Whether you believe individualism is good or that state interference in the economy is bad will hinge on the social conditioning you've received. What gets conditioned—either directly by indoctrination or indirectly by advertising and the media—will reflect the prevailing interests of the dominant ruling classes within society. To the extent Marx is correct, your ideas may not really be your own in one respect. Perhaps they reflect little more than the materially self-interested "propaganda" spread by the "corporate global oligarchy," to use a phrase often bandied about these days by international economic summit protesters.

On this startling and controversial note, our *Philosophical Segue* into *Fate, Free Will, and Determinism* comes to an end. Apart from introducing you to a few metaphysical ideas that overlap the first two philosophies of life presented in this chapter, I hope this detour has enriched your understanding, piqued your interest, and caused you to think more deeply and seriously about the issues discussed. As we proceed next with our treatment of hedonism and Buddhism, you might try to uncover further metaphysical assumptions pertaining to human nature, freedom, God, and laws governing life or the workings of the universe. Continued good luck on your journey. I hope you're enjoying the experience so far!

HEDONISM: PLEASURE IS THE MEASURE

"The achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose."
AYN RAND

The third philosophy of life we'll cover in this chapter is called **hedonism.** I somehow suspect that you will already have some vague familiarity with it. In fact, a cursory glance at popular culture might easily lead you to conclude that hedonism is the prevailing philosophy of the day, if not the last half-century. Before we get a more technical and detailed understanding of what philosophical hedonism entails, let's begin by defining it broadly as the doctrine that pleasure is worth pursuing and, that in the end, *pleasure is the ultimate goal of life.*

Whether or not you are a hedonist yourself, it's difficult to deny that vast amounts of time, energy, and money are spent on the pursuit of pleasure. Theme parks across the nation are visited annually by millions with the express purpose of having fun and seeking thrills. Millions more attend sporting events to cheer on their favorite teams. Race tracks and gambling casinos, not to mention state and provincial lotteries, hold out the hope that you too could win large sums of money and buy anything you want, making your life much happier than presumably it is right now. Travel agents, as well, hold out the promise of pleasure and excitement by showing you pictures of exotic vacation destinations, luxurious hotel rooms, and sumptuous meals that promise to bring you pleasure and relaxation. On this note, I've heard many people say that they live for weekends, a time when work ends and the fun begins. Others fantasize about their early retirement and the prospect of endless hours on the golf course or at the beach, doing nothing but soaking up the midday sun. In a humorous vein, I've listened to fun-loving adults who joke about the time of death saying, "The one with the most toys wins!" Others find the greatest pleasure in sexual activity, in

cultivating friendships, or in shopping for clothes and luxury items. Surely, all this pervasive and frenetic pursuit of pleasure points to the hedonistic tendencies in mainstream society. What you may not know, however, is that hedonists have existed for centuries and have had much to say on the subject of pursuing pleasure as the ultimate end of life.

Psychological versus Ethical Hedonism

It is important for purposes of philosophical understanding to note that there are two different types of hedonism: psychological and ethical. **Psychological hedonism** is a motivational theory. It explains *why* we do the things we do. According to the psychological hedonist, actions and desires are determined by their pleasure-producing properties. People are motivated to produce one state of affairs over another if, and only if, they think it will be more pleasant, or less unpleasant, for themselves. Psychological hedonists wish to reduce, and if possible, to eliminate pain and displeasure as much as they want to give rise to its opposite. Richard Brandt describes this concept of psychological hedonism as the "goal is pleasure" theory.[23]

Another variation of psychological hedonism is called *motivation by pleasant thoughts*.[24] This theory asserts that people will choose to do A rather than B, or will prefer A to B (whether an action or situation) if, and only if, the thought of A (with its expected consequences) is more attractive, or less repugnant, than the thought of B (with its expected consequences). In slightly different terms, if you can't imagine yourself doing "this" over "that" because "this" would likely have such horrible consequences, or at least less attractive ones compared with "that," then "that" is what you will choose to do. The thought of "that" and its expected pleasurable or preferred consequences determines your choice.

A third form of psychological hedonism is called *conditioning by pleasant experiences*. This is a theory about the causal conditions of a person's wants and values. It states that whatever you want or value at any given moment in life can be correlated with past enjoyments and rewards. Positive reinforcements associated with values in earlier experience serve to explain, at least in part, why those values are now cherished and why they influence present behavior. A person's values are therefore conditioned by that person's earlier enjoyments. For instance, if you crave chocolate, it is because you've enjoyed it in the past. But if the chocolate you were fed was always waxy or bitter, then you might not desire it now. Past enjoyments and experiences of pleasure thus influence the wants and values that determine our current behavior. We always act to get what we want, and what we want is the most pleasurable or most satisfying, given the situation.

While all three forms of psychological hedonism are intended as descriptions of actual motivation, **ethical hedonism** is not an explanation of why we value or want the things we do. Rather, ethical hedonism is a *moral theory* that suggests that if you don't pursue pleasure in life, you should. It's wrong not to. From the perspective of ethical hedonism, pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically valuable—that is, valuable in itself. A corollary to this idea is the

proposition that only displeasure is intrinsically undesirable, or undesirable in itself. In whatever we do, we should always strive to create states of affairs that produce pleasure and reduce pain or displeasure. If what you're doing right now (namely reading) is painful, then you should stop. However, if failing philosophy would cause more pain than the pain of reading on, then you should continue.

Associated with states of affairs (situations or circumstances) are **states of mind.** The ethical hedonist makes the value judgment that pleasant states of mind are desirable in themselves and that unpleasant states of mind are undesirable in themselves. Combining the notion of states of mind with states of affairs we get the following ethical conclusion: One state of affairs is more desirable in itself than another state of affairs if, and only if, it contains more pleasant states of mind than the other.[25] Thus, the quantity of value in any state of affairs is measured by the quantity of pleasure in it. Our moral obligation in any situation is to choose the state of affairs that will produce the greatest pleasure.

Ethical hedonism, understood as a theory of value and a moral prescription for living, has been defended by a long line of distinguished philosophers from the early Greeks to the present. Some see pleasure as ethical egoists, arguing that pleasure should be maximized for oneself. Others have been more altruistic in their hedonism, arguing that the right thing to do is to maximize the pleasure or happiness of the greatest number of people.

Aristippus of Cyrene

Aristippus (430–350 B.C.E.) was the first Western philosopher we know of to make a direct and uncompromising statement of hedonism. Originally living in Cyrene, a town in what is now Libya in North Africa, he traveled to Athens and became a close friend of Socrates. Like his friend, he was interested almost exclusively in practical ethics, the end of which Aristippus believed to be the enjoyment of present pleasures. After spending a number of years in Aegina, Aristippus relocated to the court of Dionysius of Syracuse where, from 389 to 388 B.C.E., he earned his living teaching and writing. At the court, he also came into contact with Plato. Eventually, Aristippus returned to his home in Cyrene, where he opened his own school of philosophy, promoting what we now call **Cyrenaic hedonism,** named after his home town. Unfortunately, his writings have either been lost or destroyed by the ravages of time, so only lists of his works remain. A number of his hedonistic ideas have nonetheless survived and immortalized Aristippus, making him relevant for us even today.

The ideas of Aristippus can be summarized into a number of basic tenets. (Consider whether you agree with any of them.) First, according to Aristippus, pleasure is the principle motive for living. **Pleasure** is always to be considered good, regardless of where it originates. Second, no qualitative distinctions can be made among pleasures themselves. **Intensity** is the only criterion that can be used to determine which action or state of affairs is best. Those things producing the greatest or most intense pleasure should be preferred. However,

since physical, sensory pleasures are more intense than mental or emotional ones, they become, for Aristippus, the best of all. Pursuing physical, sensory pleasure is therefore a higher good than the pursuit of knowledge, goodness, or truth. Third, Aristippus contends that pleasure contributes greatly to the **meaning of life.** He recommends that we follow our natural desires without guilt or apology. Our mission in life is to learn how to enjoy ourselves most fully. Through the pursuit of sensory pleasures we can make our individual lives exciting, dynamic, and worth living. Don't take this to mean that Aristippus suggested that we should become enslaved by our cravings and appetites. He is not implying this at all. Rather, he advocates Socratic self-control, which he interpreted not as self-denial, but as rational control over pleasure instead of slavery to it. For Aristippus, no pleasure or personal enjoyment can be wrong. No passion is evil in itself. Pleasures are misguided or sick only when we lose control and are victimized by them. Loss of self-control can lead to less pleasure in the long run, so self-restraint can sometimes be necessary.

A key element of Cyrenaic hedonism was the character example of Aristippus himself. Superimposed on a Socratic self-control and freedom from debilitating desires was an uninhibited capacity for enjoyment. Aristippus could revel in luxury or be content with the simplest needs, choosing each as he deemed fit and as the circumstances demanded.[26] For Aristippus, since all acts were indifferent except in their capacity to provide immediate pleasure, the science of life translated into a calculated adaptation of the self to one's circumstances, along with the ability to use people and situations for self-gratification.

Another tenet of Cyrenaic hedonism is that **actual pleasures** are more desirable than **potential pleasures.** Some people deny pleasures to themselves now in the hope of gaining greater pleasures later on. Such a strategy is not recommended by the Cyrenaics. You may deprive yourself now and save an entire lifetime to enjoy your retirement, only to die shortly after you finish work. You may give up things now for promises of future rewards, only to find those promises empty and misleading. Furthermore, what happens if you no longer want what you worked so long and so hard to achieve, once you get it? Disappointment and regret may follow. Thus, it is better to enjoy yourself today than to dream of potential pleasures in the future.

The notion that all pleasures are equal and that they differ only in intensity points to the subjective element in Cyrenaic hedonism. Since pleasures cannot be objectively compared as better or worse, if watching the cable Comedy Channel is just as good as reading Shakespeare or playing chess, then the individual becomes the measure of pleasure. Whatever pleases me the most at any given moment is the highest good there can be.[27]

A last point to be made about Cyrenaic hedonism involves participation in society. According to Aristippus, participation in public life gives rise to avoidable hassles. Involved citizenship is almost certain to interfere with one's pursuit of pleasure. To remain free and detached from sociopolitical entanglements was therefore good, so that the individual could fulfill his or her ultimate obligation, namely, to enjoy every moment in life.

"Pleasure is the absence of pain in the body and trouble in the soul."

EPICURUS

Epicurus

Epicureanism is another expression of hedonistic philosophy given form and substance by its originator, **Epicurus** (341–270 B.C.E.), after whom it was obviously named. Epicurus was born in Samos in Asia Minor in 341 B.C.E. He was a voluminous writer, having produced over 300 works, most of which are lost today. Fortunately, **Diogenes Laertius** provided us with summaries of Epicurean doctrine. The Latin poet **Lucretius** also expressed many Epicurean ideas in his poem *De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of the Universe)*.[28] Sayings of Epicurus are found as well in the works of **Seneca** and **Cicero.**

Epicurus chose to focus his attention on ethics, considering mathematics and all purely scientific pursuits as essentially useless, given that such studies have little connection with the conduct of everyday life. Though Epicurus studied with followers of **Plato** and **Aristotle,** he rejected both in the end as overly theoretical and irrelevant when it comes to the practical concerns of daily living. In reaction to both Plato and Aristotle, as well as to the stoics, who had all set up their own schools of philosophy, so too did Epicurus in 306 B.C.E.[29] He called his school **The Garden,** which was very appropriate given its secluded surroundings in Athens. The Garden served as a retreat from the sociopolitical and philosophical turmoil of Athens. Everyone was welcome at The Garden and was treated equally. Epicurus admitted men, women, courtesans, slaves, and aristocrats, making no distinctions among people based on social status, gender, or race—a very progressive policy for the thinking and values of the day. The Garden developed a reputation not only for its operating philosophy, but also for its good living and pleasant social surroundings.

Disciples of Epicurus, called Epicureans, actively competed with other philosophers for the hearts and minds of followers.[30] They ventured out into the great centers of the eastern Mediterranean to establish new communities modeled after The Garden. Epicureanism even took hold in the Roman Empire, where it reached its height of influence from 60 to 30 B.C.E.

Today, lots of people describe themselves as Epicureans, though often in a mistaken way. Many of us tend to equate the Epicurean with the *aesthete*—someone who lives a life devoted to the pursuit of beauty, physical pleasures, and the expression of discriminating and exquisite taste. Eating exotic foods, surrounding oneself in luxurious beauty, wearing only the finest clothes, and traveling to remote and exclusive destinations are often thought of as expressions of Epicureanism. The fact is that all of these things are more akin to Cyrenaic hedonism or the aestheticism of an Oscar Wilde than to what Epicurus promoted.[31]

Momentary versus Enduring Pleasures

To appreciate the pleasures that Epicurus would actually have us seek, it is first necessary to distinguish between **momentary pleasures** and **enduring pleasures.**[32] Although Epicurus grants that all pleasure is good and all pain is evil, it's not the case that pleasure should always be chosen over painful or unpleasant activities. As Epicurus says, "Every pleasure is therefore good on

account of its own nature, but it does not follow that every pleasure is worthy of being chosen; just as every pain is an evil, and yet every pain must not be avoided." For example, a particular pleasure might be very intense for the moment, but it might also lead to ill health or enslavement to a habit, thereby producing greater pain. Unprotected sex (intercourse without a condom) with a risky partner may lead to momentary orgasmic ecstasy, but it could also result in a sexually transmitted disease, an enduring pain for such a brief episode of pleasure. So too, for a momentary high, some people will experiment with addictive drugs, only to find that they become enslaved to the high feeling and the ceaseless craving that must then be continually satisfied before panic and frenzied preoccupation for physical satisfaction set in. From an Epicurean perspective, the pleasures of dangerous sex and addictive drugs should not be chosen, even if pain results from "missing out" or from not experiencing the physical high. On the other hand, sometimes pains should be chosen over pleasures. Undergoing surgery in a hospital is often painful, yet it produces the greater good—health—in the long run. Suffering momentary pain or short-lived pain thus may be the best choice for long-term well-being. Living the good life, then, is not about the mindless pursuit of immediate pleasure; the exercise of practical wisdom is required. Practical wisdom enables one to measure pleasures against pains, accepting pains that lead to greater pleasures and rejecting pleasures that lead to greater pains.[33] Epicurus's willingness to delay immediate gratification for longer term benefits and the value he places on the exercise of practical wisdom both point to a kind of hedonism that can be distinguished from Aristippus's Cyrenaic version, which used intensity of pleasure as the main criterion of evaluative judgment. Unlike Aristippus, Epicurus would not necessarily conclude that the most immediate and intense pleasures are *always* the best.

Kinetic versus Static (Catastematic) Pleasures

In the pursuit of pleasure, Epicurus would have us make a second distinction among pleasures, namely between **kinetic pleasures** and **static pleasures.** In the former case, pleasure is experienced through some kind of action. Drinking a cold glass of orange juice or ice water on a hot, sticky day is quite satisfying. The body's craving for liquid, experienced as a need or lack, is removed, and drinking feels good. Likewise, the felt need for food (hunger) can be removed by eating. In short, there is kinetic pleasure whenever a want or pain is removed. Kinetic pleasures accompany motion and cease when the motion or activity ceases.[34]

Static (or catastematic) pleasures are not pleasures found in movement or in activity but in the pleasurable states resulting when pains, lacks, deficiencies, or frustrations have been removed. Static pleasure is the state of having no pain, whereas, kinetic pleasure is the pleasure of getting to this state. Static pleasures give rise to a stable condition capable of indefinite prolongation. They are therefore characterized by an enduring state not found in kinetic pleasures, which are momentary or short-lived, lasting only as long as the accompanying action.

Ataraxia: The Ultimate End of Life

For Epicurus, the ultimate end of life is static pleasure, not kinetic.[35] He calls this end **ataraxia,** the state of not having **tarachai,** or troubles (often translated as tranquility).[36] Freedom from pain in the body is called **aponia.** Reading Epicurus, his commentators, and some of his critics makes it difficult to know exactly whether *aponia* is meant to be included under *ataraxia* or whether the absence of bodily pain is something different to be added to it separately.[37] In any case, whether *aponia* is separate from or part of *ataraxia,* the fact still remains that such ends are static, not kinetic. Being free from pain in the body and free from disturbance and anxiety in the soul are both states, not actions.

To say that *ataraxia* (including *aponia*) is a state of being is not to suggest that it involves a total absence of activity. *Ataraxia* is not about doing nothing or remaining motionless in some kind of transcendental blissful state. When *ataraxia* is achieved, one is functioning normally without painful interference. The goal of *ataraxia* is positive and substantial. It is about unimpeded activity of the human organism in its natural condition. In a state of Epicurean *ataraxia,* individuals use all their faculties without strain and without obstruction from fear, hunger, and disease. In *ataraxia,* the mind (or reason) works with an awareness of bodily functioning. It aims to keep things working smoothly.

The specialized use of reason in logic and mathematics is considered only instrumentally valuable by Epicurus. Such use is not necessary for *ataraxia,* nor for a fulfilling life. According to Epicurus, the natural child, in its untutored state, would not desire logic and math as something pleasurably good.[38] The Epicurean does not, therefore, glorify the contemplative life or the life of reason as Plato and Aristotle did, for example. Mental pleasures are not any better or higher than bodily pleasures. Both are natural. On this note, Epicurus instructs us to follow our **natural desires.**[39] As Julia Annas puts it, "Natural desires . . . do not produce mental rather than bodily pleasures; rather, the natural/not natural distinction cuts right across that of mental and bodily. Natural desires are those we cannot help having, so that in fulfilling them we are following, rather than forcing, our nature."[40] Thus, bodily desires for food and drink are, for Epicurus, as natural as the mental desire for tranquility of the soul (what some of us today would call peace of mind).

PHILOSOPHICAL PROFILE

Contemporary Scholars of Hellenistic Philosophy

Philosophy is sometimes criticized for being the study of "dead white males." It is important for you to understand, however, that many philosophers who have made valuable contributions to philosophical scholarship are female, alive, and currently engaged in important writing and research. Two such philosophers are Julia Annas and Martha Nussbaum, both experts in Hellenistic philosophy, which incorporates skepticism, hedonism, and stoicism, the latter two of which

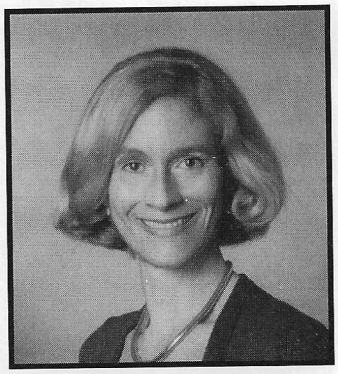
are covered in this chapter. Read below to learn more about these contemporary Hellenistic scholars, who are referred to repeatedly in this chapter.

JULIA ANNAS

Julia Annas (Ph.D. Harvard), Regents Professor of Philosophy, was at St. Hugh's College at Oxford University for fifteen years before going to the University of Arizona. She specializes in almost every facet of ancient Greek philosophy, including metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and psychology. Her current research interests are in Platonic ethics. She is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the former editor of the annual journal *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy.* Her books include: *An Introduction to Plato's Republic, The Modes of Skepticism* (with Jonathan Barnes), and *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind.* An excellent book of hers, dealing with stoicism and Epicureanism, is *The Morality of Happiness.*

MARTHA NUSSBAUM

Martha Nussbaum received her B.A. from New York University and her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Harvard. Currently, she is Ernst Freund Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago. She has also taught at Harvard and Oxford Universities. From 1986 to 1993, Nussbaum was a research adviser at the World Institute for Development Economics in Helsinki, a part of the United Nations University. She has chaired the Committee on International Cooperation of the American Philosophical Association and has been a member of the association's national board, currently chairing the Committee on the Status of Women. Nussbaum has written an excellent treatise on stoic, skeptic, and Epicurean themes entitled *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics.* Other books written by Nussbaum include *Aristotle's "De Motu Animalium," The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy,* and *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature.*



MARTHA NUSSBAUM

If we are to fulfill our natural desires, it is important that we not rely on **empty beliefs,** that is, on those that are false and harmful. Vain or unnatural desires based on empty beliefs do not come from nature but rather are products of teaching and acculturation. Their falsity results from the incorrect evaluative beliefs that ground them. Empty beliefs have a tendency to be vain and self-defeating, since they typically reach out for boundless objects that can provide no stability or long-term satisfaction. Natural desires, by contrast, can be well-satisfied because they do have limits. By trying to satisfy artificial and limitless desires, we end up sabotaging our own *ataraxia.*[41] Suppose, for instance, you hunger for food and experience this as a lack. Simple bread could ease your hunger pangs, but if you believe that, given your station in life, you truly deserve Russian caviar which is unavailable, then even if you eventually quiet your body with bread, you will still remain troubled in your soul with frustrated cravings. You will believe that you didn't get what you deserve and be upset by this belief.

> ***"Frugal meals deliver a pleasure that is equal to that of an expensive diet, when once all the pain of need is removed; and bread and water give the very summit of pleasure, when a needy person takes them in."***
>
> EPICURUS

Needing food is natural; yearning for caviar is not. Though eating caviar may be pleasurable (if you like that sort of thing), not every pleasure is worthy of being pursued or troubled about if it's not available. Believing you deserve caviar and developing a craving for it are things you have been taught and acculturated to, not things natural to the human organism. If we don't rid ourselves of empty beliefs like the one about caviar, we may end up removing the pains and lacks that we cannot help but have, but do so in ways that give rise to further pains and lacks.

In his **Letter to Menoeceus,** Epicurus classified the various kinds of human desires. Some are **vain desires,** meaning that they are not rooted in nature. Becoming famous or owning jewels are things you may desire, but they do not come with being born human. Such vain desires are conditioned by false beliefs of what is required to make one happy.

Natural desires, by contrast, may be either necessary or unnecessary. The desire for sex is natural, yet many people live a celibate life without much, if any, frustration. Desiring delicious foods is also natural but unnecessary, for we could easily live on a bland diet. Those desires that are both natural and necessary are required for comfort, happiness, and life itself. Epicurus believes that practical wisdom and friendship contribute greatly to happiness; things like shelter from the elements and adequate clothing contribute to comfort, while food and water are necessary to sustain life.

Distinguishing between what is natural and necessary from what is empty, vain, and unnecessary, Epicurus and his followers chose to live simple and frugal lives. It is truly a misreading of Epicureanism to suggest that it advocates that we all "Eat, drink, and be merry." In truth, Epicurus recommended suppression of desires that go beyond natural needs and moderation in those desires of the natural sort. Neither overindulgence of natural desires (gluttony with regard to food), nor strict asceticism (anorexia or physically wasting away) can lead to a pleasurable life.

For Epicurus, happy is the person who displays **prudence** (practical wisdom), **simple tastes, bodily health, freedom from physical need, powers of discrimination** (to distinguish between natural and vain desires) and **tranquility of the soul.** Because happy people are not deluded by vain and empty beliefs, constantly trying to satisfy limitless and unnecessary cravings, they possess a sober **self-sufficiency.** See Figure 2.3 for a classification of Epicurean desires.

Impediments to *Ataraxia*

The road to achieving *ataraxia* is not an easy one according to Epicurus. Society and the acculturation process do severe damage to human desire and natural, unimpeded functioning. To begin with, religious teachers in Epicurus's day taught people to fear the gods and to fear death because of an uncertain afterlife. In ancient Greece, the gods were thought to intervene in the lives of humans. They could reward people as easily as they could take revenge on them. Thus, humans were constantly trying to appease the gods in order not to elicit their vengeful wrath. Although this belief in "the gods" may seem antiquated or

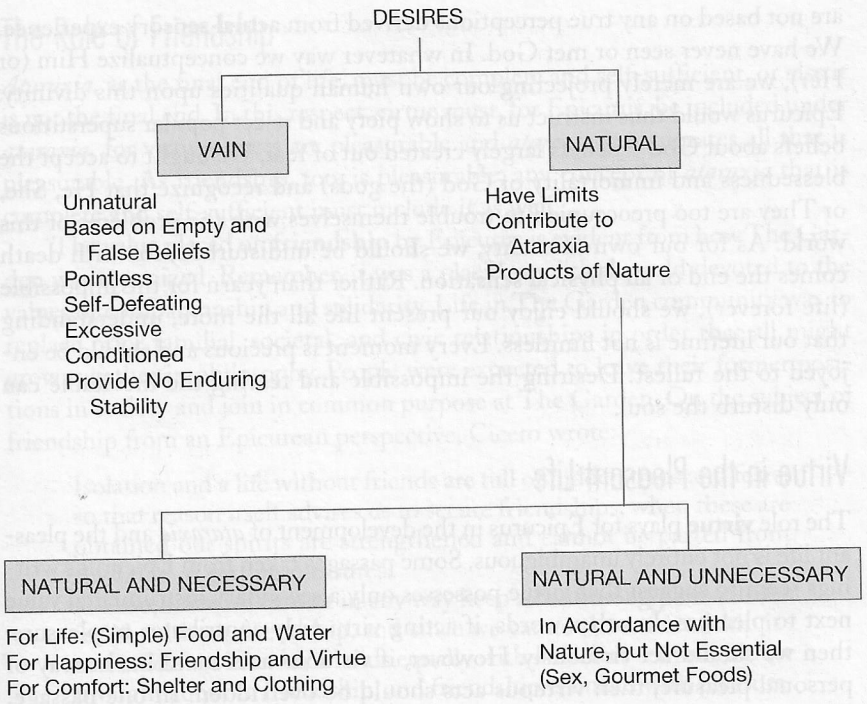


FIGURE 2.3 **A classification of Epicurean desires.**

even barbaric given the monotheistic traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, I know from personal experience that people still "make deals" with God, promising to do "whatever" to achieve their goal. Others continue to morbidly fear death, worrying about the prospects of hell if life is not lived according to God's will. The belief that God rewards and punishes or that He intervenes in our lives is even evident in professional sports. Watch athletes on television after they score touchdowns or win games; prayers of thanks are frequently offered, as if God blessed the fortunate player or the team. We're left wondering how God feels about the losers. Are they being punished for something they did? Maybe God is a Buffalo Bills' fan and hates the Miami Dolphins. Seriously though, it's interesting, that never having met God, people still project human qualities and intentions onto this deity. When we pray for things to happen, aren't we just reducing God to an errand boy whose task it is to satisfy our desires? When we fear God, aren't we choosing to see Him as a vengeful judge who sentences his creations to an eternity in hell if they do not do His bidding? In view of these beliefs, I think the fear of God and the fear of death are no less real today than they were during the times of Epicurus.

If Epicurus were living now, I suspect he would strongly recommend that we stop making false assumptions about God and attributing to God our own imperfect, human qualities. Epicurus might speculate that seeing God as judgmental is nothing more than a human projection of our own feelings of guilt. No matter what utterances we make about God, what is certain is that they

are not based on any true perceptions derived from actual sensory experience. We have never seen or met God. In whatever way we conceptualize Him (or Her), we are merely projecting our own human qualities upon this divinity. Epicurus would thus instruct us to show piety and reject popular superstitious beliefs about God—beliefs largely created out of fear. We ought to accept the blessedness and immortality of God (the gods) and recognize that He, She, or They are too preoccupied to trouble themselves with the problems of this world. As for our own mortality, we should be undisturbed, for with death comes the end of all physical sensation. Rather than yearn for the impossible (life forever), we should enjoy our present life all the more, understanding that our lifetime is not limitless. Every moment is precious and should be enjoyed to the fullest. Desiring the impossible and fearing the inevitable can only disturb the soul.

Virtue in the Pleasant Life

The role **virtue** plays for Epicurus in the development of *ataraxia* and the pleasant life is not entirely unambiguous. Some passages taken from Epicurus's writings seem to suggest that virtue possesses only a secondary instrumental value next to pleasure. In other words, if acting virtuously contributes to pleasure, then we should act virtuously. However, if virtuous acts stand in the way of personal pleasure, then virtuous acts should be overridden. In one passage, Epicurus states:

> It is because of pleasure that we choose even the virtues, not for their own sake, just as we choose medicine for the sake of health. (Diogenes X, 138)

In another passage, though, Epicurus says something quite different:

> . . . it is impossible to live pleasantly without also living prudently, honestly, and justly; [nor is it possible to lead a life of prudence, honor, and justice] and not live pleasantly. For the virtues are closely associated with the pleasant life and cannot be separated from them.

I guess as long as there are different analysts and commentators on Epicurus's works, there will be conflicting opinions about what he really meant. Julia Annas, a scholarly expert on Epicurus, suggests that it's possible that hostile critics of Epicurus have tended to downplay the inextricable link he makes between virtue and pleasure, and that they have quoted Epicurus out of context and with the most damaging interpretation of his apparent inconsistencies. A more lenient interpretation allows for the inconsistencies to serve a rhetorical, albeit innovative, way for Epicurus to awaken his listeners to Epicurean insights. As Annas points out, and as some passages seem to support, pleasure and virtue appear to be inseparable for Epicurus, if life is taken as a whole. Each one entails the other. According to some interpretations, it would appear that the virtues become part of happiness, and that part of the pleasant life is formed by acting and living according to the virtues.[42]

The Role of Friendship

Ataraxia, as the final end of life, must be complete and self-sufficient, or else it is not the final end. In this respect, virtue must, for Epicurus, be included under *ataraxia,* for virtuous acts are pleasurable and *ataraxia* incorporates all that is pleasurable. As friendship, too, is pleasurable, any concept of *ataraxia* that is complete and self-sufficient must include it as well.

The value placed on **friendship** by Epicurus is evident from how The Garden was organized. Remember, it was a placid, apolitical world devoted to the values of companionship and solidarity. Life in The Garden community was to replace prior familial, societal, and civic relationships in order that all might grow together in philosophy. People were expected to leave their former positions in society and join in common purpose at The Garden. On the subject of friendship from an Epicurean perspective, Cicero wrote:

> Isolation and a life without friends are full of hidden traps and fears, so that reason itself advises us to secure friendships; when these are obtained our spirits are strengthened and cannot be parted from the hope of getting pleasures.
>
> So, since we cannot in any way keep a continuing pleasantness in life without friendship, and since we cannot have friendship itself unless we love our friends equally with ourselves—this is in fact brought about in friendship, and friendship is linked with pleasure. (Cicero, *De Finibus I, 66–68*)

As Cicero points out, Epicurean friendship would have us love our friends as much as ourselves and have equal concern for their pleasures as our own. Friendship is not about using others to get pleasure for oneself; we get genuine pleasure from being concerned about, and caring for, others. Thus, our final end, *ataraxia,* must include friendship.

PHILOSOPHY IN PRACTICE

"Sigmund Freud's Debt to Epicurus"

> *The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious. What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied.*
>
> SIGMUND FREUD

In a marvelous book entitled *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics,* Martha C. Nussbaum points to Epicurus's greatness as a psychologist. In fact, she attributes the discovery of the unconscious to him. In The Garden, Epicurus emphasized memorization and repetition of Epicurean principles as a way of internalizing his teachings and giving them the transformative power required to overcome society's harmful teaching of false and empty beliefs. Epicurus understood how socially conditioned beliefs, causing disturbances in life, do not all lie on the surface of consciousness and may even show up in dreams. Epicurus held that the self is not