



## Cārvāka Hedonism Compared with That of Aristippus and Epicurus.

**Siddhartha Sadhu**

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy Visva-Bharati,  
West-Bengal, India.

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**Hedonism** is a philosophical system that holds that people are motivated primarily by the production of pleasure and happiness and the avoidance of pain. It takes pleasure as the ultimate standard of morality. It is the highest good, the supreme end of life. A person chooses his or her actions on the basis of how much pleasure and pain the actions will foreseeable cause.

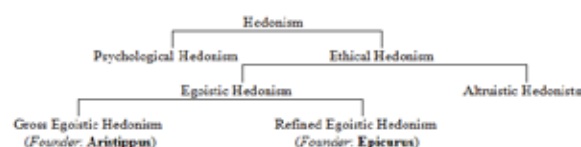
The theories of hedonism have taken many different forms. It has been held by some that man naturally seeks pleasure and avoids pain. So pleasure in some form is always the ultimate object of desire. We desire everything as a means to pleasure. Pleasure is the normal object of desire. This theory has been called a '**Psychological hedonism**', because it simply affirms the seeking of pleasure as a psychological fact. Jeremy Bentham (1741-1832) and J.S. Mill (1806- 73) are also the advocates of this theory. On the other hand, some hedonists confine themselves to the view that men ought to seek pleasure always, i.e., we do not always seek pleasure but ought to seek pleasure. This theory is regarded as **Ethical hedonism**. For him pleasure is the reasonable object of our desire. Ethical Hedonism is also divided into two types: **Egoistic hedonism** and **Altruistic hedonists**. Egoistic hedonists believe that the happiness of the individual is paramount, while altruistic hedonists feel the happiness of all people is the most important. Again, Egoistic hedonism is of two types: **Gross Egoistic Hedonism** and **Refined Egoistic Hedonism**

and evil; death is the end of both body and soul and should therefore not be feared; the gods neither reward nor punish humans; the universe is infinite and eternal; and events in the world are ultimately based on the motions and interactions of atoms moving in empty space. Epicurus, who believed that mental and social pleasures were more important than physical pleasures. Epicurus also believed that pain and self-restraint had value by virtue of sometimes being necessary to health and also by providing even more pleasure through moderation.

'In Indian philosophy, Cārvāka ethics may be called hedonism. For him according to them, pleasure is the highest goal; pleasure is the ideal of life. Some Indian thinkers speak of the four ends (puruṣārtha) of human life, namely, wealth (artha), pleasure (kāma), virtue (dharma) and liberation (mokṣa). Of these four, Cārvāka accepts wealth (artha), pleasure (kāma) and rejects the last two. They think that, wealth (artha), pleasure (kāma) are the only rational ends that a wise man can toil to achieve. But pleasure is the ultimate end; wealth is not an end in itself, it is good only as a means to pleasure. But why, why they think that pleasure and wealth are the ultimate end of human life? What is the logic of him?

Actually, the entire philosophy of the Cārvāka may be said to depend logically on their epistemology or the theory of knowledge. Their epistemological views are perception is the only source of valid knowledge and at a time they criticize the possibility of other sources of knowledge like inference and testimony which are regarded as valid pramāṇas by many philosophers. Now, if perception is the only reliable source of knowledge, then we can rationally assert only the reality of perceptible objects. According to this view, matter (earth, water, air, and fire) is the only reality, and at the same time, the reality of God, eternal soul, heaven, hell, final liberation, life before birth or after death, and any un-perceived law (like adṛṣṭa) cannot be believed in, because they are all beyond perception. The existence of soul as distinct from the body is not given in our sense-perception, and hence, the Cārvāka rejects the reality of the soul. Liberation is meaningless, the expression "freedom of the soul from the shackles of the body"---conveys no sense. It is non-sensical. They also say, liberation is an impossible or suicidal end, and no wise man should work for it. Virtue and vice are arbitrary distinctions made by the scriptures whose authority cannot be rationally accepted. Liberation can neither mean a condition here in this life, from which all sorrows and affliction have been negated, since this condition is impossible and unreal. God, whose existence cannot be perceived, fares no better than the soul. The material elements produce the world, and the supposition of a creator is un-necessary. Because, the Cārvāka states that the material elements themselves have got each its fixed nature (svabhava). It is by the nature and laws inherent in term that they combine together to form this world. There is thus no necessity for God.

Since God, soul, heaven, virtue, vice, merit, demerit, actions, and their fruits, life before birth or after death, and



**Aristippus** (c. 435—356 B.C.E.) was a follower of Socrates, and the founder of the Cyrenaic school of philosophy. Like other Greek ethical thinkers, Aristippus' ethics are centered on the question of what the 'end' is; that is, what goal our actions aim at and what is valuable for its own sake. Aristippus identified the end as pleasure. This identification of pleasure as the end makes Aristippus a hedonist. He taught that we should not defer pleasures that are ready at hand for the sake of future pleasures. He was willing to break the social conventions of his day and engage in behavior that was considered undignified or shocking for the sake of obtaining pleasurable experiences. Aristippus also believed that long-term pleasures were more valuable than short-term ones.

**Epicurus** (341 BC----270 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher as well as the founder of the school of philosophy called Epicureanism. For Epicurus, the purpose of philosophy was to attain the happy, tranquil life, characterized by peace and freedom from fear—and the absence of pain—and by living a self-sufficient life surrounded by friends. He taught that pleasure and pain are the measures of what is good

any un-perceived law (like *adrṣṭa*) etc. have not existence, consciousness is destroyed with the destruction of body, and there is no soul surviving the death of the body; Life in this world is the only life; Our existence is confined to the existence of the body and to this life; we must, therefore, regard the pleasure arising in the body as the only good thing that we may obtain. Attainment of maximum pleasure in this life and avoiding pain as far as possible is the goal of human life. An unqualified egoistic hedonism is the ethical ideal of the Cārvāka, who sings---Eat, drink and be merry, for past is dead and gone, death comes to all closing our lives, 'while life is yours, live joyously; none can escape death's searching eye. (*yāvājivet sukhaṁ jivet ṛṇiṁ kritvā ghṛtaṁ pivet. Bhasmibhuta-sya dehasya punaragamanam kutah.*)

But it is hard to believe that all the Cārvāka subscribed to such a gross egoistic view. There is reference in the ancient text to two classes of Cārvākas---gross (*dhūrta*) and cultural (*suśikṣita*). There is evidence in the second chapter of *Kāma sūtra* written by Vātsyāyana, who is regarded as a cultured Carvaka, though he believes in the realities of God and future life that the cultured Carvakas, at least, regard higher or refined pleasure as the highest end. Vātsyāyana mentions three ends of human activities, namely virtue (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*) and pleasure (*kāma*), which should be cultivated harmoniously. He, however, regards virtue and wealth as means to pleasure, which is the supreme end. But the element of refinement in Vātsyāyana's theory consists in his emphasis on self-control (*brahmācārya*), spiritual discipline (*dharma*) as well as urbanity (*nāgarika-vṛtti*). Without these, human enjoyment of pleasure is reduced to the level of beastly enjoyment. Vātsyāyana asserts that giving the senses their due satisfaction is necessary for the very existence of the body. But at the same time he urges that the sense must be educated and disciplined through training in the sixty four fine arts. The training in the fine arts should be given only after a person has devoted the earlier part of his life to absolute self-continenence (*brahmācārya*) and to the study of the Vedas and other branches of learning. Such a view as this cannot be called gross hedonism. It should rather be called "refined hedonism".

#### Similarities: Cārvāka and Aristippus:-

The Cārvāka philosophy resembles in many respects the philosophies propounded in Greek by Aristippus and Epicurus. Aristippus was the founder of the Cyrenaic school, according to which pleasure was the highest end of human life. Aristippus did not admit any qualitative difference among pleasures. The pleasure advocated by him as the *summum bonum* was pleasure arising out of gratification of the senses. We ought to do what brings pleasure in its wake. In this there is no need of taking the consequences into consideration. Individual enjoyment of pleasure should be the highest end. One should not let go the present moment in anticipation of future pleasure. Our motto should be: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may not live". Actually they say, the present is certain, the past is gone, the future is uncertain. So enjoy pleasure of the present moment disregarding the past and the future. Enjoy the maximum of bodily pleasure with the minimum of pain disregarding the next world-----this is the gross egoistic hedonism like that of Carvakas. The Cārvāka also speaks in a similar strain: "Rather a pigeon today than a peacock tomorrow. While life remains, let a man live happily, let him feed on

ghee (butter) even though he runs in debt. When once the body becomes ashes, how can it even return again". So, Aristippus advocate gross egoistic hedonism like Carvakas.

#### Similarities: Cārvāka and Epicurus:-

According to Epicurus also, the soul is a kind of bodily substance. The soul, which is composed of the atoms of four fundamental elements, remains distributed throughout the body. Likewise the Cārvāka holds consciousness to be evolutes of the body which is composed by the combination of the gross elements of earth, water, fire and air. It should however be remembered that even with materialism as the foundation of the Epicurean philosophy and consequent denial of God and future life, Epicurus admits that pleasure arises from the performance of virtuous actions. Virtue should, therefore, be cultivated. By "pleasure" Epicurus understands permanent and refined pleasure. He exhorts people to avoid those pleasures which bring pain in their wake, and to undergo pain at the present if by doing so they may attain permanent pleasure. It is evident that pleasure lasting the whole life cannot be the sensual pleasure, which is only transitory. Intellectual pleasure alone is lasting. Hence Epicurus regards intellectual pleasure as the only desirable end. Actually, philosophy was, for Epicurus, the art of living, and it aimed at the same time both to assure happiness and to supply means to achieve it. His philosophy falls into two parts, viz., the "physics" and the "ethics". The object of ethics is to determine the end and the means necessary to reach it. He distinguished two kinds---a 'kinetic' pleasure of sense and a 'static' pleasure, consisting in the absence of pain. Epicurus says, freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind is the ultimate aim of our happy life.

The traditional Cārvāka view hardly resembles such a form of hedonism as advocated by Epicurus. Vātsyāyana, known as a culture (*Suśikṣita*) Cārvāka. The best positive evidence of refined or culture hedonism is found in the ethical philosophy propounded by Vātsyāyana in the second chapter of the *Kāma-Sutra*. Vātsyāyana has advocated the harmonious cultivation of the three ends of human activity, namely, virtue (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), and pleasure (*kāma*) which will give rise to refined pleasure or enjoyment. The element of refinement in his hedonism consists in his emphasis on self-control (*brahmācārya*) and spiritual discipline (*dharma*), as well as urbanity (*nāgarika-vṛtti*), without which human enjoyment of pleasure is reduced to the level of beastly enjoyment. He further asserts that the satisfaction of the senses is necessary for the very existence of the body (*sarirasthiti*), like the satisfaction of hunger. But he also maintains that the senses must be educated, disciplined and cultured, through training in the sixty-four fine arts. This training should be given only after a person has devoted the earlier part of his life to absolute self-continenence and study of the Vedas and the other subsidiary branches of learning. He points out that without culture human enjoyment would be indistinguishable from beastly pleasure. So, we find, then, that Vātsyāyana represents Indian hedonism at its best. It is perhaps to thinkers of this kind that the name "Cultured Hedonism" (*Suśikṣita-Cārvāka*) was applied. Hence, Vātsyāyana, like Epicurus, is an advocate of refined hedonism.

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