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Happiness – modern vs ancient Greek perceptions

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Introduction

Several academics have pointed out that the word “happiness” means one thing in modern positive psychology, and meant another in ancient Greek philosophy.

This poster aims at exploring these differences and suggests that modern views might be complemented in the light of ancient Greek views on what is today called « happiness ». A new version of Maslow’s pyramid with *seven* levels well subsumes these various approaches, with self-transcendence at the top.

Variations on happiness:

***Eudaimonic happiness** is inspired from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*; eudaimonia can be defined as leading a meaningful and virtuous life.

***Hedonic happiness** has ancestors in Greek philosophy. Democritus emphasized contentment and cheerfulness, whereas Aristippus of Cyrene insisted that the only intrinsic good is pleasure, that is the absence of pain, but especially enjoyable sensations.

***Makarios** might correspond to the notion of ideal happiness as defined by Tatarkiewicz, as opposed to actual happiness. According to ancient Greek philosophy and literature, *makarios* is happiness beyond hedonism and eudaimonia, the one experienced by the gods. It approximately means “beatitude” and was used in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

Makarios has similarities with Maslow’s notion of **peak experience**, in other words self-transcendence, going beyond usual human consciousness and ego needs.



Maslow's pyramid with seven levels

(A. Maslow never actually designed a pyramid. The popular one, with five levels, does not do justice to the full scope of Maslow's writings.)

Conclusion

Ideal happiness corresponds to a lasting form of happiness; being ideal, it appears as difficult to attain.

Actual happiness is closer to the usual human experience, as studied in positive psychology.

Complete happiness means fulfilling these seven needs.

Exploring the concept of *makarios*, close to Maslow’s “peak experience” might open new vistas of research for positive psychology.

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