

Hume argues that an individual's actions are only determined to be moral or immoral based on how they affect others (and not how they affect the individual). Therefore, moral impressions should only be considered from a social point of view. With this notion in mind, Hume claims that the foundation of moral obligation is sympathy.

Morality is not a matter of fact that is the result of experience. Hume uses murder as an example. If one were to examine murder, one would not experience pain, and therefore, one couldn't find the vice. You would only uncover your own dislike of murder. This shows that morality does not exist in reason, but rather, in passions.

Because of David Hume's criticism of philosophical theories, ideas, and methodologies that relied heavily on rationalism, he became one of the most important minds in Western philosophy. His work touched on an incredible number of philosophical topics, including religion, metaphysics, personal identity, morality, and concepts of cause-effect relations.

# HEDONISM

It's all about pleasure and pain

The term *hedonism* actually refers to several theories that, while different from one another, all share the same underlying notion: Pleasure and pain are the only important elements of the specific phenomena the theories describe. In philosophy, hedonism is often discussed as a theory of value. This means that pleasure is the only thing intrinsically valuable to a person at all times and pain is the only thing that is intrinsically not valuable to an individual. To hedonists, the meaning of pleasure and pain is broad so that it can relate to both mental and physical phenomena.

## ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF HEDONISM

The first major hedonistic movement dates back to the fourth century B.C. with the Cyrenaics, a school of thought founded by Aristippus of Cyrene. The Cyrenaics emphasized Socrates' belief that happiness is one of the results of moral action, but also believed that virtue had no intrinsic value. They believed that pleasure, specifically physical pleasure over mental pleasure, was the ultimate good and that immediate gratification was more desirable than having to wait a long time for pleasure.

Following the Cyrenaics was Epicureanism (led by Epicurus), which was a form of hedonism quite different from that of Aristippus. While he agreed that pleasure was the ultimate good, Epicurus

believed that pleasure was attained through tranquility and a reduction of desire instead of immediate gratification. According to Epicurus, living a simple life full of friends and philosophical discussion was the highest pleasure that could be attained.

During the Middle Ages, hedonism was rejected by Christian philosophers because it did not mesh with Christian virtues and ideals, such as faith, hope, avoiding sin, and helping others. Still, some philosophers argued hedonism had its merits because it was God's desire that people be happy.

Hedonism was most popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to the work of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, who both argued for variations of prudential hedonism, hedonistic utilitarianism, and motivational hedonism.

## VALUE AND PRUDENTIAL HEDONISM

In philosophy, hedonism usually refers to value and well-being. Value hedonism states that pleasure is the only thing that is intrinsically valuable, while pain is the only thing that is intrinsically invaluable.

### Philosophical Definitions

**INTRINSICALLY VALUABLE:** The word *intrinsically* is thrown around a lot when discussing hedonism, and it is a very important word to understand. Unlike the word *instrumental*, use of the word *intrinsically* implies that something is valuable on its own. Money is instrumentally valuable. Having money only has real value when you purchase something with it. Therefore, it is not intrinsically valuable. Pleasure, on the other hand, is intrinsically valuable. When a person experiences pleasure, even if it does not lead to something else, the initial pleasure itself is enjoyable.

According to value hedonism, everything that is of value is reduced to pleasure. Based on this information, prudential hedonism then goes one step further and claims that all pleasure, and only pleasure, can make an individual's life better, and that all pain, and only pain, can make an individual's life worse.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL HEDONISM

Psychological hedonism, also known as motivational hedonism, is the belief that the wish to experience pleasure and avoid pain, both consciously and unconsciously, is responsible for all human behavior. Variations of psychological hedonism have been argued by Sigmund Freud, Epicurus, Charles Darwin, and John Stuart Mill.

Strong psychological hedonism (that is to say, absolutely all behavior is based on avoiding pain and gaining pleasure) has generally been dismissed by today's philosophers. There is countless evidence to show that this is just simply not the case (like when a seemingly painful act is done out of a sense of duty), and it is generally accepted that decisions can be made based on motives that do not involve seeking pleasure or staying away from pain.

## NORMATIVE HEDONISM

Normative hedonism, also known as ethical hedonism, is a theory that states that happiness should be sought out. Here, the definition of happiness is "pleasure minus pain." Normative hedonism is used to argue theories that deal with explaining how and why an action can be morally permissible or impermissible.

Normative hedonism can be broken down into two types, which use happiness to decide whether an action is morally right or wrong:

1. **Hedonistic Egoism:** This theory states that people should act in the way that best suits their own interests, which would, in effect, make them happy. Consequences do not have to be considered (and have no value) for anyone other than the individual performing the action. However, under hedonistic egoism, desensitization needs to occur. If a person steals to suit his own interest, he should feel no difference between stealing from a rich or poor person.
2. **Hedonistic Utilitarianism:** This theory states that an action is right (morally permissible) when it produces or most likely produces the largest net happiness for everyone that it concerns. Utilitarianism thus pertains to the happiness of everyone who could be affected and not just an individual (everyone is given equal weight). According to hedonistic utilitarianism, stealing from the poor would be morally impermissible because it would leave the poor person unhappy and the thief would only be slightly happier (and if he feels guilty, his happiness is even less).

Though hedonistic utilitarianism seems like an appealing theory because it treats everybody equally, it has faced criticism for holding no intrinsic moral value to things like friendship, justice, truth, etc.

Consider this example: A child is murdered in a small town. The town believes your best friend is the murderer, but you know he is innocent. If the only way to promote the greatest happiness for everyone is to kill your best friend, according to hedonistic utilitarianism, you should do so. It doesn't matter that the killer is still out there—all that matters is the largest net happiness, which would be realized by killing whoever the town believes is the suspect.

# PRISONER'S DILEMMA

What choice is the right choice?

The prisoner's dilemma is one of the most famous illustrations of why people might act the way they do. The prisoner's dilemma is actually a part of game theory, a field in mathematics that looks at various outcomes from situations that require strategy. However, the prisoner's dilemma goes far beyond simply being a mathematical notion. It raises important questions about morality, psychology, and philosophy, and can even be observed in the real world.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA

In 1950, RAND Corporation hired mathematicians Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher as part of their ongoing investigation into game theory and how it could be applied to global nuclear strategy. Based on the puzzles that Flood and Dresher created, Princeton professor Albert W. Tucker tweaked their work to make it more accessible to the masses, thus creating what is now known as the prisoner's dilemma.

## THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA

Two prisoners, prisoner A and prisoner B, are taken into custody. The police do not have a sufficient amount of evidence, so they decide to put A and B in separate rooms. The police officers tell each prisoner