

### **Hedonism Theory**

Hedonism theory involves moral standards for achieving the greatest good over evil in the universe in terms of amount of pleasure created. Hedonistic theory is espoused by a group referred to as hedonists. According to hedonists, pleasure is good in and of itself. Such an idea was supported by Plato. According to Plato, "pleasure is the good, true goal of every living being and what everyone ought to aim at." (Frankena, 1973, 83) In addition, hedonists consider that hedonism can stand alone, in that pleasure is possible without obligation. A liberal philosophy, hedonism does not require its proponents to establish what exactly pleasure is. Indeed, hedonists can each define what they believe pleasure to be without regard for quality. While some hedonists consider all pleasures good, some acknowledge that it's possible that certain pleasures are wrong for individuals. Certainly, with hedonism being an ambiguous philosophy, the many people who subscribe to it have differing ideas about what constitutes pleasure. Despite the differences in agreement, hedonists agree that pleasure alone is the goal to be achieved. This idea of pleasure is measurable when compared with the quantity of pleasantness obtainable from the situation. (Frankena, 1973, 84)

Of course the rivals to hedonists are the non-hedonists, who hold that the good should be obtained, but in a different manner than hedonists. Non-hedonists subscribe to the good having a higher value according to some principles. The good can certainly contain pleasure, but it is not the purpose of obtaining the good, non-hedonists claim. Non-hedonists are more concerned with adhering to moral principles and achievements rather than the mental and physical pleasures that hedonists covet. If an individual is in the pursuit of some goal that is itself good, any pleasure that is gained

from such pursuit is considered good as well by non-hedonists. In contrast, hedonists are more interested in the pleasure gained from such a pursuit, as it is the pleasure that they claim is what is truly good.

Among the Warner case studies, case study #6 is an example of where hedonistic theory can be applied. In this case, Jack Hill, the vice-president of Electro Industries, has a potential deal with Marty Ackerman. This deal would make Jack a lot of money, but it would be at the expense of one of his coworkers. If Jack reasoned according to hedonism theory, he might only take himself into consideration and accept the deal that Marty has presented. Hedonistic theory does not hold people accountable for actions. Rather, it is a type of ethics that encourages people to seek good things in terms of pleasure. Making more money would definitely be a pleasure that Jack would enjoy. If Jack were to take a non-hedonistic view of the situation, he would recognize that the good would be to maintain integrity with his coworkers. Taking the deal is definitely not good for the sales agent. The non-hedonistic approach carries no obvious pleasure, but it might be the better option for Jack's future, depending on how long he plans to stay with Electro Industries.

In case #7 of the Warner case studies, Campbell Soup Company has taken to using hedonistic theory in accomplishing financial goals. Campbell's plans to exchange audio-visual equipment with schools for soup-can labels. Campbell Soup gets the pleasure of positive publicity from the program. Although some people claim the company exploited children, nobody was forced to accept the soup. Thousands of schools participated in the soup-can label program. Campbell Soup was able to provide a public benefit while also gaining publicity.

Case #14 of the Warner case studies presents Sears trying to improve sales by using controversial tactics that could be described as hedonistic. Sears provided advertisements of sewing machines at a specific price but

attempted to sell higher-priced sewing machines to customers once they entered the store. Obviously, Sears is using hedonistic theory to make more money and improve its bottom line. Many people call this sales tactic the "old bait and switch" trick. Sears might be highly successful in improving its bottom line by using high-pressure motives to get people to buy more expensive merchandise. However, the company might incur negative publicity as well. If Sears used non-hedonistic thinking in its sales approach, the company might consider less drastic motives for sales. Instead of gaining the pleasure of high sales at the expense of customer frustration, Sears might consider more honest explanation of items on sale. Such a method would be aimed towards the good, which is what non-hedonists promote. Sears might build a more loyal customer base that will come back for future purchase, thus yielding higher volume sales.

Individuals can realistically use both hedonism theory and non-hedonistic theory when either theory is deemed as appropriate to specific situations. In the pursuit of happiness, many times individuals are pursuing hedonistic goals, which are mainly physical and mental pleasures. As long as these pursuits are for self-interest, people are right to pursue them. If these pursuits violate another individual's rights, then the individual must consider non-hedonistic thought. Non-hedonistic thought promotes the good over pleasure. If something pleasurable is immoral, then the individual would be wise to consider the rights of others, as that is what's good in the situation.

### **References**

Warner, Douglas W. The Basis for Ethical Conduct/Ethics for Decision-Making Case Studies. 5th ed. 1984.

Frankena, William K. Ethics. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973.