

Eudaimon ¹

The major advantage of monastic life is that it offers the rarest of all gifts in this modern world, *otium*. ² That Latin word means leisure in the sense of being freed up to pursue interests which usually pertain to philosophy, theology and academic endeavors. You could say that anyone who engages in *otium* may be described as being *eudaimon*. It's a state like nothing else, bearing a certain resemblance to peace as described by the Judeo-Christian tradition. With that in mind, *otium* is conducive to *lectio divina* as presented in so many places within this homepage. It should also be kept in mind that both *otium* and *eudaimon* are to be used in what we could call an applied sense, one that's not exclusively academic, though some such elements of it might be present in other endeavors.

There's a personal reason for bringing up *otium* a second time, having mentioned it in more recent article...where I can't recall precisely...in conjunction with a nephrologist I see on a regular basis. Truly this man is a rare bird, reading the **Iliad** early in the morning before his wife and two kids get up and late in the evening reading one of the Latin poets (I forget which one). To top it off, he does both in the original languages, Greek and Latin.

On a recent visit I asked this venerable doctor a generic sort of question, namely, what he thinks we need most today. As soon as I said it I felt a bit embarrassed. However, without missing a beat and with a wry smile on his face he came out with that loaded word *otium* all by itself. After a deliberate pause of a few seconds, he proceeded to give his two cents worth. Believe me, it was infinitely far more valuable than two cents. His take off point was that without cultivating *otium* we lose the ability to reflect upon matters which affect us deeply. As for my two cents worth, this lack of *otium* parallels an ignorance of our most important faculty called *anamnesis*. That is the core of our being and point of contact with transcendent reality, the two working hand-in-hand.

Therefore it seems that *otium* and *anamnesis* are tied to each other producing what we all want most of all, happiness. I hesitate to use that word because it's

¹In a nutshell, a Greek adjective favored by Plato meaning fortunate, wealthy, happy, blessed with a good genius.

²This website contains an article entitled **Otium or Leisure** written in 2009.

so generic and banal, hence my preference for *eudaimon*. We toss it about almost daily yet have little idea as to what it means. However, I'll stick with it for now because of our limited vocabulary pertaining to a reality I hope not so much to explain but to outline. Explaining would, I believe, beat it to death. Not only that, there's something distinctly boring about a text that explains. As for the document at hand, the reader can fill in the blanks as needed, an approach which is more subjective even though having its own drawbacks. I think it's fine to proceed this way as long as that's clear.

As for the word at hand...*eudaimon*...which forms this title, I present it as a kind of introduction to a particular verb related to divine worship that recently caught my fancy, that being to adore and the noun derived from it, adoration. Thus in a way *eudaimon* is secondary to my primary intent. As for the word to which I refer, I find that it conveys a certain homey-ness that other words pertaining to divine worship lack and are marked by a certain common-ness or banality. Again, this reflects a personal preference. It extends right down to actually enjoying the pronunciation of both the noun and the verb, especially the Latin original, *adoro* and *adoratio*.

I think it would be helpful to focus upon the adverbial form *eu-* prefaced to the root because it helps set the tone for the entire document at hand. Admittedly *eu-* caught my fancy in the same way as the above mention words, to adore, etc. In essence *eu-* being an adverb connotes that which is good or more to the point, well or fortunately, happily. Presupposed with this preface (*eu* is also free-standing) is the presence of a verb, and a verb obviously means action. If we were dealing with something static, the adjectival form *agathos* would be used. Thus applied to *daimon* *eu-* infers that it is acting well or let's take it a step further, comports itself cheerfully or delightfully. A bit awkward perhaps but enough to make a point.

While the preface *eu-* is important, we get to the heart of the matter when considering the word to which this adverbial form is prefaced, *daimon*. In brief and according to an Internet definition, *daimon* may be described as a powerful spirit that bridges the gap between humans and the gods, thereby influencing human lives and destiny. Also it can be associated with a variety of concepts, including fate, luck and destiny.³

³A quick note, if you will. While it's important to provide such information, it's more important to stick with presenting an outline as noted two paragraphs above.

With *eu-* as a modifier in mind (chiefly relative to verbs or better, relative to action), I figure it's worth jumping right in and consider several sources by Plato. Hopefully by examining two excerpts we'll get a clearer idea of the richness of *eudaimon*. As for the notes following the excerpts, they come across as a bit stilted or awkward since I prefer sticking as close to a sense of the Greek text as possible. The first excerpt is from the **Symposium** 202d-203a:

“He’s (love, *Eros*) like what we mentioned before,” she said. “He’s in between mortal and immortal.”

“What do you mean, Diotima?”

“He’s a great spirit, Socrates. Everything spiritual, you see, is in between god and mortal.”

“What is their function?” I asked.

“They are messengers who shuttle back and forth between the two, conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods while to men they bring commands from the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices. Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all. Through them all divination passes, through them the art of priests in sacrifice and ritual, in enchantment, prophecy and sorcery. Gods do not mix with men; they mingle and converse with us through spirits instead whether we are awake or asleep. He who is wise in any of these ways is a man of the spirit, but he who is wise in any other way, in a profession or any manual work, is merely a mechanic. These spirits are many and various, then, and one of them is Love.”

This passage presents *daimon* as a great spirit as well as being pretty much on the same plane as *Eros* or love. As for *Eros*, better to leave it in the Greek because it's one of those untranslatable words familiar to everyone and is associated with sexual passion as well as desire. Socrates presents it as in between or *metaxu* that which is mortal and that which is immortal. As Plato says, such is the nature of *Eros*-as-spirit or *daimon* which he describes by its adjectival form *daimonion*.

Once the singular *daimon* is rendered as such, it has the ability to multiply or to become plural. In a word, *daimon* assumes the form of messengers. This is put in terms of two participles from the verbs *hermeneuo* and *diaporthmeuo*, to explain, to expound or put into words and to carry in the sense of ferry, the

latter prefaced with the preposition *dia-* or through.

Stop here for a minute and consider what's going on. We're dealing with the sensual, all-consuming force of *Eros* which is identified as a *daimon*. Thus *daimon-as-Eros* is impossible to nail down by reason of being *metaxu* or in between the two realms of life and death. That makes it not a hybrid but as something always in motion and difficult to lay hold of. So when we attach the adverbial *eu-* to it and get the adjective *eudaimon* (a verb in disguise!), we have something far more significant than what amounts to such prosaic words as happy or blessed. Anything described as such means it's active at all times and never rests.

Consider one more reference to *daimon*, this one from **Timaeus** 90a-d. While it's tempting to add more excerpts, presenting too many samples would be an overload. Because the excerpt forms one large unit, here it's broken down into three sections for the sake of convenience:

Now we ought to think of the most sovereign part of our soul as god's gift to us, given to be our guiding spirit. This, of course, is the type of soul that as we maintain, resides in the top part of our bodies. It raises us up away from the earth and toward what is akin to us in heaven as though we are plants grown not from the earth but from heaven. In saying this, we speak absolutely correctly. For it is from heaven, the place from which our souls were originally born, that the divine part suspends our head, i.e., our root, and so keeps our whole body erect. So if a man has become absorbed in his appetites or his ambitions and takes great pains to further them, all his thoughts are bound to become merely mortal.

This section starts off with the verb *dianoëo* or literally as the mind passing through, *noos* and *dia*. *Kuriotatos* or the superlative suggests power or authority with regard to *eidos* or shape, form relative to *psuche* or soul. Such is the god's gift to us as our *daimon*. *Psuche* dwells at the top part of our bodies, *oikeo* as to make a home and *akros* as relative to summit. The task of *psuche* is to raise us from the earth toward what's akin to us in heaven. A key word here is *suggeneia* or congenital character. It's with the preposition *pros* intimating direction towards-which concerning our belonging-ness in heaven. It's as though we are plants not from the earth but from heaven, *phuton* or that which has grown. Socrates is absolutely certain of what he's saying, *orthos* or correct,

right. It's from heaven or the place of our "first birth," *prote genesis*. In a word, heaven = home.

From here that which is divine (*theios*) suspends our head, *anakremannumi* also as to hang upon with the intent of keeping our body erect (*orthos*). However, there's a danger of losing this. It happens when a man is occupied by his appetites, *teutazo* or to be employed with regard to *epithumia* or *philonikia*, literally yearning upon (*epi-*) and contentiousness. It gets worse when this person strives in an excessive fashion (*diaponeo*, intensified by the preposition *dia-* or through and *sphodra*) to satisfy them. The result: all his thoughts necessarily (*anagke*, noun) become mortal, not divine.

And so far as it is at all possible for a man to become thoroughly mortal, he cannot help but fully succeed in this, seeing that he has cultivated his mortality all along. On the other hand, if a man has seriously devoted himself to the love of learning and to true wisdom, if he has exercised these aspects of himself above all, then there is absolutely no way that his thoughts can fail to be immortal and divine, should truth come within his grasp. And to the extent that human nature can partake of immortality, he can in no way fail to achieve this: constantly caring for his divine part as he does, keeping well-ordered the guiding spirit that lives within him, he must indeed be supremely happy. Now there is but one way to care for anything, and that is to provide for it the nourishment and the motions that are proper to it.

In a case as just described a man becomes completely mortal, *pantapasi* or wholly and *malista* or exceedingly for having cultivated it, *dunatos* which signifies doing it in a powerful way. On the other hand, we have a person who's zealous (*spoudazo*) with regard to love of learning and true wisdom: *philomathia* or to be *philos* or friendly towards learning and *phronesis*, the latter also as purpose, intention. If this is so, then his thoughts (the verb *phroneo* or to be prudent) are immortal and divine, (*athanatos* and *theios*). This happens should truth come within his reach, *aletheia* and *ephapto* or to fasten upon (*epi-*). To the extent that human nature (*phusis*) can share immortality (*endeichomai* or to take in or *en-*oneself) in no way can he fail to achieve this, *apoleipo* and *meros* or to leave behind (*apo-* or from) and part or share.

This person always (*aei*, forever) cares for what is divine (*meros*) within him, the verb being *therapeuo* also as to attend to. By keeping the guiding spirit

residing (*oikeo* implies making one's home) in him, indeed he is happy or *eudaimoneo*. As for this spirit, it's well ordered, *daimon* and *kosmeo* or to arrange, equip in a pleasing way. The adverb is *diapherontos* literally as different from and implies eminence.

There's only one suitable manner of care (*therapeia* also as service) suitable, namely, to provide nourishment and motion. *Apodidomai* is the verb also as to restore *trophe* or food along with *kinesis* or movement described as *oikeios*, of the home or same household.

And the motions that have an affinity to the divine part within us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe. These, surely, are the ones which each of us should follow. We should redirect the revolutions in our heads that were thrown off course at our birth by coming to learn the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, and so bring into conformity with its objects our faculty of understanding as it was in its original condition. And when this conformity is complete, we shall have achieved our goal: that most excellent life offered to humankind by the gods, both now and forevermore.

As for motions or movements (*kinesis*) which have an affinity with the divine (*suggenes*, born-with, *sug-* also as *sum-*), they consist of thoughts and revolutions (*dianoesis* and *periphora*, the process of thinking and revolution) of the universe (*to pan*, the all). All must be followed, *sunepomai* or be in accordance with (*sun-*).

We need to redirect (*exorthoo*: to set aright, *ex-* as from) the revolutions in our heads (*periodos* and *kephale*) which had been misdirected at our birth, the verb being *diaphtheiro* or to destroy utterly, *dia-* as through. We do this by learning (*katamanthano*, *kata-* suggesting that which is in accord with) the harmonies and revolutions (*harmonia* and *periphora*) of the universe (*to pan*). Thus we bring into conformity (*exomoioo* or to assimilate, to make quite like, *ex-* from: connotes not possession but approaching it) our faculty of understanding with its objects. This consists of two uses of *katanoeo*: to perceive or apprehend and that which is apprehended. Note another word with the preposition *kata* or in accord with, that which is from the beginning, *archaios*.

Once all this has been completed, we've achieved our goal (*telos* or end). That consists of the most excellent (*aristos*, the best or most noble of anything) life offered (*protithemi*, to set before) by the gods both now and forever: *pareimi*

or to be beside and *epeita*, thereafter; both prefaced with *pros* which is indicative of immediacy.

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I had spent considerable time with the passages above, that is, having taken enjoyment inserting the transliterated Greek words in an attempt to capture what's being communicated. Despite deficiencies in this regard, the process of going through them produced a state which I can only describe as one of blessed stupor. The actual effect? I felt weighed down...oppressed...but in a most delightful way. It resembled being on a planet with the gravity way heavier than the one we're accustomed to. I was unable to move and reduced to pondering a few words, phrases and at the max, part of a sentence. After being in this state for an indefinite amount of time I'd either stop for the day or plod onward a bit more, slowly but surely.

So what was this all about? Some kind of meaningless after-effect or was it pointing to something else? We can follow through only so much on this, for what was just described consists of certain physical effects which were transitory. Nevertheless, they seem to hint at something deeper by reason of the positive effect they leave. In essence I found that the texts...so loaded with meaning...have a tendency to reduce you to nothing, flat out and almost unable to move. Perhaps this is how they bring you to the transcendent realm where physical ways of communicating are suspended. A given text is simply the so called trigger that brings this about. For that reason it is to be greatly valued.

Practically speaking, where do you go from here? Nice to have such a wonderful experience, but we'd be better off if it could spill over into daily life. Perhaps some planning might contribute to how this would work out. The most important thing you need to do—and this is crucial over the long haul—is to have a realistic view of the enterprise at hand. Let's face it. We're engaged in an enterprise for which you won't find much support because realistically speaking, who's into practicing what a text well over two thousand years old is presenting? You'll be hard pressed...very much so...to find just one individual ⁴.

⁴You'll find plenty of in depth studies, for example, about the dialogues already cited. When it comes to practicing what they teach, might as well forget about it. Thus we have enshrined in libraries throughout the world all these texts that have been examined over and over but for the large part not known. Then there are exceptional "manuals" for lack of a better term. One such author is Pierre Hadot who had success at bringing the actual practice

At the same time the power or *dunamis* latent within the representative samplings of texts as cited above has a mysterious way of putting you in contact with the right person or persons. Any such contact will by default be limited. You have to take this on faith and try it out on your own. The result may not be immediate, but you can count on not waiting too long. Consider the nephrologist mentioned in this essay's second paragraph. Conversation between such persons mustn't be prolonged. Short and sweet is more like it.

There's a danger lurking in the way we deal with these texts. We can be excited over the content and wish to have them become not just a permanent part of our lives but to inform every waking hour. We desire to have their transcendent character stick in our awareness constantly ⁵. However, it's important to override this infatuation. If we don't, we're setting ourselves up big time for a fall. The fall consists in first being enthusiastic with what we've discovered in the texts followed by an abrupt disappointment in our inability to sustain what we've discovered. Here we're operating in a realm our human-ness rubs up against a wholly different reality inciting us to overcome our limitations. By limitations I don't mean the Big Stuff but the small things that assail us in day to day living. And so in a surprisingly short order we become stiff or even jerky in the way we comport ourselves. Our natural-ness has started to take a back seat due to our inability to harmonize the two realities, that is, the human and transcendent.

Thus this rubbing up against a wholly other reality represented by the texts at hand can make go through an extended period of flip-flopping. By that I mean we continue taking delight in the texts we read while anxiety about how we harmonize them with real life starts creeping in. It continues for sometime and can be painful, depending upon each person's disposition. Indeed, much ink has been spilled as how to deal with this situation. While a lot of it is on target, there's something missing which centers around the perception of a time gap. That consists of the interval between reading the texts and let's say for a better word, their application.

The word for this state of affairs mentioned in an excerpt from the **Symposium** above is *metaxu*. As noted there, *metaxu* is the place where the *daimon* operates.

of ancient philosophy into the modern world.

⁵This reminds me of what Peter said on the mount of transfiguration, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah" [Mk 9.5]. Surely Jesus, Moses and Elijah must have smiled at these words.

Both thus are hard to grasp, neither fully in the realm of life nor death. Once that's clearly intuited, our perception of time or between when we read a text and implement collapses at once. That's what we're looking for in life more than anything else. It reveals our desire to be free of this temporal order which can happen from time to time. However, it can't be permanent but in a way sustained or better, buttressed by memory of the experience. This of course is the faculty of our memory as *anamnesis* or awareness of our rootedness in transcendent reality. Indeed, by default, everything rests upon how we come to grips with awareness.

It seems that the *anamnesis* at hand makes us aware of our being *metaxu* located in that strange land of neither life nor death but in a realm where we fumble around for words to describe. Precisely here we need to give voice to such an odd yet wonderful predicament. Actually this giving voice is as traditional and part of human nature as it had been from the beginning. By that I mean worship of God or the more specific word of which I am fond, adoration, that being the center of this essay.

How and when did I hit upon that word? Ever since Easter Sunday about two months ago and shortly before starting this article several words from the Gloria at Mass had caught my attention. It tied in with another article I had been working on with regard to our innate desire to praise. This seems somewhat akin to our desire to give allegiance to someone, anyone or anything. In a way, it's a desire for support and a recognition of our neediness, we not being able to stand on our own.

The opening words of the Gloria from the Mass touched upon this deep-seated need to adore causing me to really appreciate that prayer of almost pure praise⁶. I say "almost" because the Gloria contains requests for divine assistance towards the last third. That, of course, is to be expected. The five words that impressed me, *adoramus* standing out from the rest? I give them in Latin, all in the first person plural as in the text and easily recognizable: *laudamus*, *benedicamus*, *adoramus*, *glorificamus* and *gratias agimus* (praise, bless, adore, glorify and give thanks).

As noted, the verb that struck me was *adoramus* which made me look up some of the definitions given by the **Oxford Latin Dictionary**: to beg, crave, marvel. I

⁶A personal favorite are vss. 28-68, Song of the Three Young Men in the **Apocrypha**.

found *adoramus* appealing even to utter because it conveys a certain—and I’m somewhat reluctant to use this word despite my fondness for it—cuteness. In sum, it conveys a reality which is downright wonderful and full of delight. How can you not be attracted to it right off the bat?

I get the impression that no effort with regard to *adoro* applies as it does with the other four verbs. That might be going overboard a bit too much, but I believe it contains some truth. Even its pronunciation has an endearing quality, something pleasant to hear as well as to utter. In a word, *adoro* cuts across any desire to make petitions from God. While that’s a perfectly acceptable thing to do, when we make a request from a person, including God, more often than not we pretty much drop him or her once we have our request fulfilled. When it comes to prayer, we repeat our request which amounts to alternating between varying degrees of need and forgetfulness of the source. To be mindful of the source is where true adore-ation lies.

I like to think of *adoro* as a gesture with no desire for recompense. That endows it with a cleanness or brilliance that lights us up inside. The only pleasure is to do it in a straight-forward manner and to continue doing it as long as humanly possible without expecting results. When doing *adoro* I don’t think you have to worry about going beyond a limit. *Adoro* isn’t constrained by such a concern including those times when we’re not doing it. You just *adoro* in an unconditional fashion. It’s hard to put this properly into words, but that’s no problem. *Adoro* is its own reality which means you’re being most human while doing it. Thus it is the solution to our desire for constancy when it comes to relating to God noted earlier.

As for a concrete example of adoration, consider how young people are smitten by a celebrity and how they track him or her everywhere and at every event. There used to be fan clubs for such persons but now they’re a thing of the past now with the appearance of the Internet, social media and all that entails. One of the earlier know examples of this which has become famous and remains an archetype of sorts are young girls who had gone crazy over the Beatles. While *adoro* as presented here doesn’t fall under that extreme example, still we can learn something from it. The problem related to *adoro* is constancy which already has reared its head in this article. Is it something we do all the time? I don’t think so. However, *adoro* is rooted in our physical being or is a mode of being to which we tap into. This issue is important because when it comes to

talk about prayer and the like, often it's put into a kind of all or nothing container not allowing for degrees.

So if you want an activity which is rooted in the most delightful mode of being available to us, clearly adoration is it. As you move along in life with its ups and downs including periods of forgetfulness when it comes to adoration, easily you can raise your head with bold impunity and simply adore God. That sounds a bit brazen and perhaps naive but don't forget. Adoration is what makes is most human. If you want to see if this works, go out and try it.

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