Teleological Ethics: Hedonism

Dr. Desh Raj Sirswal  
Assistant Professor (Philosophy),  
P.G.Govt. College for Girls,  
Sector-11, Chandigarh  
http://drsirswal.webs.com
Happiness
Introduction

Teleological ethics, (teleological from Greek *telos*, “end”; *logos*, “science”), theory of morality that derives duty or moral obligation from what is good or desirable as an end to be achieved. Also known as consequentialist ethics, it is opposed to deontological ethics (from the Greek *deon*, “duty”), which holds that the basic standards for an action’s being morally right are independent of the good or evil generated.

Modern ethics, especially since the 18th-century German deontological philosophy of Immanuel Kant, has been deeply divided between a form of teleological ethics (utilitarianism) and deontological theories.
Theological Ethics

• Teleological theories differ on the nature of the end that actions ought to promote. Eudaemonist theories (Greek *eudaimonia*, “happiness”), which hold that ethics consists in some function or activity appropriate to man as a human being, tend to emphasize the cultivation of virtue or excellence in the agent as the end of all action. These could be the classical virtues—courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom—that promoted the Greek ideal of man as the “rational animal”; or the theological virtues—faith, hope, and love—that distinguished the Christian ideal of man as a being created in the image of God.
Utilitarian-type theories hold that the end consists in an experience or feeling produced by the action. Hedonism, for example, teaches that this feeling is pleasure—either one’s own, as in egoism (the 17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes), or everyone’s, as in universalistic hedonism, or utilitarianism (the 19th-century English philosophers Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Henry Sidgwick), with its formula the “greatest happiness [pleasure] of the greatest number.” Other teleological or utilitarian-type views include the claims that the end of action is survival and growth, as in evolutionary ethics (the 19th-century English philosopher Herbert Spencer); the experience of power, as in despotism (the 16th-century Italian political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli and the 19th-century German Friedrich Nietzsche); satisfaction and adjustment, as in pragmatism (20th-century American philosophers Ralph Barton Perry and John Dewey); and freedom, as in existentialism (the 20th-century French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre).
Hedonism

- **Hedonism** is a school of thought that argues that pleasure is the only intrinsic good. In very simple terms, a hedonist strives to maximize net pleasure (pleasure minus pain).
- Ethical hedonism is the idea that all people have the right to do everything in their power to achieve the greatest amount of pleasure possible to them. It is also the idea that every person's pleasure should far surpass their amount of pain. Ethical hedonism is said to have been started by a student of Socrates, Aristippus of Cyrene. He held the idea that pleasure is the highest good.
Classic Schools of Antiquity

• Democritus seems to be the earliest philosopher on record to have categorically embraced a hedonistic philosophy; he called the supreme goal of life "contentment" or "cheerfulness", claiming that "joy and sorrow are the distinguishing mark of things beneficial and harmful".

• Cārvāka

• Cārvāka was an Indian hedonist school of thought that arose approximately 600 BCE, and died out in the 14th century CE. The Cārvākas maintained that the Hindu scriptures are false, that the priests are liars, and that there is no afterlife, and that pleasure should be the aim of living. Unlike other Indian schools of philosophy, the Cārvākas argued that there is nothing wrong with sensual indulgence. They held a naturalistic worldview.
The Cyrenaic School

- The Cyrenaics were an ultra-hedonist Greek school of philosophy founded in the 4th century BCE, supposedly by Aristippus of Cyrene, although many of the principles of the school are believed to have been formalized by his grandson of the same name, Aristippus the Younger. The school was so called after Cyrene, the birthplace of Aristippus. It was one of the earliest Socratic schools. The Cyrenaics taught that the only intrinsic good is pleasure, which meant not just the absence of pain, but positively enjoyable sensations. Of these, momentary pleasures, especially physical ones, are stronger than those of anticipation or memory. They did, however, recognize the value of social obligation, and that pleasure could be gained from altruism. The school died out within a century, and was replaced by Epicureanism.
Epicureanism

• In the Epicurean view, the highest pleasure (tranquility and freedom from fear) was obtained by knowledge, friendship and living a virtuous and temperate life. He lauded the enjoyment of simple pleasures, by which he meant abstaining from bodily desires, such as sex and appetites, verging on asceticism. He argued that when eating, one should not eat too richly, for it could lead to dissatisfaction later, such as the grim realization that one could not afford such delicacies in the future. Likewise, sex could lead to increased lust and dissatisfaction with the sexual partner. Epicurus did not articulate a broad system of social ethics that has survived.

• Epicureanism was originally a challenge to Platonism, though later it became the main opponent of Stoicism. Epicurus and his followers shunned politics. After the death of Epicurus, his school was headed by Hermarchus; later many Epicurean societies flourished in the Late Hellenistic era and during the Roman era (such as those in Antioch, Alexandria, Rhodes and Ercolano). The poet Lucretius is its most known Roman proponent. By the end of the Roman Empire, having undergone Christian attack and repression, Epicureanism had all but died out, and would be resurrected in the 17th century by the atomist Pierre Gassendi, who adapted it to the Christian doctrine.
Christianity

• Christian hedonism is a controversial Christian doctrine current in some evangelical circles, particularly those of the Reformed tradition. The term was coined by Reformed Baptist pastor John Piper in his 1986 book *Desiring God*. Piper summarizes this philosophy of the Christian life as "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." Christian Hedonism may anachronistically describe the theology of Jonathan Edwards. In the 17th century the atomist Pierre Gassendi, adapted Epicureanism to the Christian doctrine.
Conclusion

In this section we studied I about teleological ethics with special reference to hedonism. This is very important conception to understand utilitarianism also.

References:

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