

Ch.4: Hedonism

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4.2 The Cyrenaics

- Pushing Hedonism to it's limit
- Immediate pleasure > long term
- Ex. playing with fire, loaning a friend money



Can pleasure alone really drive morality?

- You don't need philosophy to know when something feels good.
- Mutual understanding, no complicated rules
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- What are the problems with this kind of thinking?



Problems behind it

- Reckless/unsafe for oneself
- No reason to avoid harming others (no fairness/justice)
- Goes against humans beliefs (empathy, regret, relationships, consequences)



- Cyrenaics ignore this.
- “The theory doesn’t match how humans actually live.”

Exercise

What would you do *right now* if only present pleasure mattered?

- Sleep, check your phone/scroll, *leave class*, start eating chips loudly

Notice how none of those involve being responsible or planning

- Cyrenaics *require* you to choose to look past that basic etiquette of respecting the classroom setting.

4.4 Higher and Lower Pleasures

John Stuart Mill established this “Quantity of Pleasure”

- Believing that pleasure could be valued on the weight of pleasure is entirely superficial

Are you able to manipulate the balance of pain and pleasure?

“We can indeed take pleasure in higher things, but what make them higher is not the pleasure they give us, but something else about the activities themselves”



Example: Roller Coasters



4.5 Sadistic Pleasures

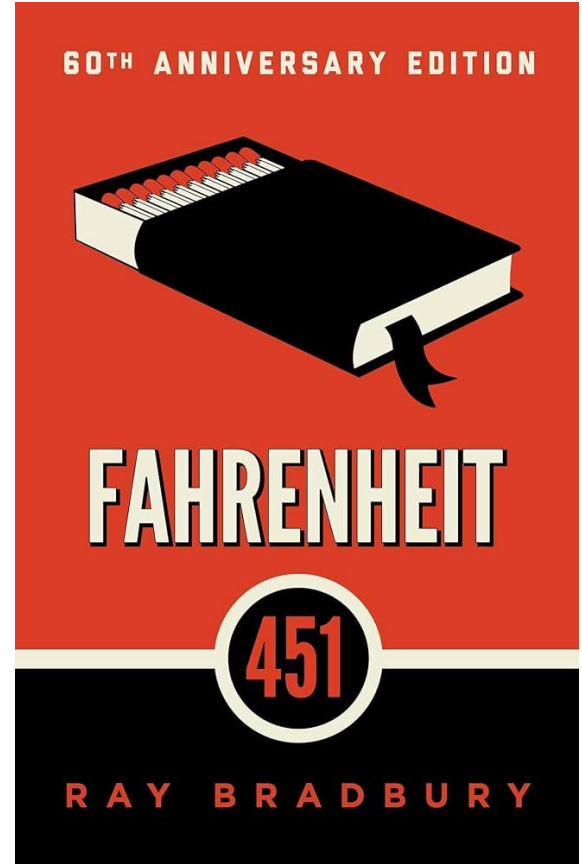
- Socrates believed in equality of pleasure derived from helping patients and torturing animals
- Callicles argued there was a difference between heroic and vulgar pleasures
- Life for sadists and others equally enjoyable when engaging in activities that induce pleasure
- Hedonists: hurtful activities worse if no pleasure to offset victims' pain

Do you think it's better if a murderer derives pleasure from killing or if they don't?

“You must understand that our civilization can’t have our minorities upset and stirred. Ask yourself, What do we want in this country, above all? People want to be happy, isn’t that right? Haven’t you heard that all your life? I want to be happy, people say. Well, aren’t they? Don’t we keep them moving, don’t we give them fun? That’s all we live for isn’t it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these.’ [...] ‘Colored people don’t like Little Black Sambo. Burn it. White people don’t feel good about Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Burn it. Someone’s written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Burn the book.’”

Hedonism in *Fahrenheit 451*

- Society that promotes “happiness”
- Believes that happiness is the absence of conflict (led to book burning)
- Pleasure gleaned from constant external stimulation (“parlor walls”, “seashell”, high-speed driving)
- Characters refuse to acknowledge negative feelings (believe any conflict will take away happiness)



Reflecting on Hedonism

- 2010 study found a greater tendency to accept negative feelings predicted lower levels of depressive symptoms (*Behaviour Research and Therapy*)
- Hedonism that avoids pain at all costs not necessarily maximizing life satisfaction
- Pain and struggle give us perspective, allow good things to seem even better
 - A life of only pleasure would not be so rewarding as we wouldn't know any alternative

4.6 Aristotle's Thoughts

- Pleasure is derived from activities -> not a sensation (unlike pain)
 - Pleasure from the end: eating, sex, etc.
 - From bodily sensations
 - Pleasure from the activity: painting, baking, sports, art, etc.
 - Joy from doing the activity itself rather than the result of the activity
- Opposite order from hedonism
 - Get pleasure from some activity because we value it
 - Opposed to doing the activity because it give pleasure
- Takeaway:
 - Pleasure is a **byproduct** of activities that we find worthwhile, not the end goal

Examples/Comparison

- Studying
 - Hedonism: Studying to get a good grade
 - Aristotle: Study because you enjoy the subject you are studying -> pleasure even if you got a bad grade
- Gym
 - Hedonism: Working out to attain a certain physique
 - Aristotle: Working out to feel good in your body/energy from exercise
 - Pleasure of getting your desired physique is a byproduct of exercising -> not the main goal
- Volunteering
 - Hedonism: Volunteering at animal shelter for volunteer hours
 - Aristotle: Volunteering because you care about the animals
 - No "I have to do this for school" and more I look forward to seeing the animals

My Takeaway

- Nothing wrong with doing things for the end result/pleasure
 - Good grades, physique, volunteer hours
- Main point: doing things because you enjoy them rather than for an end goal will ultimately bring lasting happiness
 - Maximize your joy
 - More likely to tire out or stop enjoying if you do it for a result
 - Less pleasure if bad grade, didn't attain desired physique, stop after reaching required volunteer hrs
 - versus:
 - Still have pleasure from studying the subject, moving your body, interacting with animals
 - Shift your focus
- Less about what is “right” or “wrong”
 - Hedonism puts too much emphasis on pleasure and pain as the main driving force
 - Sustainable view on pleasure: emphasis on the joy of the activity to avoid burnout

Do All Pleasures Count the Same?

“There must be something other than pleasure that makes things good, and hence strict hedonism is false.” – Graham, 4.7

- Classical hedonism: pleasure = good life
- But different activities can produce different kinds of pleasure
- Pleasure cannot capture things like
 - Meaning
 - Achievement
 - Personal growth
- Question: What makes something good past pleasure?

Question

How Many TikToks Does It Take to Equal Acing a Test?

Why does acing a test feel different from scrolling on Tiktok for 3 hours?

Can an unlimited number of quick pleasures add up in value to a more meaningful pleasure?

If pleasures were the only good these could feel equivalent but they don't. Why?

Takeaway

- Some activities are valuable not because of the pleasure is can elicit (learning, growth, relationships)
- Some pleasurable activities can be harmful and unproductive
 - Junk food, Smoking
- We pursue some activities because they display values like success or meaning
- Indulging in Pleasure alone does not make life good

The Problems of Consensus 2.2.5

From Judgment to Choice

-Morality is intrinsic and requires choice :

“Each of us is always free; our actions reflect our inner state. We cannot enforce morality; it must come from within” - Professor Sadegh Angha, Pir Oveyssi,

My thoughts: You want a society to be moral, but in order for a society to be moral they need to have freedom to make their own choice to be moral, but people want protection from immoral people (thieves, murders ect). -> freedom moral = inevitably someone will be harmed by immoral people

Sacrifice moral freedom -> safety

- For the most part it is worth it to sacrifice moral freedom for safety, I would rather have protection then be morally free
- But I still value freedom, so I believe reward systems should only be for concerns of safety, theft and human rights

