

A Discussion Of Eudaemonia - Extracted from the Facebook Group

Post by "Cassius" of February 26, 2016 at 6:16 PM

MC: Aristotle spoke of eudaimonea, translated as a state of being happy. Is this the same word the Epicureans used to describe their goal, and how does the Epicurean conception differ exactly?

PA: Literally means being in good spirits.

RW: The goal that is actively aimed for by Epicurus is avoidance of physical pain and mental anxiety. If, as is likely, eudaemonia ensues, that is a kind of bonus. But if it never occurred, you'd still be fine.

PA: Ataraxia is the goal.

TH: I kind of wish you could have avoidance of physical pain and mental anxiety AND eudemonia!!! Maybe we should start a new philosophical school of thought? By the way, my spelling of the word is via the dictionary. May not be the Greek way though.

IV: "Eudaimonia" as a word means "happiness" (alternatively flourishing etc.) The main difference between the philosophical schools is the definition they offer to that word. For the aristotelians, this would be a life of "virtuous action in accordance with reason", while Epicureans say that it's a life "free of pain in the body and anxiety in the mind". When ancient philosophers say "eudaimonia", it's like they were saying "my car". Obviously they are talking about a similar thing, but also about a different car. I think that Epicureans shouldn't use "eudaimonia" for the reason that it will be confused with aristotelianism. We ought to use the word "ataraxia" because it defines a discussion along Epicurean lines.

Cassius Amicus: TH need not start a new school of thought, because pursuit of pleasure AND avoidance of pain IS Epicurean philosophy. As IV says, in modern discussion (and a I probably don't need the "modern" qualifier) eudaemonia is an Aristotelian-associated word that comes loaded with all sorts of requirements IN ADDITION to pleasure, notably including all the virtue/reason idealism that Aristotle inherited from Plato and which Epicurus rejected. RW's formulation, which never uses the word pleasure and in fact reads normal understanding of the word "pleasure" out of the equation, is what happens when you take a Stoic-inspired view of Epicurus and try to conclude that "avoidance of pain" is the complete meaning of Epicurean philosophy, which it most certainly is not. It's necessary to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time, and that means never forgetting the numerous statements of Epicurus such as "Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is the starting-point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge of

every good thing." Of course those who insist on arguing that pleasure = nothingness will never agree.....

RW: "Seeking pleasure" implies having a desire which is unfulfilled, i.e., pain. Satisfying a necessary desire and ridding ourselves of its pain, in an intelligent way, is pleasurable. But since many desires can be resolved by realizing they are unnecessary and that satisfying them or attempting to satisfy them will have further painful consequences, it makes sense to describe avoidance of pain as primary. The question that arises is whether it makes sense to seek pleasure in the absence of any desire. It does, if the pleasure is thoughtfully chosen with the object of fortifying us against future pain. (Just as it sometimes might make sense to choose a somewhat painful activity for the same purpose). Such pleasures largely comprise those we share with others as part of the creation and maintenance of friendship, which is our bulwark against future pain.

Cassius Amicus: ""Seeking pleasure" implies having a desire which is unfulfilled, i.e., pain" NO! Incorrect! A standard example of how this is wrong is the pleasure of smelling roses, which is pleasurable but certainly not something that you "lacked" or were "in pain for" before smelling those roses. The "replenishment" theory of pleasure is so full of holes that only my friends the Stoics find it servicable, and if you read Gosling & Taylors the Greeks on Pleasure you will find ample documentation how inadequate it is to explain pleasure in that way. What you are doing RW is placing pain as the center of universe for life, and the guiding star of all. You are certainly not alone in doing that and there are many philosophers who do, but I can't think of any way to be more anti-Nature or anti-Epicurean than that. But again, this chain of discussion is very useful because it shines the light on a path of thought that is absolutely incompatible with identifying pleasure as the guide of life. Some people said "No, Epicurus was wrong to say pleasure was the guide." The worst of his opponents never had the guts to make the argument while he was alive, but the moderns have slyly twisted his words. Black is white! Up is down! And "Pleasure" they say, is ****nothing more**** than the absence of pain." Hogwash. HD, I hope you are feeling MY pain! wink emoticon Do you see what is happening here Haris? And Ron is NOT being insincere or willfully obtuse. RW's Epicurus is who Epicurus is to at least 80% of those who know anything about him in the world today! (And my number is probably too low a percentage....)

RW: Consider: I spoke of "seeking pleasure", in response to your claim re same. Experiencing pleasure may or may not be the result of "seeking pleasure". There are fortuitous pleasures as well. I haven't claimed Epicurus believed all pleasure is "nothing more than" the absence of pain, only that the sort of pleasure that counters present or future pain is largely the only sort worth the effort of seeking.

Cassius Amicus: In other words, the activity of pursuing relief from pain is the only kind of activity worth pursuing (????)

AR: Seeking pleasure is not less important than avoiding pain. "...decide what to choose and what to avoid by referring to the goal of obtaining a body that is healthy and a soul that is free

from turmoil, since this is the aim of living happily. It is for the sake of living happily that we do everything, as we wish to avoid grief and fear. When once we have attained this goal, the storm of the soul is ended, because we neither have the need to go looking for something that we lack, nor to go seeking something else by which the good of our soul or of our body would be improved. For you see when we lack pleasure and we grieve, we have need of pleasure, because pleasure is not present. >>> On this account we affirm that Nature has provided that Pleasure is the beginning and end of living happily; -Epicurus, LTM"

RW: Cassius Amicus Or avoidance of future pain, yes. Of course I interpret pain broadly, as I believe Epicurus does, to include any sensation of disturbance or lack, even the slightest. It doesn't take much to nudge us to seek pleasure or relief.

Cassius Amicus: And thus in the space of this short thread we observe how Epicurean philosophy, which had swept the world by clearly pointing out that the purpose of life is to BOTH seek pleasure AND avoid pain, as normally understood by normal people, devolved into word game, of interest mainly to those disaffected Stoics who desperately sought to mask their own morbid fascination with emotionlessness by renaming it "pleasure."

RW: My impression is that you insist on seeing differences between our viewpoints that may not exist, or are at worst minor quibbles. I see no Epicurean point in your insisting that I should seek more intense pleasures or my insisting that you should seek fewer, as long as both of us are living prudently. And certainly no point in suggesting the other is pathologically deviant.

Cassius Amicus: RW I hope you see that my problem is not focused on you but in the fact that the viewpoint you are stating is that of the "orthodox" commentators such as Rist which I cited in the nearby post and with which you appear to agree. Look at how you phrased your last comment - "as long as both of us are living PRUDENTLY....." The test of the goal is whether we are in fact living happily/pleasurably, not prudently or wisely. Yes prudence and wise living are necessary to living happily, but there is no test for prudence and wisdom other than how successfully we achieve pleasurable living. Maybe you think I am splitting hairs but this is the central argument of much of what we know from the texts (Torquatus, Diogenes oinoanda, et. Al) and so it is worth emphasizing. In fact, I would argue that no one who does not understand it really understands the central message of Epicurus. Wisdom and the other "virtues" are desirable only because they lead to pleasurable living, not the other way around.