under every bed* 😊

Post by "Don" of August 13, 2021 at 11:16 PM

That's the problem with the fragments. They're literally fragmentary. Without seeing the actual manuscripts, we're relying on scholars' educated guesses and interpretations. Without context, there's no way to ascertain how profound or prosaic an excerpt was in the original.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I say that to say that at the moment I don't find "at the same time the greatest good is created and enjoyed" as saying anything really meaningful -especially given what I

think is the firm premise that pleasure is a feeling and I don't see Epicurus being concerned about whether we think about it or not.

Unless he was trying to refute some "reason is the be all and end all" Philosopher and defending pain/pleasure as part of the Canon, a direct link with reality with no intermediary needed or necessary. There's literally no way to know. In any case, I'm enjoying sticking with απολαύσεως for now (pun fully intended 😊)

Post by “Godfrey” of August 14, 2021 at 2:00 AM

Quote

Suppose it could be some kind of variation of the Plutarch statement about the greatest joy arising from escape from the greatest evil?

That's how I had read it, although without thinking of Plutarch. Epicurus Wiki is along the same lines:

http://wiki.epicurism.info/Vatican_Saying_42/

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2021 at 4:24 AM

Thanks for that reference Godfrey. Every interlinear version is helpful.

If in fact as the wiki translates there is a "GREATEST" qualifier in there I would still say that this is more than just a reference to the one-to-one relationship that all experience is either pleasure or pain.

Whenever we are talking about "limits" of any kind (as I would interpret "greatest") it seems to me that an important point of principle is being referenced, and likely in response to another school as a point of contrast.

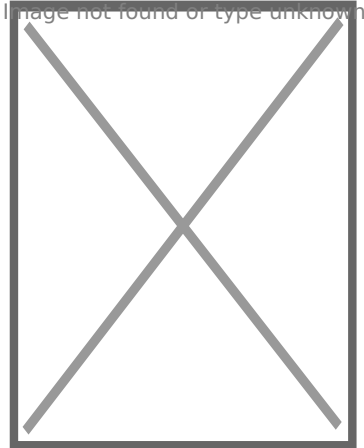
So while this first point about the one to one relationship may be true to as one of several points being made I would expect that that is not the only or even the most important point.

Post by "Don" of August 14, 2021 at 6:57 AM

Okay, lace up your boots 'cause we're headin' into the weeds here!

So, the Vatican Sayings are contained in the Codex Vaticanus Graecus 1950 which also contains Marcus Aurelius's Meditations evidently. The first publication of this manuscript was by Wotke along with Usener in Wiener Studien, Vol. X, in ,1888.

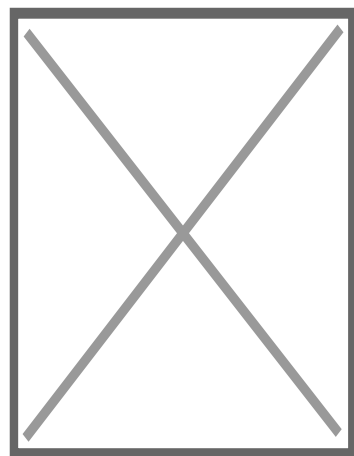
And it's digitized on Internet Archive:



[Wiener Studien, vol. 9-10 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Wiener Studien, vol. 9-10 (1887-1888) Book digitized by Google
archive.org

I don't read German, but I read well enough to find saying 42 in this text. Since Wotke and Usener were evidently working from the manuscript itself, there's no Greek word for pain in number 42, just the "greatest good" του μέγιστου αγαθού



[Wiener Studien, vol. 9-10 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

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And the edit of ἀπολύσεως in the manuscript to ἀπολαύσεως by Wotke and Userner appears to be uncontroversial (to them at least) since 42 doesn't seem to be mentioned anywhere else in the paper where various sayings are discussed.

Unfortunately, this looks to be as close as we can come to codex Vaticanus Graecus 1950 since I couldn't find a digitized version online ... yet.

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2021 at 8:10 AM

Great Work! It has long been a frustration of mine that we ought to have - but don't seem to have - a picture of the Vatican Sayings. I hope we can eventually find that!

Post by “Don” of August 14, 2021 at 9:31 AM

<http://www.mss.vatlib.it/guii/scan/link1.jsp?fond=Vat.gr>.

Bah!!! Vat. Gr. 1950 digitized images are only available in their Reading Room... I'm assuming that means onsite. 😞

OH!OH!!

CLICK ON THE BOOK ICON!!

[DigiVatLib](#)

Woohoo!! Now just to figure out where they are, part 1 or part 2!!

Post by “Cassius” of August 14, 2021 at 9:46 AM

At least you are pinning down the exact place to look - surely when we finish doing that we can find someone who can help - even if we have to post over on the Facebook page and Twitter.