

ETHICS AND CULTURE (HUM-103)

HEDONISM I: ETHICAL EGOISM

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Hedonism and Egoism

- ❖ *Egoism*: Consider only the consequences of any action for one's own self
- ❖ *Ethical Egoism*: We act morally when we act in a way that promotes our individual self-interest
- ❖ “*Self-interest*” can mean many things: pleasure, power, knowledge, wealth, rational self-interest, self-realization, or promotion of all human capacities ...
- ❖ *Hedonist*: Defines self-interest in terms of pleasure and pain



Two Important Distinctions

❖ Not all egoists are hedonists

- Hedonists: I act in my best interest when I seek pleasure (and avoid pain) above all else
- Some Egoists identify self-interest not with pleasure but some other good

❖ Not all hedonists are egoists

- Egoistic Hedonism: Hedonists who pursue pleasure only for one self
- Utilitarianism: Pursuit of pleasure (or happiness) for the greatest number of people (e.g., humanity)



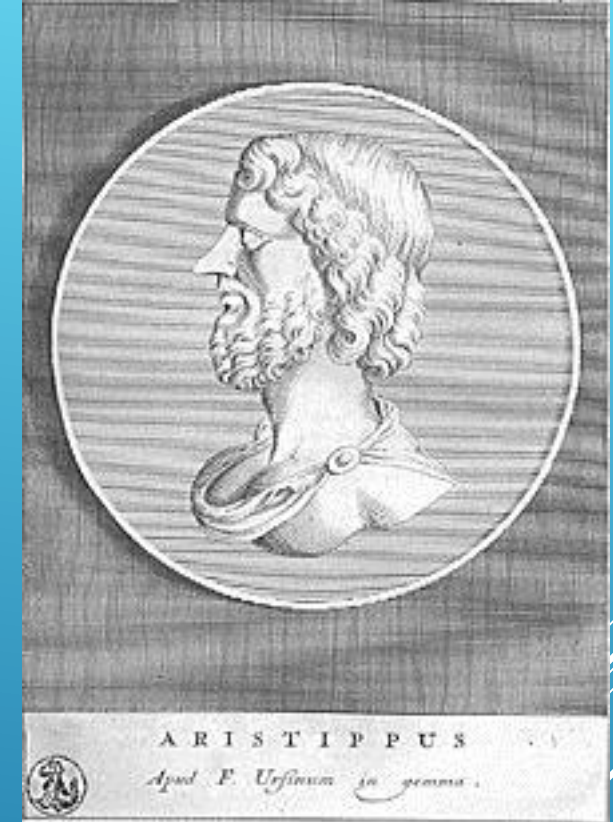
Hedonism

- ❖ Derived from Greek word *hedone* (Pleasure)
- ❖ Wellbeing consists of pleasure and the absence of pain
- ❖ Only pleasure has intrinsic value
- ❖ *Hedonism* views pleasure as the sole good and pain as the one sole bad (or evil)
- ❖ Aristippus and Epicurus: moral worth of any action determined by the amount of pleasure or pain it produces at the end.
- ❖ Consequential or *teleological* approach



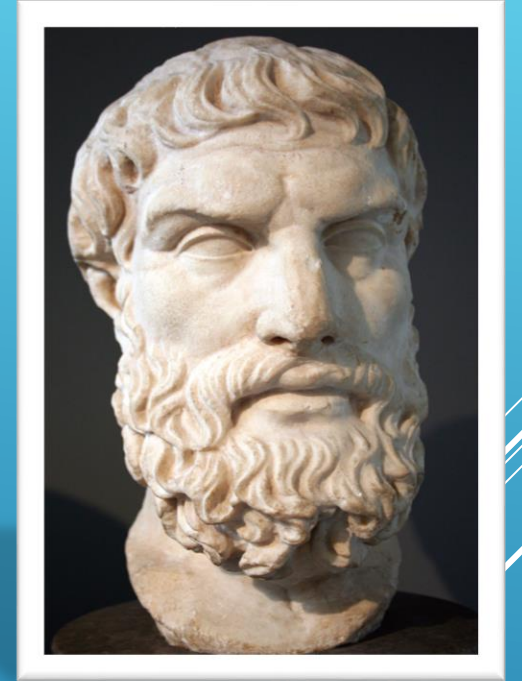
Aristippus (435–356 B.C.E.)

- ❖ Ancient Greek philosopher and student of Socrates
- ❖ Believed that happiness consists in pleasure
- ❖ Commonly associated with the ethical doctrine of *hedonism*.
- ❖ He argued that if we observe people, it would be easily understandable what motivates people for their action. The answer is, they all seek pleasure and want to avoid pain.
- ❖ The purpose of life must be achieving as much intense pleasure as possible.



Epicurus (341–270 B.C.E.)

- ❖ Greek philosopher Epicurus advanced the view in ethics that pleasure is the one sole good and pain is the one sole bad and that one should not seek out pleasures solely but devote oneself to also avoiding pain.
- ❖ He made distinction between different types of pleasure:
 - “Higher” pleasures: intellectual or ‘sober’ pursuits
 - “Lower” pleasures: physical gratifications
- ❖ Only the higher pleasures can provide optimal pleasure and the ultimate peace of mind



Egoism

- ❖ Teleological approach
- ❖ Focuses on achieving self-interest in more general terms
- ❖ Humans tend to act on safeguarding their own interest
- ❖ Focus on two types of egoism
 - *Ethical egoism*
 - *Psychological egoism*



Psychological and Ethical Egoism

- ❖ Psychological Egoism: Human nature is such that it compels humans to be egoist
 - ❖ Egoistic nature of humans reflect their egoistic psychology which perceive individual self-interest and seek to maximize this self-interest
 - ❖ Egoistic choices and actions are not derived from any moral reasoning but rather from the very psychological aspect of humans
- ❖ Ethical egoism holds that everyone ought always to do those acts that will best serve his or her own best self-interest
 - ❖ Our moral obligation is to seek our own self-interest
 - ❖ Any action is morally right if it produces more good and fewer bad consequences for us
 - ❖ For the ethical egoists, this is a moral value that is binding on all humans.



Some Criticisms of Ethical Egoism

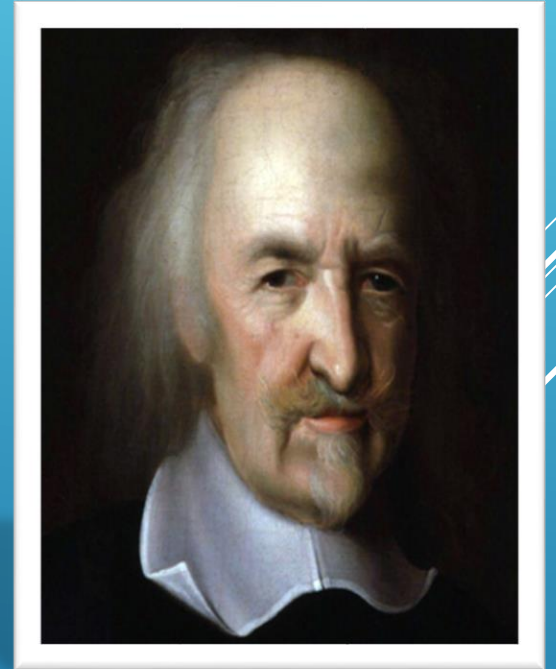
- ❖ Cannot reconcile conflicting interests of individuals
- ❖ Introduces inconsistency in moral counsel; undermines moral viewpoint
 - ❖ Ideal observer has to be “impartial” or unbiased
 - ❖ Ideal observer has full knowledge of all facts or viewpoints
- ❖ Ethical egoism is not impartial because it favors self-interest, so it is not consistent with a moral point of view.
- ❖ If humans are psychologically programmed to be egoists, then they can never be obligated to perform altruistic (that is, selfless) acts toward others



Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

“For every man by natural necessity, desires that which is good for him.”

- ❖ 17th century English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes is known for enunciating pessimistic views on human nature
- ❖ Human lives are solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short
- ❖ Writing during a time of social unrest and political turmoil
- ❖ English Civil War (1642-1651): series of three civil wars between the parliamentarians and royalists
- ❖ Hobbes advocated strong monarchical authority derived from the ‘social contract’ between individuals



State of Nature

“*Felicity* is a continual progress of the desire from one object to another, the attaining of the former being... the way to the latter” (*Leviathan*, Chapter XI)

- ❖ Humans have endless desires, instantaneous and continuous
- ❖ General inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power
- ❖ Competition for riches, honor, command, or other power leads to enmity and war
- ❖ Nature has made men equal in faculties of body and mind
- ❖ **The Right of Nature** (*Jus Naturale*) – liberty of each man to use his power, as he wills himself, for the preservation of his own nature and life
 - ❖ By liberty, he means the absence of external constraints
 - ❖ Therefore, to do according to his own reason and judgment anything that leads to the preservation of nature (life)



State of Nature as State of War

“When out of civil state... they are in that condition which is called... war of every man against every man” (Leviathan, Chapter XIII)

- ❖ Equality of ability leads to equality of hope of achieving their ends and desires
- ❖ When two persons desire what they cannot both enjoy, equality leads to rivalry
- ❖ In the absence of common power to awe them:
 - ❖ Individuals driven by *competition, distrust, and glory*
 - ❖ Each seeks power, gain, and glory that threaten the same for others
 - ❖ Human beings are in a constant state of war (of all against all)
 - ❖ Therefore, human beings have grief rather than pleasure in society
- ❖ In such a state of war, humans live without security other than that provided by own strength and abilities
- ❖ In such a state of war, there is no place for industry, trade, knowledge, arts...
- ❖ Humans live in constant fear and danger of violent death, and a solitary, poor, brutish, nasty, and short life



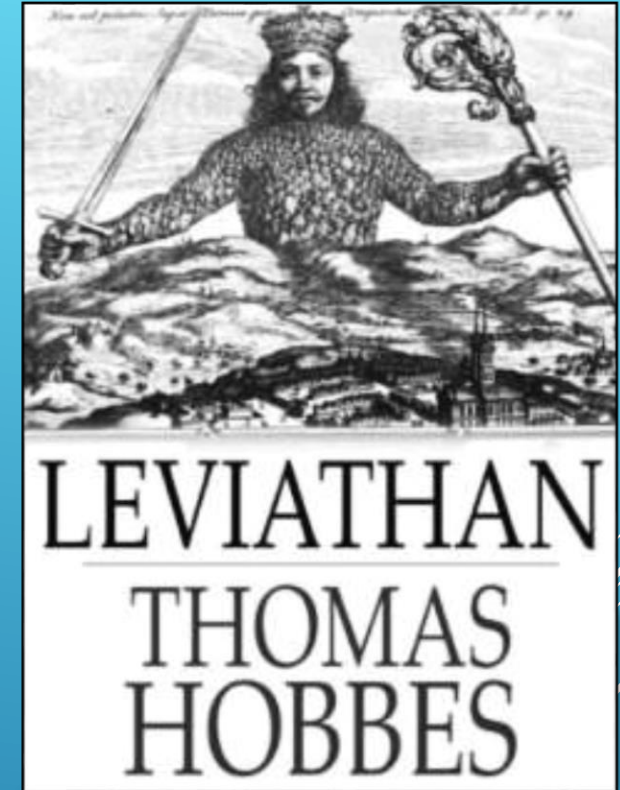
Social Contract

- ❖ The **First Law of Nature** (*lex naturalis*): A precept or general rule, found by reason, by which a human being is forbidden to destroy his life or take away the means of its preservation
- ❖ Consequently, general rule or precept that all humans ought to strive for peace
- ❖ The **Second Law of Nature**: a person be willing, so long as others are also willing, to lay down this right to all things, and to be contented with so much liberty against other human beings, as he would allow others against himself
- ❖ Not all rights are alienable: right of self-defense against threat to life, injury, chains



The Leviathan

- ❖ This right is laid aside by transferring the right to a public authority (The Sovereign)
- ❖ The Sovereign makes no contract with the subjects who transfer their rights because he makes the covenant with the multitude
- ❖ When the majority declares a sovereign, even dissenters must now consent with the rest
- ❖ The Sovereign's actions cannot be justly accused by subjects
- ❖ Whatever the sovereign does is not punishable by subjects
- ❖ The sovereign's rights are indivisible and inseparable – it cannot be given away without renouncing sovereign power
- ❖ Caveat: sovereign power cannot be so hurtful that it is greater than the benefits of not submitting to it



John Locke's Criticisms



- ❖ Lockean conception of the state of nature
- ❖ “*State of perfect Freedom* to order their Actions, and dispose of their possessions and Persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other Man.”
- ❖ But, this state of nature is a state of liberty, not ‘a state of license.’ Individuals are bound by duty to God and governed by the laws of nature.
- ❖ The law of nature specifies basic principle of morality: individuals should not take their own lives, they should try to preserve themselves and each other, and should not infringe upon another’s liberty
- ❖ Adherence to the law of nature ensures that the state of nature is not a state of war



Lockean Conception of Social Contract

- ❖ However, the natural rights of individuals are not always safeguarded in the state of nature; certain “inconveniences” exist; not all individuals fully respect rights of others; subject to aggression of others etc.
- ❖ Thus, the remedy of the inconveniences of the state of nature is an agreement to create a civil association or political government
- ❖ Criticism of Hobbes
- ❖ “When the citizens are agreeing to give the power to the state, how can they be sure of the fact that the authority would make the society peaceful?”
- ❖ “This is to think that Men are so foolish that they take care to avoid what Mischiefs may be done them by *Pole-Cats*, or *Foxes*, but are content, nay think it Safety, to be devoured by *Lions*.”



Hedonism: From Egoism to Utilitarianism

- ❖ *Hedonism* and *Egoism* both focus on the outcome or consequences of our actions, but we noted some key distinctions:
- ❖ Egoists focus on the outcomes of actions for the individual, while egoistic hedonism defines those outcomes for the individual in terms of the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain
- ❖ Next, we will turn to the conceptions of hedonism by one of the most influential schools of modern ethics - *Utilitarianism*

