

**HEDONIC, EUDONIC AND MAKARISTIC HAPPINESS: DIALOGUE BETWEEN  
ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

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**Ágabo Borges de Sousa<sup>1</sup>.**

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**ABSTRACT**

This work proposes to raise a discussion about the concepts of happiness in Positive Psychology from the understandings of happiness in ancient philosophy, considering Cyrenaic hedonism, Aristotelian eudaimony, Nicomachean Ethics and Epicurus' Makaristics. Presenting the three philosophical concepts, it is understood that the Makaristic understanding of happiness has been neglected in Positive Psychology, and can be included in the psychological construct to enrich the proposal of happiness.

**Keywords:** Positive Psychology. Happiness. Ancient Philosophy. Epicurus.

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<sup>1</sup> E-mail: dr\_agabo@uefs.br



## INTRODUCTION

### HAPPINESS IN POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Positive Psychology arises from the perspective of looking beyond psychological illness, highlighting the positive potential of human beings' existence. From this perspective, factors that influence and contribute to well-being and happiness were investigated. In this effort, several assessment instruments have been developed and validated in several countries, including Brazil. Then, some works on happiness appeared that became known and were translated into Portuguese, such as: *The Psychology of Happiness* (CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, 1992); *Authentic Happiness* (SELIGMAN, 2002); *The Harvard Way of Being Happy* (ACOHR, 2012); the text of Omais on Happiness in the *Manual of Positive Psychology* (2018). There is even a World Happiness Report, which is updated annually.

We realized that happiness has become a construct that has been widely studied scientifically, and a theory called PERMA has been developed, which has five aspects linked to well-being, which are: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and fulfillment.

We must, however, understand that this construct – Happiness – is still in the process of being built in psychological science and lacks some reflections, especially because it is influenced by different philosophical understandings of happiness.

Positive Psychology starts from two "types of Happiness" (OM AIS, 2018, p.11) from ancient philosophy, but ignores a very important understanding of happiness, from Hellenistic philosophy, also from ancient Greece, which we will present later.

The look at happiness of Positive Psychology was reduced to the hedonic and eudaimonic understanding.

Hedonic happiness comes from the pursuit of immediate pleasure and the reduction of suffering and pain, while eudaimonic happiness would be a more lasting happiness, which comes from the pursuit of moral good, a fuller and more meaningful life, and a selection of desires to be fulfilled. (OM AIS, 2018, p.11).

A third understanding of happiness, which I am calling *makaristic*, *has been left unobserved*, because of the Greek concept *makarários*, which we usually translate as blessed.

Like the gods, the human being must be among his equivalents or equals, living among men, as if he were a god, for he would have attained the blessed life; since immortality is not of his nature, the human being must live prudently, feeding his life on the virtues, without the fear of death, even though life is ephemeral. In this way we affirm that the happy life, presented by Epicurus in his *Letter to Meneceus*, is analogous to the condition of the gods, a blessed life. (SOUSA, 2020, 31)



This concept is used by Epicurus, a philosopher of the Hellenistic period, who discusses his philosophy as a way to develop oneself towards a happy life (*makararios zein*). He also discusses the relationship between pleasure and happiness, which may lead some to a mistaken reading that he would be a hedonist, but his writings make it clear that it is a different form of happiness.

Let's get to know a little about the three philosophical proposals of happiness in order to enrich the understanding of happiness as a psychological construct.

## HAPPINESS IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

### HEDONIC

The hedonic understanding of life arises, especially, with Aristippus of Cyrene and the Cyrenaics, who were direct or indirect followers of Aristippus. For them, the *summum bonum* (sumo bem) was pleasure (*heidonê; heidos*), which "consists of 'gentle movement', with pain being a 'sudden movement' and the neutral state of 'immobility'" (Sextus Empiricus, 1933, xvii). Aristippus, a disciple of Socrates, "was the first of the Socratics to charge fees and send money to the master" (D.L, II, 65).

For him the supreme end is the "gentle movement", which provides the sensation, in this sense the best is not to abstain from pleasure, but to be able to master it, not being harmed by it. Later, his disciples developed their ideas by admitting two states of the soul – pleasure and pain, with "immobility" being the negation of both, as defended by the master of Cyrene. For them, there was no difference between pleasures, in quality or intensity, but pleasure is physical, which is also the supreme good. In this sense,

The Cyrenaics hold that there is a difference between the highest good and happiness. The supreme good is in reality isolated pleasure, while happiness is the sum of all isolated goods, in which past and future pleasures are also included. Pleasure alone is desirable for its own sake, whereas happiness is desirable not for its own sake but for the sake of pleasures alone. The proof that pleasure is the supreme good lies in the fact that from childhood we are instinctively attracted to pleasure, and when we obtain it, we no longer seek and avoid as much as possible its opposite, pain." (DL, II, 87-88).

Pleasure is the principle of happiness, because happiness is nothing more than the sum of pleasures experienced throughout existence. For the Cyrenaics, psychic pleasures and pains are directly linked to somatic pains and pleasures and are determined by them. In this way, the body (*soma*) determines psychological well-being or malaise, so somatic pain is worse than psychic pain, so more attention should be paid to the body than to the soul (*psyche*).

Later disciples of Aristippus of Cyrene will state:



Happiness is utterly impossible, for the body is affected by many sufferings, and the soul suffers together with the body and is disturbed by it, and fortune prevents the realization of many hopes; consequently happiness is unattainable. Moreover, life and death are desirable alternately. (DL, I, 94).

The understanding of pleasure linked to the body reduces, for the Cyrenaic hedonists, the possibility of thinking about happiness, due to the condition of human nature and its real conditioning factors of life. The followers of Aniceris, one of the Cyrenaics, understand that the happiness of one friend, that is, of the other, cannot be desired by itself, because it is not felt by the one who desires; however, they do not deny friendship, gratitude and respect for parents, who can move people to act in a way that causes them embarrassment, but the "wise man will not be less happy, even if he has few pleasures left" (DL, II, 96).

It is perceived that happiness in the context of Cyrenaic hedonism will have an eminently corporeal character, whose emphasis is sensation or 'gentle movement'; thus, it is not the things themselves that provide happiness, but the sensation that they provoke in the body. Aristippus highlights this with his *luxury modus vivendi*, a "lustful nature" (DL, II 66), marked by food, feasting, and the company of "courtesans."

Pleasure and pain, for the Cyrenaic hedonists, especially Theodores, are in an intermediate position between good and evil; on the one hand, wisdom, prudence, and justice are derived from the supreme good; while folly, imprudence, and injustice derive from the supreme evil.

## EUDAIMONICS

It can be seen that in the history of philosophy, Aristotle was one of the best known and most discussed philosophers who spoke about happiness (*eudaimonia*) in a more conceptual and systemic way. This discussion appears in the Nicomachean Ethics (EN) in a very direct way. Therefore, when we think of Felicity (*eudaimonia*) in Aristotle, we immediately think of his writing to his son Nicomacheans.

Aristotle builds his discussion on happiness, starting from the principle that "all art and all investigation, as well as all action and all choice, have in mind some good" (EN, I, 1). In this way, we can say that "the good is that to which all things tend" (EN, I, 1). This principle is important, because happiness would be a good, or even the supreme good. However, the question of the good must take into account that there are "goods in themselves" and other goods related to them.

He himself will say:



If there is only one absolute end, it will be what we are looking for; and if there is more than one, the most absolute of all will be what we seek.

Now we call that which deserves to be sought for its own sake, more absolute than that which deserves to be sought with a view to something else, and that which is never desirable in the interest of something else, more absolute than things desirable both in themselves and in the interest of a third; That is why we call absolute and unconditional that which is always desirable in itself and never in the interest of something else.

Now, this is the concept that we preeminently have of happiness. It is always sought for its own sake and never with a view to anything else, whereas we do choose honor, pleasure, reason, and all the virtues for their own sake (for even if nothing came of it, we would continue to choose each of them); but we also choose them in the interest of happiness, thinking that the possession of them will make us happy. Happiness, however, no one chooses for any of these, nor, in general, anything that is not itself. (EN,I,7).

Aristotle rejects the hedonistic understanding that happiness is directly and inseparably linked to bodily pleasure. However, it is important to consider that happiness (eudaimonic) is the most desirable good, which is not counted among other goods, but understands these "other goods" as instrumental in the service of happiness and never the other way around.

Since the good is "that in whose interest all things are made", what would be the "function of the human being", which would give direction to his thinking, his choices and his acting?

we affirm that the function of man is a certain kind of life, and this life an activity or actions of the soul that imply a rational principle; and we add that the function of a good man is a good and noble accomplishment of them; and whether any action is well performed when it is in accordance with its own excellence; If this is so, the good of man appears to us as an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there is more than one virtue, as the best and most complete. (EN,I,7).

Thus, Aristotle states that happiness is "a kind of good life and good deed" (EN, I, 8). It is perceived that there is an understanding of the state (an idea of passivity) and a dynamic understanding, provoked by the action in a virtuous activity, because there is, for him, a direct relationship between happiness and virtue. However, Aristotle does not deny the reality of life, which is linked to things and people influencing the human being. Virtue cannot be exercised without the proper means and "in many actions we use friends, wealth and political power as instruments" (EN, I, 8). Thus, circumstances, including a kind of economic-structural prosperity, influence the happiness of human beings.

Happiness, for Aristotle, is a virtuous activity of the soul." (EN,I,9) "Of the other goods, some must necessarily be present as preconditions of happiness, and others are naturally cooperative and useful as instruments." (EN,I,9) However, we must highlight that for happiness, nothing is lacking, because it is self-sufficient; Happiness is therefore desirable in itself, and seeks nothing but its own activity.



In this way, happiness is linked to life activities that are consistent with the condition of the human being, because virtue is what makes the being what it should be. Aristotle, therefore, does not understand happiness as the result of passivity, as something that affects him from the outside, but as a construction of being, which affirms him as a being.

Aristotle admits a "perfect happiness" (*teleia eudamonia*), but also a "divine" happiness, which would be a kind of "bliss", a *Makaristic happiness*.

He himself will say: "Consequently, the activity of God, which surpasses all others by blessedness, must be contemplative; and of human activities, which has the most affinity with the latter, it is the one that should most participate in happiness." (EN,X,8).

This contemplative activity establishes an "affinity" with the gods; then, the human being who does this "will presumably also be the happiest. So that in this sense too the philosopher will be the happiest of men" (EN, X, 8).

This understanding of Aristotle already opens up another idea of happiness, discussed by Epicurus in his Letter to Menecaeus.

## MAKARISTICS

Aristotle mentions in his Nicomachean Ethics the *makários*, or the blissful makaristic, happiness; but for him this happy, complete life is inaccessible to the human being.

But such a life is inaccessible to man, for it will not be in so far as he is a man that he will live in this way, but in so far as he possesses something divine in himself; and so far as this element is superior to our composite nature, so is its activity to the exercise of the other kind of virtue. (EN,X,7).

Epicurus makes a great contribution to this question, as he considers it fully possible to live "as a god among men". Diogenes Laertius dedicates book X (DL,X) to the teachings of Epicurus, who highlights his importance to Greek thought in the Hellenistic period.

In the letter to Menecaeus it is very clear that *Makaristic happiness* can be experienced by the human being: "A righteous contemplation (*aplanes theoria*) of these things knows all the choice and rejection for the health of the body and tranquility of the soul (*psyche*), since this is the end of a happy life (*makarious zên*)." (DL, X, 128). In other words, it is the sure knowledge of the doctrine taught in the Garden, the school of Epicurus, that makes it possible to choose or reject the events of life, pleasures, for example, leading to the health of the body and the tranquility of the soul (*psyche*), because this is the purpose of the happy, blissful life, of *Makaristic happiness*.

It is already perceived here that this happiness to which Epicurus refers involves the whole of the human being: his completeness, body and soul; It seems to be about the full



realization of this human being, including health and imperturbability. The disturbance, for Epicurus, comes from the belief that nature can be blessed (*makaristic*) and incorruptible, as the gods would be.

Thus, to 'put into practice' or 'meditate' on the fundamental principles of doctrine, *stoiceia*, in a certain way inserts man on the path of things that leads to blessedness. In this we distinguish beatitude as an essential attribute of the gods and an accidental attribute of men. (SAPARERRO, 2014, p.18).

The human being can reach a blessed life, that is, *Makaristic* happiness, not as a result of his nature, but as a result of his *modus vivendi*, as proposed by the philosophy of the Garden.

We can say that the *Makaristic understanding* of happiness for Epicurus has a fundamental psychological factor, as it requires philosophical effort, which includes the defense and preservation of what leads the human being to a blissful life (*makarious zên*). "All the things to which I have exhorted you continually, attain them and do them, taking them as rudiments of good living (*kalous zên*)." (DL, X, 123)

It is not a solipsistic philosophy, marked by the reflection of the individual, but a *modus vivendi*, in which the choices and rejections of pleasures are part, as well as the other is included by friendship (love – *philia*).

It should also be reflected that of the desires, some are natural, others vain. And of the natural ones, some are necessary, others only natural; Of those necessary, some are necessary for happiness, others for freedom from disturbance of the body, some, for living. [128] A righteous contemplation of these things knows all the choice and rejection for the health of the body and tranquility <of the soul>, since this is the end of a happy life. For the sake of this, we practice all things, so that we have no pain, no fear. Once this has been achieved in relation to us, the whole storm of the soul is calmed, and the living being does not have to go about looking for something and looking for something else with which the good of soul and body will be completed. So, we lack pleasure when we feel suffering because pleasure is not present; <When we don't suffer, > we no longer need pleasure. That is why we say that pleasure is the beginning and the end of living happily; [129] We understand it as the first and inherent good, and from it we begin all choice and rejection, and we arrive at it, judging all good with feeling as a rule. And since this is the first and congenital good, for this reason we do not choose all pleasure, but pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance comes upon us from them; and we consider many sufferings better than pleasures, when a great pleasure follows a long time of enduring pains. For all pleasure, because it has a proximate nature, is a good, but not all of it must be chosen; just as all pain is an evil, but not all [it] is to be avoided. [130] Therefore all things are to be discerned in a proper way, by comparison, utility, and harm. (DL, X, 127-130).

Despite Epicurus stating that pleasure is the beginning and the goal, the end, pleasure must be measured in its result, for its acceptance or rejection. It is a way of life in which the teachings are applied to avoid suffering and disturbance; It is important to highlight that this is not just a dichotomy between pleasure and pain. This is clearer in



Vatican Sentence 5, which says: "It is not possible to live pleasantly without living with prudence (*phronismos*), rectitude (*kalous* - beauty) and justice (*dikaious*); when this does not occur, it is not possible to live pleasurably (it is not a pleasurable life – *ouk estin hêdous zên*)." (SV,5)

Another fundamental aspect for *Makaristic happiness* in Epicurus, which shows that it is not a solipsistic philosophy, is the understanding of friendship, of *philia*, that is, the love of a friend. We have this established in the Principal Maxims and the Vatican Sentences (SV): "Of the things that wisdom provides for lifelong happiness, the acquisition of friendship is by far the greatest." (DL,X, 148,(27)). "Friendship leads its dance all over the world, inviting all of us to awaken to the celebration of happiness." (SV, 52).

The Vatican Sentences will show us that the philosophy of Epicurus indicates a *modus vivendi*, much more than a reflection that abstracts the human being from reality, taking him away from the real encounters of life.

"It is necessary to laugh when philosophizing, and also to manage the house and to make use of all the things that are proper to us, without ever ceasing to propose the words of correct philosophy." (SV, 41).

"One should not pretend to philosophize, but to philosophize effectively; for we need not appear healthy, but have true health." (SV,54).

Epicurus begins the letter to Pythocles by emphasizing the positivity of affection, which is marked in the memory, which contributes to a blissful life, a *Makaristic*, happy life. "In your letter, which Cleon has brought me, you continue to show me the affection I deserved for the devotion I have to you, and you try, not without success, to recall the considerations of what makes a life happy (*makarion bion*)." (DL, X, 84).

These aspects show, in my view, clearly, that the philosophy of Epicurus distances itself from the proposal of classical philosophy, especially with Plato and Aristotle, bringing philosophy to the day-to-day life in its concreteness in time and space, as stated in Vatican Sentence 17:

We should not consider the young man happy (*makaristós*), but the old man whose life was fortunate. The young man, full of vigor, follows, at the whim of fortune, the thoughts of others; the old man reaches old age as in a port, where he has housed goods whose expectation was previously uncertain and which he now retains in the security of recognition. (SV,17).

*Makaristic happiness* is a construction of life, which develops throughout existence. This does not mean that one should think that the path to the blessed (*Makaristic*) life is a thing for the elderly, but only in the course of the history of existence is one perceived the happy life.



Epicurus says at the beginning of the Letter to Meneceus:

Let no one, being young, postpone philosophizing, nor, being old, begin to tire of study. In fact, no age is premature or late for the health of the soul. Anyone who says that the time to study philosophy has not yet come, or that it has passed, is the same as saying that the time for happiness (*eudaimonian*) has not yet arrived or no longer exists now. Consequently, wisdom must be sought in the young and the old: in one, so that, as he grows old, he may be young in good things, because of the grateful memory of what has passed; while the other, that he may be both young and old, because he is not afraid of things to come. Then we must take care of the things that make happiness (*poiounta tēn eudaimonian*), since, if such is present, we possess everything of it, and if absent, we do everything to have it. (DL,X, 122)

Here, Epicurus speaks of *eudaimonian*, *eudaimonic* happiness, which like the 'beautiful life' and 'pleasure' is part of a blissful life, a *Makaristic* life, or a happy life.

To close our reflection on Epicurus' *Makaristic* happiness, we must mention the so-called *tretrapharmaco*, or the four remedies of Epicurus' philosophy, which help us to perceive his philosophical proposal as a *modus vivendi*.

1. Do not fear the gods: "The happy and eternal being has no disturbances or imputes to anyone, therefore, he does not exist for anger, nor for thanks; in reality, all this [exists] in what is weak." (DL, X,139(1)).

This is true of the gods who do not punish or engage with the human being so as not to affect his imperturbability; but I understand that it applies to the human being with a *Makaristic* life, too. He who is well and full, blessed, has no disturbances in his *psyche*, nor does he disturb others; he does not affect or is affected in his soul.

2. Do not fear death: "Get used to considering that death is nothing to us; for all good and evil is in sensation, and death is loss of sensation." (DL, X, 124).

Then death, the most terrible of evils, is nothing to us, since, when we exist, death is not present; and when death is present, we do not exist. Therefore it is nothing, both for the living and for the dead, for as far as the former [living] are concerned, and the others [dead] no longer exist. (DL, X, 125).

3. Knowing how to deal with pleasure: "The limit of the magnitude of pleasures [is] the removal of all suffering. Where pleasure is present, as long as it lasts, there is no pain, or disturbance or both together." (DL,X, 139(3)). The amplitude of pleasure in the body establishes the presence of what your body lacks and the absence of what makes you suffer. But we must remember that for Epicurus there must be an analysis for the acceptance and rejection of pleasure, so that it does not bring him more suffering than this pleasure provides in terms of satisfaction.

4. It is possible to endure evil, for it is not eternal:



"Continuous pain in the flesh does not last, but the great pain is present for a short time, and also that which is only equal to pleasure through the flesh, does not remain for many days. Prolonged illnesses take greater pleasure in the flesh than pain." (DL,X, 140,(4)). In this sense, it makes no sense to be distressed by suffering, because it is ephemeral, knowing how to deal with pain in life is one of the formulas for living well and consequently, I went on to a blessed, *Makaristic life*.

It can be seen that Epicurus' proposal of *Makaristic* happiness is different from the hedonic and eudaimonic proposals, already well known in Positive Psychology.

#### 5. Inclusion of the concept of *Makaristic Happiness*

It is perceived that the discussion about happiness in ancient philosophy has a special place and can be an enriching element for understanding happiness in Positive Psychology.

We must understand that there are three understandings of happiness that are distinct: hedonic, eudaimonic, and makaristic. Each of them highlights important aspects, such as pleasure, with happiness being the sum of these in the course of life; virtue, that which makes being what it should be; and a plenitude of the human being in his *psyche* and in his body, as health of the body and imperturbability of the soul (*ataraxia*). In this understanding, the biopsychosocial and "theological" dimensions are included.

Elements such as self-sufficiency (*autarchia*), prudence (*phronesis*), justice (*dikaiois*) are not denied, quite the contrary, they are an integral part of this happy life, as well as friendship (*philia*). This understanding of happiness makes human beings responsible for their positive affects and care for negative affections, helping them to understand their weaknesses and potentialities.

Makaristic happiness has a strong aspect of personal responsibility (*autarchia*), but it is not limited to aspects of virtue (*phronesis*, *dikaiois*, and others). It implies the ability to resist external attacks that take away your tranquility (*ataraxia*), a kind of shield, which avoids being affected by things that are negative to you, exercising positivity, well-being. This Makaristic happiness requires the "critical" capacity (analysis with criteria) in the face of pleasures, perceiving their potentiality to provide more pain, as well as the "criticism" of pain, which can provide more satisfaction.

Another important aspect in this Makaristic happiness is resilience, that is, the ability to resist pain, in the understanding that no pain is eternal.

We can see that there is much to explore in this Epicurean understanding of happiness, which needs to be realized so that the concept of happiness as a psychological construct in Positive Psychology is expanded.



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