

PLOUTARCHOS, n.s.

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Plutarchus



Plutarchus ein natürlicher maister vnd außspruchender geistlicher vnd weltlicher ein gepie-
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Plutarch's thoughts about happiness

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Abstract

Plutarch has much to say about happiness but, as far as we know, he never devoted an essay to this subject. His conception of happiness is built on the Aristotelian principle of the golden mean (μ) implying that he repudiated the extreme doctrines of Stoics and Epicureans. Plutarch emphasizes the importance of the emotions for a happy life. His conclusions about the factors of happiness have been verified by modern research in psychology, sociology and medicine.

Introduction

Among Plutarch's about 125 extant works we find none devoted precisely to happiness. Neither is there any title among the 227 of the Lamprias catalogue that would indicate such a theme. This is rather striking, considering that the texts of the *Moralia* extend over a very vast scope of subjects. At least in the *Quaestiones convivales*, where Plutarch most clearly displays his capacity of polyhistor, it would indeed be very likely to find a discussion on such an interesting and important subject.

The fact that Plutarch, as far as we know, did not hit on the idea of writing an essay μ or the like is particularly strange, considering that he, throughout his writings displays his profound interest in psychological issues of

different kinds. We may also assume that he, in his teachings at his private academy at Chaeronea, committed himself to the amelioration of the character of his listeners partly in order that they might lead a more happy life.

In the lack of a monograph on this issue we have to search for thoughts about happiness throughout his writings and try to get a picture of his views. Plutarch probably never tried to present any definition of the concept. In difference to the Stoics or the Epicureans he does not recognize happiness as a stereotyped state of mind, such as the Stoic or the Epicurean

. He regards their concepts of happiness and the principles of these as unnatural and impossible to realize in practical life. His decided repudiation of these sects is to be seen in the large number of polemic writings leveled against them.

The Lamprias catalogue counts eight writings against the Stoics¹ and ten against the Epicureans². Three of the former group and three of the latter are extant. One essay against both is lost³.

Plutarch’s theory of ethics

It is a well-known fact that Plutarch proceeds from Plato and Aristotle in his philosophy of ethics and thus considers virtue as fundamental to a happy life. Lack of virtue leads to bad actions, evil behaviour and wickedness. The kind of virtue which Plutarch regards as the basis and prerequisite for a happy life is the moral virtue. In his work

he sets out this practical-philosophical concept. His presentation is based on a combination of Platonic and Aristotelian psychology. The soul is described as composed of two components, reason (λογιστικόν) on the one hand, and the emotional part (αισθητικόν) on the other. Plutarch prefers this Aristotelian description. Plato’s third component, the volitional part (βουλητικόν) he counts as part of the emotional part. It is thus λογιστικόν, but can be affect-

ed by the logical part so as to control the desires, λογιστικόν μὲν 4.

In his description of the moral virtue Plutarch likewise follows Aristotle⁵, but he emphasizes its role stronger. He considers it essential to a good life and definitely more important than the theoretical, contemplative virtue. Directly at the beginning of his essay he confronts the two kinds of virtue with each other and gives the prominence to the emotional part of the soul as essential to the moral virtue. He sets out that it is its material (αισθητικόν), and reason its form (λογιστικόν)⁶.

Throughout *De virtute morali* Plutarch repeatedly emphasizes the central role of the emotions in the function of the soul. This position naturally made him level biting criticism against the Stoic notion of these as deficiencies of reason, and not as a particular function of the soul in its own right. He shows this by means of various arguments. For example, when the psychic activity of an individual activates the emotions, one can observe physical symptoms such as paleness or blushing, or trembling and palpitation of the heart, whereas no such reactions occur in

¹ The Lamprias catalogue nos. 59, 76-79, 149, 152, 154.

² The Lamprias catalogue nos. 80-82, 129, 133, 143, 155, 159, 178, 179.

³ No. 148

⁴ *De virt. mor* 442 A

⁵ *Nie. eth.* II 1. 1103 a 14-1103 b 25.

⁶ *De virt. mor.* 440 D [λογιστικόν] μ

purely intellectual activity⁷.

Thus Plutarch underlines that the emotions are a natural part of the soul, and not, as the Stoics maintain, a defect of the reason, an imperfection that the Wise has eliminated. Plutarch establishes that it is not desirable nor possible to erase the emotions. On the contrary, the proper function of the emotions is essential to a good and happy life. However, the passions must be disciplined. It is the task of the practical reason () to eliminate deficiencies and excesses in their functions⁸. They must be brought to perform their functions according to the Aristotelian principle of the middle course, the μ ⁹.

Plutarch emphasizes, even more than Plato, the importance of education and training in ethics and morals. More than Plato he puts stress on practical training and the establishing of a good behaviour by means of habituation (). Founding his reasoning on Aristotle's theory of the soul he maintains that if reason trains and habituates the emotions to obedience and to keep within certain limits,

then a lasting psychic character, an , or , is established. A person who has acquired such a stable second nature is guided by it in his acting so that he is able to avoid bad conduct and act morally by habit and, according to Plutarch, is in the best condition of leading a happy life.

Incidentally, Plutarch's conclusion has been verified recently by modern psychological and medical research. Repetition and habituation establish new connections in the brain which form a basis of lasting patterns of behaviour¹⁰.

The opposite is true if reason has not brought the emotions under control but instead has allowed them to develop their irrational capacity and establish an amoral pattern of conduct characterized by vice,¹¹. An individual whose soul is ruled by can by definition not lead a happy life. To Plutarch as well as to Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics virtue is an indispensable prerequisite of happiness. Aristotle underlines that acting in accordance with virtue produces pleasurable sensations and thus con-

⁷ *De virt. mor.* 451 A-B.

⁸ *De virt. mor.* 443 E-444 D.

⁹ *De virt. mor.* 444 D-445 A; Cf. Arist. *Me.eth.* II 6.1106 a 24-33.

¹⁰ See Klein, 2005, Ch. 4, esp. pp. 76-77, 82-85; Averitt & More, 1993, pp. 622-623. Cf. Schanno, 2003, p. 14 "Das Gesollte aber muss gelehrt werden, in den Idealen als Bildungsvorrat konserviert, wiedergefunden und erzieherisch neugestaltet werden. Der Belehrt, der Erzogene muss sich zum selbständig Findenden wandeln, den Weg von der Einsicht in das Gute hin zum Wollen gehen."

¹¹ *De virt. mor.* 443 D.

tributes to happiness¹².

Rejection of Stoic ethics

Plutarch firmly rejects the opinion of Chrysippus that virtue is identical with happiness. In *Adversus Stoicos* he makes ironical remarks about the Stoic imagination that the Wise is totally equal to Zeus in wisdom and blissfulness. He ridicules the Stoic conviction that not being deficient in virtue means having no lack of happiness. Even a Wise who is hit by disease or mutilation and therefore commits suicide is blissful in the same degree as Zeus, according to the Stoic view¹³. Plutarch establishes that this Wise man simply does not exist and has never existed anywhere on earth¹⁴, and he attacks with biting irony the Stoic view that countless myriads of human beings who have not succeeded to attain wisdom live in extreme misery and unhappiness in Zeus' commonwealth or realm which has the very best administration.

Plutarch frenetically opposes this Stoic dichotomy of humankind in an immense majority of absolutely evil individuals and

a minimal paucity of absolutely good, wise and godlike. The esoteric attitude of the Stoics is totally in conflict with his own optimistic view that people do have a possibility of making progress in virtue and thus be happier.

Moreover, the Stoic opinion that the change from μ to μ happens on a sudden and without being noticed by the individual appears to Plutarch as utterly absurd. For if this were true, neither good nor bad things would be perceptible. But Chrysippus says himself that they are, and that we can notice differences between them, Plutarch points out in *De Stoicorum repugnantiis*¹⁵. "How is this not the utmost absurdity?" he asks sarcastically¹⁶. A similar biting criticism is found in *On progress in virtue* where he ridicules the Stoic imagination of the sudden shift from μ to μ . This would mean that anyone who is the very worst would fall asleep in the evening and awake wise in the morning without recognizing the great difference in his own self¹⁷. It would be more probable, he remarks, that anyone

¹² Arist. *Nie. eth.* I 8. 1099 a 10-17; X 5. 1176 a 24-29.

¹³ *Adv. Stoic.* 1076 B; *De Stoic, rep.* 1046 E μ
(sc.)

¹⁴ *Adv. Stoic.* 1076 μ

¹⁵ *De Stoic, rep.* 1042 E-F.

¹⁶ *De Stoic, rep.* 1042 F-1043 A μ
 μ , μ ,

¹⁷ *De prof, in virt.* 75 D-E.

who were made man from woman in answer to prayer, should fail to recognize the transformation.

Plutarch repeatedly returns to this Stoic fancy, introducing different arguments. Thus he asks how it is not at odds with the common conception that one apprehends a difference between health and disease but not between prudence and folly¹⁸. And he continues his irony and asks: "When the Stoics maintain that men who are making progress remain stupid and vicious, and do not notice the change when they have become prudent and virtuous, in spite of the fact that they do assert that there is a great difference between prudence and folly, does it perhaps seem to you that they are in an amazing way confirming the consistency of their doctrines?"¹⁹

Another Stoic opinion that Plutarch likes to attack is their view that anyone who is happy only for an instant is happy in the same way and in the same degree as those who are happy over a longer time²⁰. Plutarch's rejection of

this idea is in agreement with the general conception of modern psychology, namely that a momentary feeling of bliss is not the same as *being* happy and to lead a happy life. A feeling of euphoria lasting for a short while may only provide a brief and unexpected relief in an otherwise depressive state of mind²¹.

Plutarch's high appreciation of common sense made him react in face of these doctrines of absolute wisdom and virtue and happiness on the one hand, and absolute wickedness, vice and unhappiness, on the other. He accuses the Stoics of trying to force the facts into an unnatural agreement with their own assumptions, instead of the other way round²².

Plutarch's aversion to these extreme Stoic doctrines was most probably provoked by the egocentric and exclusive attitude they represent. It is noticeable, however, that the target of his attacks is the classical Stoicism in the dogmatic form presented by Chrysippus. Modified Stoic views of his own time he might accept, but his negative attitude to Stoic

¹⁸ *Adv. Stoic.* 1062 D.

¹⁹ *Adv. Stoic.* 1062 E.

²⁰ *De Stoic, rep.* 1046 C-E; *Adv. Stoic.* 1062 A

²¹ See Warner, 1986, . 475; Klein, 2005, pp. 48-49; Schanno, 2003, p. 11 "Glück ... ist im eigentlich verstandenen Sinn ein Zustand, aus dem Kraft und Zuversicht geschöpft werden kann."

²² *De prof, in virt.* 75 F

ethics was nearly general²³. However, this did certainly not prevent him from taking part in the vivid discussions and partly syncretistic exchange of thoughts of his time. Several of his friends were Stoics, though probably not of the old kind²⁴.

The conspicuously harsh polemic of Plutarch's anti-Stoic writings is in sharp contrast to his friendly attitude to his contemporary moderate Stoics. His attacks on classical Stoicism are probably meant to bring out in sharp relief the difference between them and his own views. The Cynic-Stoic position means concentration on the own self in order to acquire insight and a higher form of knowledge and thus attain virtue and happiness, an attitude that reduces or eliminates any interest in other people's moral status. The Stoic man's conviction that he possesses a particular exclusiveness and privilege appeared to Plutarch as diametrically opposite to his own outlook. Following the lead of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, he aimed at the amelioration of the ethical and moral status of as many people as possible. The self-righteous attitude of the Stoic Wise implying condescending contempt for the

entire vile mankind which, plunged in , passes life in desperate misery, Plutarch probably felt as a provocation of his own view, characterized by - . This concept is assigned a central position in Plutarch's ethical theory. In fact, he seems to regard it as prior to all other concepts constituting the ethical virtue²⁵.

Progress in virtue

Plutarch was obviously convinced that progress in virtue is possible. Education appeared to him as the fundamental means of offering to people the basis of a good and happy life. Having presented his ethical theory in *De virtute morali* he wrote his essay on how to make progress in virtue, *De profectibus in virtute*. After a pungent anti-Stoic introduction he meditates upon the different possibilities that exist and the different difficulties that may turn up, when one tries to ameliorate his character by means of habituation to a good norm of action. He points out that it is possible to observe the progress of one's own ethical development and describes how the steps forward convey satisfaction and enjoyment and thus, implicitly, a feeling of happiness²⁶. The

²³ See Babut, 1969, pp. 114-115, 318 "Pourtant, on sait que les oeuvres polemiques reservent une place importante, sinon exclusive, à l'éthique, et nous avons constate que dans ensemble des *Moralia* les emprunts à l'éthique stoicienne restaient en definitive assez limites.

²⁴ One of these was Themistocles, see Teodorsson, 1989, p. 146; Teodorsson, 1996, p.109.

²⁵ Plutarch uses / more frequently than other ethical concepts, , , , and almost always together with other more or less synonymous words. See Teodorsson, 2004, p. 677.

²⁶ *De prof. in virt.* 81 A-B μ μ μ μ

progress as such, then, is a source of happiness. And he depicts how the progress in virtue improves the way of thinking and leads on to a better general conduct .

Plutarch points out that it is a specific mark of progress when words are transformed into deeds, and that this in turn indicates that the apprentice has established a positive relation to his instructor and desires to emulate what he commends and, on the other hand, avoid what he censures . Plutarch always emphasizes the great importance of good examples for progress in virtue. The young man compares himself with his model and, when he has become conscious of his deficiencies, he is pricked by the hope and desire to become equally good and perfect .

Because the moral virtue, according to Plutarch, is the fundamental condition for a happy life, he underlines, as was to be expected, that happiness does not come from external goods and wealth. On the contrary, we get it from our own character, provided that it is good, and then we can get additional feelings of enjoyment from the material things³⁰.

Reversely, nobody who has a bad, vicious character, , can ever enjoy material resources, however great they may be. But whoever has learnt - will be contented even in poverty and lead a happy life with any resources. Wealth causes gladness for the good one will do to others, whereas poverty grants freedom from concern about the wealth, and obscurity protects against envy³¹.

Plutarch repeatedly maintains that material goods do not imply happiness, if they are not combined with prudence, (De fortuna 99 E). He states (Cato maior 18.5) that striving for wealth does not arise from any natural passion in one's soul but is due to influence of people's false opinions about it. Money cannot buy peace of mind, greatness of spirit (μ), serenity, confidence and self-sufficiency (). Having wealth is not the same as being superior to it, nor is possessing luxuries the same as feeling no need of them. And Plutarch asks: "From what other ills does wealth deliver us, if it does not even deliver us from craving for it?"³²

²⁷ De prof in viri. 81 B-82 A.

²⁸ De prof in viri. 84 B-C.

²⁹ De prof in viri. 84 D.

³⁰ De viri, et vie. 100 C

³¹ De viri, et vie. 100 F-101 E.

³² De cup. div. 523 D-E.

Plutarch often emphasizes that lack of knowledge and folly are the causes of the wretched and unhappy state of things of many people. He begins his short diatribe entitled *Whether the affections of the soul are worse than those of the body* quoting Homer: "Nothing is more wretched than man of all that breathes and creeps upon the earth." But he then puts the question whether it is due to bad luck () or because of our own fault that we lead a miserable life, and he declares that while illness of the body develops by nature, the immorality of the soul is the souls' own doing, which develops into its affliction³³. Diseases of the body are readily detected by the reason, but the evils of the soul escape the notice of most men. Illnesses of the soul are thus the greater afflictions, because they themselves prevent the soul from becoming conscious of them, for it is affected in the very part by which it judges. Thus the lack of knowledge leads to a continued bad and evil and unhappy life. For while men sick in body send for a doctor, those who are sick in soul are not aware of it and thus avoid philosophers³⁴.

By his strong emphasis on the difficulties of curing a deep-rooted, established bad conduct, Plutarch wants to call attention to the fact that the foundation of a good moral judgement () ought to be laid already in the youth and thus to provide for a future good and happy life

(). In his brief essay - he argues vigorously and with his unfailing pedagogical optimism in favour of his conviction that moral virtue can actually be learnt and confirmed by instruction and training.

Rejection of Epicurean ethics

Plutarch considered the well-being of both body and soul essential to a happy life, but he evidently attached the greater importance to the health of the soul. Thus it was natural to him to dissociate himself decidedly from the Epicurean materialistic doctrines of pleasure. In his writing entitled *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum* he launches a series of arguments against these. As in his anti-Stoic criticism he tries to demonstrate inconsistencies and illogical thinking in Epicurus' doctrines. For example, when he belittles and laughs at the pains of disease, Plutarch asks how the Epicureans can appreciate the pleasures of the body, when they do not perceive its pains (1088 C). They affirm that they enjoy the good condition of the body, i.e. health, but Plutarch objects that there is no way to acquire any assurance that it will last (1090 D). And he ridicules Epicurus' statement that the very escape from ills is the supreme good. He exclaims: "Oh the great pleasure and blessed state this company enjoy, as they revel in suffering no hardship or anxiety

³³ *Anim. an corp. affect.* 500 C.

³⁴ *Anim. an corp. affect.* 500 E-501 B.

or pain!" (1091 B). He continues: "They are not less blissful than swine or sheep, since they count it blessedness that everything goes well with the flesh and with the mind in its concern for the flesh. Actually, for the cleverer and more graceful animals the escape from evil is not the highest end; rather, when they have had their fill they turn to song, or revel in swimming or in flight, or for pure joy and high spirits take up a playful imitation of words and sounds of every kind" (1091 C-D).

What appears especially strange to Plutarch is the fact that the Epicureans repudiate intellectual pleasure, the highest and most exquisite kind and, while rejecting music and poetry, are content with simple theatrical recitals and shows at their banquets (1095 BC). To Plutarch, being together with friends and colleagues is an important source of happiness, but it must be connected with stimulating intellectual activity. He cannot discern any possibility of happiness in the solitary life of the Epicureans who spend their days in vegetative passivity in isolated esoteric groups. He notes that Epicurus himself realized that individuals who are ambitious by nature must be allowed to follow their inclination and take part in public life³⁵.

Plutarch notices that inactivity is devastating to the tranquillity of mind, a fact that, incidentally, is well known and documented by modern psychology³⁶. Plutarch mentions as an example that women, who are not so occupied with many things as men, by no means have a greater tranquillity of mind. Instead they are often hit by all kinds of pain, excitement, despondency and imaginings. Plutarch intimates as a main factor the fact that they are thrown upon a confined way of life at home ()³⁷.

Factors of happiness

Plutarch frequently suggests that good relations to other people are very important for a happy life. That this is true has been shown by modern sociological and psychological research.³⁸ Plutarch especially emphasizes the primary and close relations within the family. His consolation letter to his wife, written when their little daughter had died, shows that he and Timoxena his wife most probably lived in a happy marriage. Several passages in the *Coniugalia praecepta* indicate that he considered it of great importance that husband and wife respect each other and that both encourage and please the other part in order to preserve and consolidate the happiness of

³⁵ *De tranqu. an.* 465 F-466 A.

³⁶ See *Argyle*, 2001, pp. 103-105; *Klein*, 2005, pp. 186-187, 245-248; *Durstewitz et al.*, 1999.

³⁷ *De tranqu. an.* 465 D.

³⁸ See *Argyle*, 2001, pp. 71-88, 224-225; *Klein*, 2005, Ch. 10; *House et al.*, 1988, pp. 540-544; *Kemper*, 1993, pp. 41-45.

married life³⁹. Plutarch's commitment to his children is to be seen in the consolation letter, and another passage suggests his genuine interest in children⁴⁰.

Plutarch's family connexions certainly comprised a broader scope than his own family. He devoted a particular essay to brotherly love, which he appreciates even higher than the goodwill of children towards their parents⁴¹. He obviously appreciates friendship very high and no doubt regards it as one of the primary conditions of a happy life⁴². Sociability, friendship and cheerful conviviality contribute much to the sense of well-being and happiness⁴³. Plutarch's experience is substantiated in modern sociological and psychological research⁴⁴.

In the *Table Talks* we get a remarkably clear and detailed insight into Plutarch's family and his vast circle of friends and acquaintances. Here we witness how his father and grandfather and father-in-law, his brothers and sons and brothers-in-law take part in the discussions together with a very great number of persons from his circle of acquaintances. He also mentions that some of his students were present at some banquets⁴⁵. He obviously very much enjoyed this company of cultivated, witty persons who were able to discuss different questions brilliantly. He often makes it clear that these conversations over the cups were a great intellectual pleasure to himself as well as his circle⁴⁶. He rejects with contempt other kinds of entertainment, such as vulgar, uneducated

³⁹ *Coni. praec.* 142 E μ . 145 ...

⁴⁰ *Praec. ger. reip.* 814 μ μ

⁴¹ *De frat. an.* 480 μ μ ;

⁴² *De ad. et am.* 51 AB μ μ
 μ . *De ad. et am.* 55 B μ

⁴³ *De ad. et am.* 54 EF μ μ , , μ

⁴⁴ See Ar g y l e, 2001, pp. 72-76, 88, 224-225; Kl e i n, 2005, pp. 171-183.

⁴⁵ *Quaest. conv.* III 1. 646 A; III 6. 653 EF; III 7. 655 F; VII 5. 704 E.

⁴⁶ *Quaest. conv.* V Prooem. 672 μ
 . *Quaest. conv.* VII 8 713 D μ , μ μ
 μ μ .

people enjoy so much. The passage in *Non posse* 1095 BC cited above shows that he counted the Epicureans among the people of bad taste and lack of appreciation of intellectual pleasure.

A feature to be seen throughout the *Table Talks* is the jovial, friendly and often humorous conversational tone⁴⁷. The discussions are vivid, sometimes rather animated but always kindly and civilized without severe confrontations. Plutarch did not shun conflicts, as is to be seen in his harsh criticism of Stoics and Epicureans, and he even wrote an essay about how to profit from one's enemies⁴⁸, but in company with friends the end is to increase and consolidate friendship. The best way of doing that is to choose subjects for discussion without obvious risks of conflicts⁴⁹. It is a noticeable and rather strange fact that among the multifarious questions of very disparate kind that are treated in the *Table Talks* none concerns politics⁵⁰.

This policy was probably due to Plutarch's basically positive attitude, his

, in his social relations. Generally speaking, it appears throughout his works that he had a positive outlook on life and the polyhistor's inquiring mind which granted him intellectual pleasure. He had an open-minded, acceptant attitude to moderate, cultivated pleasures, both psychic and physical⁵¹.

In his essay on tranquillity of mind, *De tranquillitate animi*, Plutarch expounds his views on positive thinking as a basic factor in various psychic functions and thus an important condition of a happy life. This is an opinion that has been widely verified by modern psychology and medicine⁵². Plutarch emphasizes that when happenings and circumstances are contrary to our wishes, we should not overlook whatever we have that is pleasant and attractive and, mingling good with bad, cause the better to outshine the worse. And yet we strain our mind towards painful things and force it to dwell on the consideration of disagreeable matter, all but dragging it by

⁴⁷ Several studies show that humour is an important source of happiness, see Argyle, 2001, pp. 54-55,61,69-70.

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⁴⁹ *Quaest. conv.* II 1. 631 BC , μ , μ

⁵⁰ See Teodorsson, 1995.

⁵¹ Plutarch rejects excessive use of luxuries, e.g. perfumes and purple clothing, but accepts flower-garlands at banquets, because they are purely natural and not artificial luxury products, see *Quaest. conv.* III 1.

⁵² See Argyle, 2001, pp. 23-28, 208, 215-219; Klein, 2005, pp. 217-219; Isen, 1985, pp. 388-391; Isen, 1993, pp. 261-277; Izard, 1990, pp. 487-498; Izard, 1993, p. 634.

compensation away from those which is better⁵³. Plutarch asks: “Why do you scrutinize too keenly your own trouble, my good sir, and continue to make it ever vivid and fresh to your mind, but do not direct your thoughts to those good things which you have?”⁵⁴ “It is senseless”, he says, “to be distressed at what is lost and not rejoice at what is saved, but like little children, who, if someone takes away one of their many toys, will throw away all the rest as well and cry and howl.”⁵⁵ Plutarch establishes that everyone has within himself the capacity of tranquillity as well as discontent; it is merely a question of choice⁵⁶.

In *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum* Plutarch devotes the last third of the text to his negative attitude towards religion. This indicates the great importance Plutarch assigns to religion as essential to a happy life. He begins his argumentation with an enthusiastic description of the joy and feeling of relief one experiences when participating in various forms

of religious worship. He writes⁵⁷: “No visit delights us more than a visit to a temple; no occasion more than a holy day; no act of spectacle more than what we see and what we do ourselves in matters that involve the gods, whether we celebrate a ritual of take part in a choral dance or attend a sacrifice or ceremony of initiation. For on these occasions our mind is not plunged in anxiety or cowed or depressed, as we should expect it to be in the company of tyrants or dispensers of gruesome punishments. No, wherever it believes and conceives most firmly that the god is present, there more than anywhere else it puts away all feelings of pain, of fear, and of worry, and gives itself up so far in pleasure that it indulges in a playful and merry inebriation”⁵⁸.

Plutarch remarks that Epicurus’ doctrine of the dissolution of the soul after death does not involve any hope of blissful relief to those who lead a wretched life in hard conditions, and it is even more painful to the fortunate because it

⁵³ *De tranqu. an.* 469 A-B

μ μ
μ μ
μ , μ

⁵⁴ *De tranqu. an.* 469

⁵⁵ *De tranqu. an.* 469 D μ

μ , μ
μ , μ

⁵⁶ *De tranqu. an.* 473 B-C.

⁵⁷ *Non posse* 1101 E.

⁵⁸ It has been shown in several studies that religion has positive effects on well-being and happiness, see Argyie, 2001, pp. 164-177.

robs them of their pleasant life. So the doctrine of Epicurus promises the wretch no very happy relief from adversity, and from the prudent and wise and those who abound in all good things it quite eradicates all cheer by altering their condition from blissful living to not living or being at all (1106 C). Epicurus maintains that his doctrine terminates the fear of death, but Plutarch puts the rhetorical question (1196 D): "If relief from expecting infinite woe is highly pleasant, how can it not be painful to be deprived of hope of everlasting weal and to loose a felicity beyond compare?"

Summary and conclusions

If we compare Plutarch's thinking about happiness with other notions of this concept, we will find that its basic trait is realism. Plutarch rejects all extreme positions, primarily represented by Stoicism and Epicureanism. Generally speaking, his thinking on these things originate from his sober-minded common sense and moderation. His inquiring mind and positive attitude to life directed his attention to the real world and made him repudiate the exclusive and restricted attitudes of Stoics and Epicureans to essential parts of both natural psychic phenomena and cultural and social functions. Plutarch rejects only such things as conflict with his principle of moderation, which he regards as the basis of a happy life.

Plutarch's sober sense of realities and high appreciation of the reasonable and practicable and truly natural made him

reject unnatural doctrines which implied the denial of the *raison d'être* of the emotions or, inversely, the acceptance of these and the physical pleasures as the highest end, or else the rejection of religion and its relevance for a happy life.

To Plutarch, the priest of Apollo during many years, the motto certainly appeared as an infallible principle and lodestar which excluded anything extreme. It was quite natural to him to adopt Aristotle's concept of μ . It appears that Plutarch's thoughts about happiness can be summed up as expressions of a pragmatic moral of happiness founded on practical rules of conduct, that are realistic and possible to live up to. To him this will have meant living according to nature, , in his view the real sense of that phrase.

It is striking that practically all Plutarch's thoughts about happiness have been verified by modern research. However, this is not astonishing. Plutarch's "research" on happiness was built on experience and observation of reality. It was not based on theoretical speculation in the first place. Instead his approach was empirical, which facilitated drawing the correct conclusions. It seems reasonable that we should assign Plutarch full credit for that and recognize him as a good psychologist.

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