Hedonism

Ethical hedonism is a moral position, arguing that you *should* pursue pleasure in life.

We'll look at two famous attempts to "unpack" this idea…both from the ancient Greek world:

a) Cyrenaic Hedonism

b) Epicurean Hedonism

A) <u>Cyrenaic</u> <u>Hedonism</u>:

(named after Aristippus of Cyrene)

Its features:

1) Pleasure is the principal motive for living, and it is always a good thing.

It can even give meaning/purpose to your life: e.g. “Our mission is to learn to enjoy ourselves more fully.”

2) No qualitative distinction can be made among pleasures.

(None is better than any other.)

Only INTENSITY
can help you decide
which to pursue.

3) Since physical/sensory pleasures are typically more intense…

…they are to be preferred to mental pleasures.

4) ACTUAL pleasures (now) are more desirable than potential ones (in the future).

5) Since “involved citizenship” will almost certainly interfere with pursuing pleasure…

…you should disengage from politics.

6) Pursue rational control over pleasure (instead of slavery to it).

And don’t be
victimized
by pleasures.

B) <u>Epicurean Hedonism</u>:

(named after Epicurus, c. 300 BC/BCE)

He founded a school in Athens called “The Garden.” Everyone was admitted regardless of status, sex, etc.

Its features:

1) It makes a distinction between momentary and enduring pleasures.

Although all pleasure is good and all pain is evil (intrinsically)…

…pleasure should NOT always be chosen.

e.g. if momentary pleasure leads to enduring pain.

In fact, *pain* should sometimes be chosen…if temporary pain leads to enduring pleasure.

2) kinetic vs. static pleasures

Kinetic pleasure comes via some kind of action (e.g. eating)

Static pleasure results when pains or deficiencies, or frustrations have been removed.

Static pleasure is more enduring than kinetic pleasure.

It is the state of having no pain…

…while kinetic pleasure is the pleasure of getting to that state.

3) Ataraxia

It is the ultimate goal of life for the Epicurean…a type of static pleasure.

It is the state of not having troubles…being free from pain in the body and anxiety in the soul…

…and functioning normally without strain or obstruction from fear, hunger, illness, or exhaustion.

4) Mental pleasures are not better or higher than bodily pleasures, since both are natural.

5) He goes on to make several points about classifications of desires *(see the table on p. 12):*

Two basic types of desires:

--vain

--natural

Vain desires are:

a) unnatural…i.e. not rooted in nature

b) based on empty and false beliefs

c) conditioned

d) excessive

e) provide no enduring stability

…one way these can be created today is through advertising…

…or peer pressure…

Natural desires, by contrast, are rooted in nature…and contribute to ataraxia.

Epicurus identifies two types of natural desires:

a) <u>Natural and necessary</u> desires:

e.g. necc. for life—food and water

for comfort—shelter and clothing

for happiness—friendship and virtue

b) <u>Natural and unnecessary</u> desires:

i.e. those desires that are in accordance with nature…but not essential for happiness.

He includes gourmet foods…and sex…here.

6) Obstacles/impediments to ataraxia:

--the largest may be the fear of death… or a yearning for immortality.

Epicurus says we should enjoy every moment to its fullest, knowing it will never come again.

This is related to the currently-popular (but ancient) concept of "mindfulness."

7) Friendship:

The importance of this may be best understood via the alternative: isolation. We believe (probably) that isolation is not good for most people.

Epicurus says it is “full of hidden traps and fears.”