

Chapter 4 - *Hedonism*



Team 1

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Chapter 4.1

Recap of egoism & definition of hedonism

- **Egoism** makes each individual the focus of their life in *preference* to any moral concern for the rights of people around them
 - Nietzsche criticizes those who live by conventional morality or religious faith, but what if someone deliberately chooses to live by those rules willfully?
- **Hedonism** is the doctrine that pleasure is the ultimate value and goal of human life, emphasizing the maximization of enjoyment and minimization of pain



The Big Question

“Why do I forgo pleasure just because morality tells me to?”

- **Egoists** would ask for more explanation
 - They aren't immediately against rules, just require more justification
- **Hedonists** would think there's never a reason to forgo pleasure because pleasure is the only valuable thing there is
 - If X brings pleasure, there's no reason to not do it

The Egoist vs. the Hedonist

- The **Egoist** thinks having a will of our own is the natural condition for human beings
 - **Tony Stark** acts from his own judgement and doesn't give in to the will of institutions vs. himself
- **Hedonist** thinks that when human beings are not deflected by false religious & altruistic doctrines, they seek pleasure and the avoidance of pain
 - **Barney Stinson from *HIMYM*** rejects "altruistic duty" and actively seeks pleasure for the most part because it minimizes emotional discomfort



Chapter 4.2 - The Cyrenaics

- The Cyrenaics: ancient school of philosophy that first advocated the philosophy of Hedonism
- Founder: Aristippus of Cyrene
- Cyrene: North African Greek town
- It was Romanized and remained a great capital until earthquake of 365



Cyrenaic Philosophy

- **Pleasure** is “natural” good and pain is “natural” evil
- **Natural Definition:** existing in nature; not made or caused by humankind
- What counts as **honorable** and what counts as **disgraceful** differs from culture to culture (**not universal**)
 - Dependent on **customs, particular times, places**
- Eg: We can reject the idea that unmarried pregnancies are disgraceful but we can't reject the fact that burns are painful



Slurping ramen in Japan



Graveyard culture in Copenhagen

The Problem with Cyrenaic Hedonism

- Cyrenaics believe that the best life = maximum bodily pleasure (food, drink, sex, physical enjoyment)
- They assume that pleasure and pain are complete opposites: more pleasure → less pain
- ... But you can't pursue bodily pleasure without also risking suffering

Eating excessively →



Drinking →



Can you really have pleasure without pain?

So what is the fix?

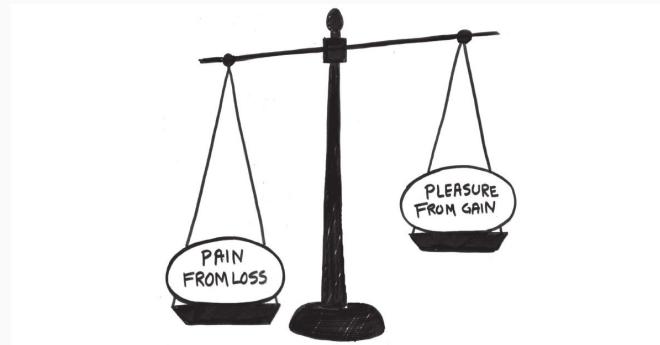
Slight Thought Experiment:

Two lives:

- One filled with powerful pleasures and powerful pains
- One filled with very mild pleasures and very few pains

Which life is more pleasurable?

- The Cyrenaic ideal is attractive in theory but unrealistic in real life → a life focused only on bodily pleasure becomes self destructive
- Even without social rules, nonstop bodily pleasures still lead to pain



Chapter 4.3 - Epicureanism

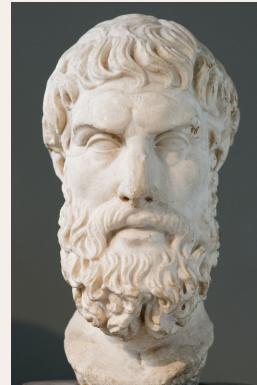
Hedonism

Google Definition: the pursuit of pleasure; sensual self-indulgence. (From the Greek word for “pleasure” ἡδονή (hēdonē))

My take: prioritizing pleasure over everything else in your life



Aristippus of Cyrene



Epicurus

Epicureanism

Google Definition: an ancient school of philosophy founded in Athens by Epicurus. The school rejected determinism (believing you have no free will) and advocated hedonism (pleasure as the highest good), but of a restrained kind: mental pleasure was regarded more highly than physical, and the ultimate pleasure was held to be freedom from anxiety and mental pain, especially that arising from needless fear of death and of the gods.

My take: a subcategory of Hedonism, prioritizing lighter pleasures that do not involve pain

Indulgence

Epicureanism requires people to limit their pleasures, which is not appealing to hedonists

Hedonist



Epicureanist



Two people who find the same amount of pleasure in this cake

Section 2.2.5: Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

- Extrinsic: not part of the nature of someone or something, coming or operating from outside
- Intrinsic: belonging to the nature of someone or something
- Hedonism: claims that pleasure is the only valuable motivator for human actions (action is best justified by pleasure-seeking and pain-avoidance)
- Does Hedonism rely on intrinsic or extrinsic motivation?
- The Cyrenaics claim that pleasure is universally desired by all humans
 - Are universal incentives intrinsic or extrinsic?

Distributive Justice: Frameworks

- Distributive Justice: concerned with how resources, goods, and opportunities are allocated in a society

Frameworks:

- 1) Libertarianism: freedom of ownership (individual reward) and exchange
 - 2) Utilitarianism: maximize overall pleasure or welfare
 - 3) Meritocracy: reward is proportional to effort/achievement
 - 4) Egalitarianism: social equity justified by the goal of equality
 - 5) Virtue ethics: promotes virtue via cultivating the qualities of character
- Do these frameworks align with the Hedonist view of humans as pleasure-seekers?
 - How can the universal incentive of pleasure be used in a rewards-based society?

Takeaway

- Question: What motivates human behavior?
- Two philosophies:
 - Minimize pain and Maximize (physical) pleasure (Hedonism)
 - Achieve tranquility (mind) and absence of pain (Epicureanism)
- Or is it something else altogether?
 - Fear
 - Meaning
 - Mastery
 - Identity....

“I think the unique thing isn’t my ability to solo, I think the unique thing is really wanting to.”
— Alex Honnold

“This is not scary... because this is what I do.”
— Alex Honnold

