

## **Aristippus & Others**

He was born in Cyrene, an Athenian colony on the coast of North Africa in what is now Libya. The exact year of his birth is not known; but it was roughly 425 B.C.. He completed his education in Athens as one of the followers of Socrates. Perhaps this was where he learned that an ethical theory ought to be philosophically defensible. And perhaps Socrates, by the example set by his own way of life, made it impossible for Aristippus to deny that self-mastery, and more particularly, mastery over pleasure and pain, is a good trait of character. Aristippus was the first of Socrates' pupils to charge a fee for lessons in philosophy. He was invited to the court of Dionysius the elder as one of several resident philosophers. Eventually he returned to Cyrene, raised his daughter, Arete, and founded the sect of philosophers known as Cyrenaics. He died sometime around 366 B.C.

### **I**

#### **Epistemology and ethics**

Aristippus' ethics is based, in part, upon his epistemology. He maintained that the only things we can know are certain facts about our own present feelings. We cannot get knowledge about the real out-there-in-the-world causes of these feelings. I can be certain that I am now aware of yellowness or sweetness; but I cannot be sure that the cause of this feeling is a daffodil or a spoonful of honey. There is, Aristippus thought, solid evidence that a person can have yellow sense-impressions even though the cause of these feelings is not, as we would ordinarily say, yellow, and that he can have an impression of sweetness caused by something we would call non-sweet. The peculiar experiences of those who suffer various diseases of the eyes and tongue back up this claim. Most, if not all, English speakers use the term "yellow"; but Aristippus would say that the word may be associated with very different inner feelings. The idea appears to be that

each person can only know what he himself, or she herself, means by such terms.

Presumably you have your impressions of yellow, and I have mine; we have no reason to think that these feelings are alike. You cannot experience my impressions, nor can I experience yours.<sup>[1]</sup>

It is conceivable that Aristippus held that we are totally ignorant of everything other than our own impressions. Perhaps he thought we cannot even make good guesses, or bets, about their causes.

Given this view as to what we can and cannot reasonably believe, it may be easy to think that what I should aim at in life must be something found in feelings I can have right away. It may seem silly, for example, to aim at becoming a loyal follower of Zeus. I cannot be even half-way sure that there is a Zeus, and, even if he does exist, I can't form any reasonable guesses as to what, if anything, he wants me to do.

Some feelings are pleasant (these are smooth and gentle inner motions); other feelings are painful (the motions are violent); and still others are neither painful nor pleasurable (the motions are too weak to be perceived). According to Aristippus, feelings of the first sort - particular pleasures - are the only things that are genuinely good. And feelings of the second sort - particular pains - are the only things genuinely bad. Feelings of the third kind are neither good nor bad. I do not know whether Aristippus held that pleasure is absolutely good, or that it is only good relative to the person who enjoys it. My own view is that he should have been a relativist in this regard.

Nevertheless, I take him to have been a realist, or at least an objectivist of some sort, and a rationalist. On his view, it is simply an objective, absolute, fact that each person should pursue his, or her, own immediate pleasure. This is the only way of living that makes sense.

It is commonly believed that happiness (eudaimonia - having it made) is the thing to aim at. Aristippus taught that the idea of happiness is a confused idea of a favorable total of all the particular pleasures and pains achieved over the whole course of one's life - past, present, and future. As such, it gets its appeal from the attractiveness of those component pleasures and the repulsiveness of those pains; but they, and they alone, are good or bad in themselves.

If we were to ask Aristippus what made him think pleasure the final good, he would, I think, give three reasons:

(1) From childhood on instinct tells us to go for various pleasures. That is to say, they are naturally good.

(2) When we feel a real pleasure, we don't (while we are feeling it) look for anything more.

(3) The thing we least want is pain (pleasure's opposite).

Those who avoid pleasure are perverse. (Had Aristippus lived 600 years later he might have pointed to the Christian hermits.) Mastery is not to be found in that direction:

It is not the man who abstains who is pleasure's master, but rather the man who enjoys pleasure without being completely carried off his feet. Just as in the case of a ship or a horse one does not show one's mastery by refraining from use, but by knowing how to direct them whithersoever he will...[\[2\]](#)

Given a choice between a pleasure and a pain in the immediate future an unperverted, unprejudiced, person will choose the pleasure. And that is just what one ought to choose in this sort of situation. The choice may be 'disgusting', 'shameful', 'wicked', 'immoral', or the like, as judged by some arbitrary, and unnatural, code of social behavior; but that is unimportant.

What should one do when faced by a choice between two pleasures? Apparently Aristippus held that pleasures cannot differ in pleasurable-ness. What on earth did he mean by this? It's especially puzzling given his claim that physical pleasures are better than mental ones and physical pains worse than those of the mind.[\[3\]](#) In any case, it is clear that some pleasures are more pleasurable than others; for example, there are people who have enjoyed both of two movies, A and B; but have enjoyed A a lot more than B. If Aristippus denies this, he is just wrong. The truth appears to be that one should choose the more enjoyable of two competing pleasures, other things being equal. How could this be wrong?

Should one ever sacrifice a present pleasure for a superior pleasure somewhere in the distant future? Aristippus believed that one should live for the pleasure of the moment. It is foolish to work and sacrifice for remote and dubious rewards. Furthermore, the elaborate calculations and maneuvering which are required in order to accumulate future pleasures are, in themselves, irksome.

Epicurus (341 - 270) subsequently claimed that the chief and best pleasure is a state of painlessness - a peaceful undisturbedness. Aristippus, and the Cyrenaics, would have rejected this vehemently. Only particular pleasures are good. Since both pleasure and pain are motions, the mere absence of pain cannot, itself, be pleasure. People in dreamless sleep feel no pain; but one could hardly call that state pleasurable.

Pleasure, on the Cyrenaic view, sometimes (always?) involves ideas and beliefs. Simple sensations, as such, are not enough. So, for example, we take pleasure in hearing a skillful actress play the part of someone in misery; but the same behavior would make us unhappy if we thought the misery was genuine.<sup>[4]</sup> It is our interpretation of what we see and hear that makes the difference.

A wise person feels no envy, and no love, because these feelings require mistaken beliefs. Presumably the beliefs in question are, for example, that such and such a person is happier than I am (happiness is a bogus ideal), or that so and so is obtaining more pleasures and fewer pains (one cannot know such things), or that only such and such a person can give me pleasure.

That, in rough outline, is Aristippus' theory of ethics.

## II

### A Puzzle

There is a hint of inconsistency in Aristippus's ethics. Many of his sayings, and many of the stories about him, show admiration for, and cultivation of, a kind of inner freedom and self-mastery. Thus, for example, when he was jeered at for living with Lais (a famous whore) he said, "I possess her, but I am not possessed by her; the best thing is to have pleasures without being their slave, not to be pleasureless." And, once, at the baths he departed wearing the shabby old cloak of Diogenes ("the dog" - one of the founders of

the Cynic school of philosophy). Diogenes, who insisted on dressing like a member of the working class, rushed out demanding his cloak back. Aristippus remarked that Diogenes was so concerned about his reputation, he would rather go cold than wear purple.[\[5\]](#) On being asked how Socrates had died, Aristippus said, "As I myself would wish to die". When he was going into a prostitute's house with some young friends, he noticed that one of them was blushing. "It is not going into such a house that's bad", he said, "the bad thing is not being able to go out." How is this admiration for freedom and self-mastery to be reconciled with the claim that only immediate pleasure is good? Notice too that this admiration takes us well beyond present sensations.

Perhaps Aristippus would say that self-mastery and inner freedom are 'good' simply as means to pleasure. They aren't good in themselves. Like money, they give us a better chance to obtain pleasure and avoid pain in the future. This is not to say that one should make a painful effort to acquire self-mastery, inner freedom, or wealth. But, if one has these things, or can get them easily, one is lucky.[\[6\]](#)

### III

#### Plato's Attack

Plato was deeply opposed to the idea that physical pleasure is the thing to aim at (i.e. 'the good'). He attacks this idea in various ways, and, apparently, gradually changes his theory of pleasure as he works on the problems that emerge. In the Gorgias he offers a 'restoration' theory. When an organism is at its best - all systems in their proper balance - there is no pleasure and no pain. A pain is a disruption of the natural balance. For example, in order to operate properly, an animal needs food. The animal's feeling of hunger is an awareness of a disturbance in its natural condition. A pleasure, on the other hand, is, or attaches to, a quick restoration of the animal's proper state.[\[7\]](#) Plato apparently takes this theory to show that pleasure is a process, and one necessarily mixed with, or requiring, pain. Presumably one's good can't be inextricably tangled up with pain, and can't be a process. So, pleasure can't be the real goal of life.

There are various possible arguments here. One might go something like this:

- (a) Pleasure is inextricably mixed with pain.
- (b) Pain, by hypothesis, is an evil (i.e. something to be avoided).
- (c) So pleasure is inextricably mixed with evil.
- (d) But good cannot be inextricably mixed with evil (i.e. something to be avoided).
- (e) So pleasure can't be good.

I find premise (d) unpersuasive. Why shouldn't my good be intertwined with evil? Of course I don't aim at the evil, but at the good with which it is mixed. Perhaps this is the best the actual world has to offer.

A second argument might go like this:

- (a) Pleasure is a process.
- (b) The goal of a process is better than the process itself.
- (c) Hence the goal of pleasure is better than pleasure itself.
- (d) The goal of pleasure is something attainable, namely, the natural state of balance.
- (e) One ought to aim at the best that is attainable.
- (f) Hence, we ought to aim at the natural state of balance, rather than at pleasure itself.

Again, there is at least one questionable premise. Why should we suppose that every process has a goal which is better than the process itself?

There is, however, another line of thought which seems to support Plato's contention. The restoration theory suggests that every pleasure must be paid for by a counter-balancing pain. In order to find pleasure in drinking a glass of cold water, we must first experience the misery of being hot and thirsty. And perhaps it is being assumed that the pain is as bad as the pleasure is good - net worth zero. If this is so, there is some absurdity in making pleasure one's goal. A person who is in proper balance presumably experiences neither pleasure nor pain. Surely it would be foolish to set off in pursuit of some pleasure if the pursuit will require the pursuer to experience the counter-balancing pain? Perhaps, then, the state of natural balance is that at which we should aim.

## Aristotle's Attack on the Restoration Theory

Aristotle tries to prove that the restoration theory is unacceptable. Here are four of his arguments.

First, a normal pleasure is not a process, and some pleasures do not even involve processes. Normally, a pleasure, i.e. that which is enjoyed, is an unimpeded activity of the natural state, not a restoration of that state.

...it is not necessary that there should be something else better than pleasure, as some say the end is better than the process; for pleasures are not processes nor do they all involve processes - they are activities and ends; nor do they arise when we are becoming something, but when we are exercising some faculty. And not all pleasures have an end different from themselves, but only the pleasures of persons who are being led to the perfecting of their nature. This is why it is not right to say that pleasure is perceptible process, but it should rather be called activity of the natural state, and instead of 'perceptible' 'unimpeded'.[\[8\]](#)

Is Aristotle right? If all pleasures were, as he says, activities of the natural state, it would seem to follow that those who are not in that state can't enjoy anything. But this is plainly false. A woman who is hungry can, nevertheless, take pleasure in listening to music.

Does this show that Aristotle is mistaken? I don't think so. As I understand it, Aristotle would maintain that the woman's organs of hearing are in their natural state even if her stomach isn't. It's an activity proper to her organs of hearing that's being enjoyed.

Here is a more troublesome case. Surely a man who is convalescing from a serious illness can enjoy his convalescence? Isn't this a situation in which the object of enjoyment (i.e. the pleasure) is a perceptible process of restoration to the natural state? Aristotle apparently admits that this pleasure is a restoration; but he insists that such pleasures are abnormal and exceptional - like a starving man's enjoyment of really nasty food.[\[9\]](#)

It seems to me that Aristotle is absolutely right in denying that our ordinary pleasures are all restorations of the natural state. But I cannot accept his claim that all such pleasures are activities (given that activities are being contrasted to processes). A carpenter can enjoy building a house - and this is a process, since it can be accomplished, rapidly or

slowly. Furthermore, an animal enjoying the climactic sexual pleasure enjoys a sensation as well, perhaps, as an activity. Aristotle comes close to recognizing this latter point; but he misidentifies such sensations as unimpeded perceptions by touch.[\[10\]](#)

Let's get back to Aristotle versus the restoration theory. His second objection is that pleasure itself (i.e. the enjoying of something) is not a process. A process can be completed, or gone through, quickly or slowly, gradually, or precipitously. Pleasure is not like this. A man can convalesce quickly or slowly. And he may enjoy his convalescence. But he cannot speed up or slow down his enjoyment. Of course one can become pleased quickly; but this doesn't hasten the pleasure itself.[\[11\]](#)

Third, Aristotle claims that the restoration theory is based upon a confusion between what some body undergoes, and what some animal (human or non-human) experiences. The restoration of an organism's natural balance is something that happens to a body. But the restorationists apparently take pleasure to be such a restoration. Hence, they must hold that pleasure is something a body feels. This, presumably, is absurd. A process occurring in an animal's body may be that which is being enjoyed, but it cannot, itself, be the enjoyment. The woman who has gone without eating for a long time may enjoy stuffing herself; but the enjoyment is something she, and not her body, experiences. Similarly, a surgical procedure (something being done to a patient's body) may be accompanied by severe pain; but we must not confuse the pain with the procedure.[\[12\]](#)

Fourth, the restoration theory apparently developed out of an analysis of the pleasure of eating when hungry. Here the theory looks good. The pleasure counter-balances the previous pangs. But many pleasures do not fit this model at all. The pleasure of learning a new song, or a new language, is not the restoration of a physical imbalance, or the undoing of a previous misery. Nor, for that matter, does the model fit many sensuous pleasures - the pleasure of smelling a daffodil, or hearing the sounds of a flute. Or, again, the pleasures of memory - thinking fondly of one's childhood - or of daydreaming about the future, are not necessarily preceded by pain.[\[13\]](#)

Aristotle's arguments against the restoration theory are decisive. He forces us to admit that there are many pleasures which just aren't undoings of painful imbalances.

## Plato's Final View

In the *Philebus* Plato offers his most sophisticated discussion of pleasure. His target is probably neither Aristippus nor any of the other Cyrenaics. The likelihood is that he is trying to refute Eudoxus.<sup>[14]</sup> Plato argues, again, that pleasure cannot be what makes a life good; but the grounds upon which he makes this claim are new. He now sees that there are radically different kinds of pleasures and pains. There are physical pleasures and intellectual pleasures; there are 'pure' pleasures and pleasures that are [essentially?] mixed with pain. (Are there 'impure' pains? Well, of course, if there are impure pleasures, there must be those pains which are entwined with the pleasures. And, I suppose, some pains are essentially linked to pleasure. Thus, for example, the pain of losing something one loves is essentially hitched to previous pleasure in regard to that thing.) No single, simple, model fits them all. Some physical pleasures and pains (e.g. thirst and the pleasure of quenching thirst) suggest the restoration model. But other pleasures (e.g. the pleasure of smelling a daffodil) require a different picture. It follows, of course, that all simple theories purporting to give a full account of pleasure and pain are mistaken. "Pleasure" and "pain" are family resemblance terms. No single common factor unites all pleasures (or all pains) and constitutes their essence.

If pleasures and pains are as motley a crowd as Plato claims, then it is quite possible that we cannot scale pleasures and pains on one and the same scale of 'pleasurableness/painfulness'. How many pleasant glasses of wine add up to as much pleasure as the pleasure of exploring the moon? Perhaps no such comparison can be made. But this sort of scaling seems an essential part of any long-term, calculative, go-for-pleasure theory.

In a way, this leaves Aristippus untouched, for, as I've said, he apparently held (mysteriously) that pleasures don't differ in pleasurableness (hence, again, they can't be scaled). And, I suppose he would say, even if they could be scaled, long-term calculations would be an unpleasant waste of time - we cannot know the future.

Plato offers other, less serious, shots at hedonism. Pleasure, he claims, has no limit. We might call it 'open-ended'. In this, pleasure is like size, and unlike, say, equality, or, as we now know (but Plato didn't) coldness. Given a pleasure, it is always possible that it, or

something else, should be more pleasurable. Given an object of a certain size, it is always possible to imagine something bigger. According to Plato, no open-ended phenomenon can, by itself, constitute the good, because it 'lacks measure'.[\[15\]](#)

It seems to me that 'my good' may mean either 1) my proper goal (that at which I should aim), or 2) that which I ought to try to maximize. When I ask myself whether or not 'my good' is attainable, I suppose I am wondering whether or not my goal can actually be achieved. Now, I take Aristippus to say that I ought to try to maximize my own immediate pleasure. This is not a specification of a goal. Similarly, when a Sumo wrestler is told to gain as much weight as possible, no goal has been provided. Aristippus is free to agree with Plato that pleasure is not a proper goal, since pleasure is open-ended. Pleasure, he might say, is one's good just in the sense that it is that which one ought to try to maximize.

In another attack, Plato asks us to imagine a life of intense pleasure unaccompanied by even a spark of intelligence - unaccompanied by any beliefs, any recognition of the pleasure, or any memory of it.[\[16\]](#) Surely that life would be improved by the addition of some intellectual activity? But if this is so, pleasure, by itself, cannot be the good. The argument might be written out like this:

- (a) Pleasure plus intellectual activity is better than pleasure alone.
- (b) If A plus B is better than A alone, then B is good.
- (c) Hence, intellectual activity is good.
- (d) But intellectual activity is something other than pleasure.
- (e) Hence, pleasure is not the only good.

I can't imagine the life Plato describes. How can there be pleasure without intellectual activity? Even the pleasure of having one's back scratched requires awareness. As I understand it, a clam or a star-fish has no pleasures. Perhaps what we should imagine is a kind of life in which intellectual activity is reduced to the minimum compatible with pleasure. That kind of life, Plato must hold, would be more desirable (the amount of pleasure remaining the same) if it included a large amount of thought, memory, and

awareness. The life of a pig would be better if pigs thought more. Let's assume, then, that the argument should be rewritten in some such way as this:

(a) A life containing  $n$  units of pleasure plus a small amount of intellectual activity would be better if it contained  $n$  units of pleasure plus an increment in intellectual activity.

(b) If  $A$  plus  $B$  would be better than  $A$  alone, then  $B$  is good.

(c) Hence an increment in intellectual activity on the part of one whose life contains  $n$  units of pleasure plus a small amount of intellectual activity would be good.

(d) But such an increment would not be an increment in pleasure.

(e) Hence, pleasure is not the only good.

I guess Aristippus would reject premise (a). It seems to rest upon an intuition Aristippus just doesn't share. In any case, premise (b) has a very shifty look.

## VI

### Aristotle's Attack on Hedonism

Aristotle, like Plato, offers objections to hedonism. He held that pleasure is good or bad depending upon the merit of the object of enjoyment. Furthermore, he thought, it is at least logically possible that there should be good activities which are not pleasures at all. Here are four of his arguments.

First, a true friend is quite different from a flatterer. The friend wants what is best for us, while the flatterer just tries to give us pleasure. We praise the former and condemn the latter, on the grounds that there are crucial differences in their goals - what they are trying to do to, or for, us. Apparently we believe that what is good for us and what will please us are very different things.

Aristippus might reply that a true friend hopes that we will develop such virtues as self-mastery and courage, and does sometimes, for example, expose us to unpleasant truths. But these things are done so that we may learn to find more pleasure in life. They are means and not ends in themselves. The true friend, no less than the flatterer, seeks our pleasure.

Second, Aristotle says, no one would choose to go through life with the mind of a child, even if all sorts of childish pleasures were guaranteed. Presumably Aristotle takes this to show, or suggest, that a mature mind is something, other than pleasure, which is good. Given that self-love would prevent us from choosing to live out the remainder of our lives with childish minds is this because we count a mature and cultivated mind as something good in itself, or because we regard the 'higher' pleasures (which that sort of intellect permits us to experience) as more valuable than the pleasures available to children? Clearly Aristippus cannot say that a mature and cultivated mind is good in itself. I imagine he would say a cultivated mind is good because it betters our chances for pleasure. Given the certainty that we would be happier with childish minds, we should choose to remain childish. But, in this chancy world, how could one be certain of such a thing?

Third, there are faculties and traits we would choose to have even if their exercise yielded no pleasure at all. Aristotle mentions seeing, remembering, knowing, and the virtues. Perhaps these faculties and traits necessarily yield pleasure; but that is beside the point. We would choose to have them even if, impossibly, their exercise were not enjoyable.[\[17\]](#)

This argument brings us to a choice we must make in constructing a theory of prudence (alias, 'self-love'). Does self-love sometimes urge us to perfect ourselves even though that perfection gives no increase, and perhaps even some decrease, in pleasure? One who loves an incomplete work of art, hopes that the work will achieve its own special kind of perfection. But we ourselves are, in some ways, like incomplete works. Shouldn't we hope, then, for more perfect characters? Of course Aristippus would say that virtues, abilities, and faculties are only valuable as means to particular pleasures. But are they only valuable in this way?

Aristotle's fourth argument goes like this. Some activities are good (i.e. desirable) and others are bad (i.e. undesirable). A desire for a certain activity is good if the activity is good, and bad if the activity is bad. The goodness or badness of the desire depends entirely upon the goodness or badness of the activity. But a desire for an activity is much less closely linked to the activity than is the pleasure that goes with that activity. In fact it is difficult to distinguish the enjoyment of an activity from the activity itself. (The

pleasure of playing ping-pong can hardly be separated from the playing of ping-pong. I don't mean they are the same thing. But, on the other hand, they are not two things each of which could exist by itself. The pleasure is not like a buzz that goes on in addition to the playing.) So, the goodness or badness of the enjoyment of an activity must also depend entirely upon the goodness or badness of the activity. Presumably, then, there are good pleasures and bad.[\[18\]](#)

Obviously, Aristippus would turn Aristotle's claim around. The merit of an activity, he would say, derives from the pleasure or pain in its performance. If Alice enjoys digging in the garden, then digging in the garden is a good thing for Alice to do - i.e. it is good with respect to her because she enjoys it. Aristippus would reject the idea that Alice's enjoyment derives whatever desirability it has from the desirability of her digging. No activity, in his view, is good or bad in itself.

## VII

### A Minor Clarification or Modification

Some animals [e.g. amebas] may be too simple to have either pleasures or pains. If there are such creatures then, of course, their behavior is not governed by pleasure and pain. Then too, there may be animals that can feel physical pain, but are not complex enough to be capable of feeling pleasure [e.g. snails?].

[It is easy to find oneself thinking that animals must be governed by pleasure and pain. What else could motivate them? But, for example, one can imagine a creature that simply swims towards light - it is 'wired' to do so. If we like, we can say it 'likes' sunlight, or 'doesn't like' darkness; but in this context, presumably, that would just mean it characteristically behaves in this way.]

Can we imagine a creature that naturally operates as Aristippus says we should? Could there be a creature that is driven this way and that by its own immediate pleasures and pains? Think of the relevant 'pleasures' and 'pains' as buzzings and boomings. Very crudely, the creature operates as follows: If there is any buzzing, the creature casts around trying to make it increase or, at least, continue. If there is any booming, the creature tries to make the booming stop or, at least, diminish.

It is perfectly clear that Aristippus does not think we are creatures of this sort. He holds that most people do not act as he thinks we should. We make elaborate calculations about the remote future. We pursue 'happiness', as distinct from particular pleasures. We make sacrifices for the sake of 'honor' or 'morality'. Aristippus urges us to give up these foolish ideas and begin to live for the pleasures of the moment.

Read with as little charity as possible, this means that one should never sacrifice a present pleasure in order to avoid a future misery or attain a greater pleasure. I am inclined to think that Aristippus was not so stupid. The Cyrenaics, as I have said, held that nothing is just or unjust, honorable or disgusting, by nature, but only by custom and convention. Nevertheless, they maintained that a good Cyrenaic is deterred from 'wicked' deeds by the penalties that would be imposed and the prejudices that would be aroused by doing such things. Clearly, then, some Cyrenaics (if not Aristippus himself) must have held that it is sometimes wise to sacrifice a present pleasure or accept a present misery in order to make the near future better.

Suppose Sally is in bed with a headache. If she gets up to take some aspirin, the effort will make her feel worse, but, in twenty minutes, the headache will be gone. If she remains in bed, the pain will last for hours. Let's assume that Sally is not a self-hater. Nor is she anxious to mortify her flesh. In fact, her only aim is to maximize her own pleasure and minimize her own pain. Should she get up? The answer is obvious.

I conclude from this that the uncharitable version of Aristippus' theory is just plain false. If the general theory is to be made half-way plausible it will have to be expressed in such a way as to permit poor Sally to get up and take some aspirin. We are not driven this way and that by our immediate pleasures and pains. Sally could get up, even though she knows that would make the pain worse for a while. She may well be motivated by the hope of ending the pain in twenty minutes. A plausible version of the Aristippean theory must say this is permissible.

#### A 'Reformed' Version of the Theory

Let's pretend that pleasures and pains are fairly simply, measurable, states. Their intensity is measured in 'Hurgs'. The over all score of an experience is measured in 'Squrgs'.

According to the Reformed version of the Cyrenieac theory, we try to formulate rough estimates of the score in Squigs offered by the various courses of action open to us. When those alternative futures are more or less certain and obvious, the theory tells us to do the thing that has the best estimated score taking the long view. (Sally must get up and take some aspirin. The Reformed Cyrenieac theory seems to yield the right answer in this case.)

Unfortunately, reformed versions of the theory face problems the uncharitable version can avoid. For example, we are now working with some sort of a scale of pleasures and pains. [The pain that Sally will feel if she gets up is small enough to be outweighed by the beneficial effects of the aspirin.] A serious Aristippean will have to worry about Plato's suggestion that pleasures and pains form a motley crowd, because this may mean we cannot find the sort of scale the theory requires.

So where are we? Well, the uncharitable version of Aristippus' theory is plainly absurd. But the theory can be interpreted in more plausible ways. Historically, naturalistic ethics began in this neighborhood.

Relevant Reading:

J. C. B Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982.

Gilbert Ryle, *Dilemmas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1960, ch. IV.

[1] An outline of his epistemology is to be found in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, The Loeb Classical Library, Vol. II, pp. 103-109.

[2] Aristippus ap. Stob. *Florileg.* 17, 18: quoted from Charles M. Bakewell's *Source Book in Ancient Philosophy*, Charles Scribner's Sons, p. 143.

[3] Diogenes, p. 473.

[4] See Diogenes, p. 90.

[5] This story comes from E. Mannebach (ed.), *Aristippi et Cyrenaicorum Fragmenta*, Leiden, 1961, fr. 32c. Of course a purple cloak would be the mark of a rich and powerful man..

[6] There is reason to think that Socrates sometimes argued that *arete* (goodness, virtue, excellence, distinction) gets its value from its usefulness. See Plato's *Meno* 87 d-e, and *Gorgias* 474 d.

[7] See Plato's *Gorgias* 493d-497.

[8] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1153a.

[9] *Ibid.* 1152b-1119a.

[10] *Ibid.* 1117b 24 - 1119a 21.

[11] *Ibid.* 11173 a 29 - 11173b 7.

[12] *Ibid.* 1173b 7 -12. But see *Rep.* ix 584c. Here Plato says that pleasure reaches the soul through the body.

[13] *Ibid.* 1173b 13-19. Plato insists upon the same point - *Philebus* 503 52b. For some reason that escapes me, Aristippus denies that there is pleasure to be found in memory or in thinking about the future.

[14] J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor present the case for this claim in *The Greeks on Pleasure*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982. See especially ch. 7.

[15] See *Philebus* 26c.

[16] *Ibid.* 60b-e.

[17] These three arguments are to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1173b 31 - 117a 12.

[18] *Ibid.* 1175 b 24 - 1176 a 3.