

Ethical Hedonism (A-B)

Ethical hedonism holds that pleasantness is the only quality because of which an experience is good or valuable. A good action is an action which leads to a pleasant experience as its consequence, and the right action at any moment is the one which will lead to more pleasant experiences or, as we commonly say, to greater pleasure than any other action which is possible for the agent at that particular moment. Ethical hedonism does not merely say that one of the factors which makes an action good is the pleasantness of the experiences which it brings about, for this is a view which many moralists, who are not ethical hedonists, would adopt, ethical hedonism holds strictly that no consequence of an action except pleasantness and unpleasantness which we may call its hedonic consequences, have the slightest relevance whatever to the goodness of the action.

Ethical hedonism is ~~the~~ a theory of ethics telling how men ought to act and what

men ought to desire. In this way it differs from psychological hedonism, which is a theory of psychology holding that men always do these actions which have pleasant consequences and do have such natures that they can desire nothing but pleasantness. Many ethical hedonists have been at the same time psychological hedonists, and if they had succeeded in demonstrating the truth of their psychological theory, they would certainly have refuted all other theories than egoistic hedonism.

Few hedonists, however, have accepted egoistic hedonism as their sole theory. There are two kinds of ethical hedonism —

- a) egoistic hedonism, which holds that each man ought to seek his own maximum pleasure.
- b) universalistic hedonism, more commonly known as utilitarianism, which holds that each man ought to seek the maximum pleasure of all human beings, or even of all beings capable of experiencing pleasantness and unpleasantness.

In estimating the amount of pleasantness caused by an action, two factors need to be taken into account, the intensity or degree of pleasantness caused, and the duration or length of time that the pleasant experience lasts. It is difficult to estimate the comparative importance to be given to these factors.

Bentham suggested other factors which should be taken into account in comparing two pleasant experiences with regard to their pleasantness,

namely (a) certainty or the degree of probability of the pleasantness resulting from the action, (b) proportionality or the number in time of the pleasant result, (c) frequency or the power of the pleasant experience, (d) further pleasant experiences in its train, (e) purity or freedom from intermixtures with unpleasant experiences, and (f) extent or the number of persons affected by it. In our practical consideration of the result of an action, the probability of a particular result of an action occurring is a very important factor. Proportionality is important only in so far as it affects probability. Frequency and purity are really secondary factors determining the intensity, for there is less unpleasant experience to reduce the surplus of pleasantness over unpleasantness.

A moralist may adopt either hedonism for any one of three reasons. (a) He may hold that the terms 'good' and 'pleasant' have exactly the same connotation or meaning, so that the one may be used for the other indifferently, or more probably he will hold that 'good' has the same meaning as 'production of pleasant consequences'. If this view were correct it is difficult to understand how people come to argue as to whether hedonism is a true theory or not, and their discussions are not merely discussions as to the meaning of terms. Prof. Broad calls the ^{profounder} holder of this theory an analytic hedonist, (b) A morality may hold that, while the terms 'good' and 'productive' are not identical in

in meaning, the experience of the human
race has shown that good actions do, as a matter
of fact, produce pleasant consequences. Such a
hedonist has still to face the fundamental
question of what it is that makes a good
action good, or he may take, as such hedonists
often do, a sceptical attitude to the possibility
of this question being answered. In Prof. Broad's
terminology, this morality is an empirical
synthetic hedonist. (c) A morality may hold
that while 'good' and 'productive of pleasant
consequences' are not identical in meaning, yet
they stand in a necessary relation to one
another. A good action does not merely as a
matter of fact produce pleasant consequences,
from its very nature it must produce pleasant
consequences. If we reject analytic hedonism
as obviously misrepresenting the nature of
ethical argument this becomes the ground of
hedonism most worthy of a critical examina-
-on. Prof. Broad calls it a priori synthetic
hedonism.