

**THE ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF PLEASURE, FEELING,
AND HAPPINESS IN MODERN
NON-HEDONISTIC SYSTEMS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649422425

The Ethical Significance of Pleasure, Feeling, and Happiness in Modern Non-Hedonistic Systems by William Kelley Wright

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

WILLIAM KELLEY WRIGHT

**THE ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF PLEASURE, FEELING,
AND HAPPINESS IN MODERN
NON-HEDONISTIC SYSTEMS**

The University of Chicago
FOUNDED BY JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER

THE ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PLEASURE,
FEELING, AND HAPPINESS IN MODERN
NON-HEDONISTIC SYSTEMS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND LITERA-
TURE IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

(DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY)

BY
WILLIAM KELLEY WRIGHT



CHICAGO
1906

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	7
II. THE PERFECTIONISTS	9
A. Descartes	13
B. Malebranche	17
C. Spinoza	20
D. Leibniz	23
E. Wolff	26
III. THE BRITISH NON-HEDONISTS	30
A. Attempts to Save Morality by Widening the Conception of Pleasure	33
A. Shaftesbury	33
B. Hutcheson	35
C. Hartley	38
D. Hume	40
E. Adam Smith	42
B. Systems Revealing an Increasing Divergence between Morality and Pleasure, and a Gradual Repudiation of Pleasure as Exclu- sive Motive	43
A. Butler	43
B. Price	45
C. Reid	47
D. Dugald Stewart	48
E. Thomas Brown	49
F. Later Intuitionists	51
IV. MODIFIED PERFECTIONISM	53
A. Mendelssohn	53
B. Tetens and Schmidt	55
V. KANT	57
A. The Early Rationalistic Period	57
B. The Period of English Influence	58
C. From the Inaugural Dissertation to the Critique of Pure Reason	60
D. The Ethical System in its Final Form	64

	PAGE
VI. SEVERAL NINETEENTH-CENTURY NON-HEDONISTS	72
A. Fichte and Hegel	73
B. Schopenhauer	79
C. Herbart	81
D. Lotze	82
E. Green	85
F. Nietzsche	89
VII. CONCLUSION	92

I. INTRODUCTION

During the Middle Ages such a question as what significance should be attributed to pleasure in a moral system could hardly have arisen. We may distinguish a kind of feeling and happiness in the ecstasy of the Mystics; but pleasure in the modern sense of the term could hardly have been regarded as of much moral value, even if it were not reprobated as indissolubly bound up with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In modern times, however, the situation has been quite different. A considerable proportion of the leading ethical systems have frankly made pleasure the necessary motive to moral action, and many also have gone so far as to make it also the criterion of moral values, and to declare that no action is of moral significance except so far as it furnishes pleasure to a sentient being. In addition to the ethical writers who thus are to be classed as hedonists, there is another large class of writers who, while refusing to make pleasure the standard of morality, nevertheless seem aware that it is too prominent a feature of our conscious life, and too intimately connected with the springs to action, not to possess some significance.

It is with this second class of writers that we have to do here, and it will be the effort of this dissertation to show that pleasure—and, as arising out of pleasure and connected with it, feeling and happiness—do serve a position of some importance in their thought, to a much larger degree than perhaps is generally understood. While, naturally enough, most non-hedonistic writers discourse at greater length against pleasure and happiness in the way that they are employed by the hedonists, than they do in the positive employment of them in their own systems, nevertheless they do make use of them in a very explicit way, and to a considerable extent. In other cases one is able to detect a large implicit recognition of feeling and happiness as integral features of moral action.

The non-hedonistic writers here to be considered fall into three principal groups: (1) the rationalistic perfectionists; (2) the British moral sense writers, and their intuitionist successors; (3) Kant, and some of the idealists who have followed him.

The ethical conceptions of the perfectionist school were derived by its founder, Descartes, largely from ancient sources—Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans all furnishing contributions. These contributions

were not simply stuck together into a crude eclecticism, but molded into an integral system. Self-realization, under the modified form of perfection, became the moral ideal, virtue was the practice of this morality, pleasure was the consciousness of successful progress in its attainment, and happiness was the final reward associated with its achievement. For a time this combination seemed to work with entire satisfaction; but later a growing sense of a larger moral content, upon the one hand, and the narrowing of the content which could be included within the conception of perfection, upon the other, forced a divergence that could not be overcome. Pleasure, perfection, and duty no longer could be regarded as coincident.

Among the British writers the development was similar, but more rapid. Their observation was not limited to the use of a formal conception and a mathematical method. Shaftesbury laid rather more emphasis upon the feeling side of perfection than Descartes had done; and the greater attention to the feeling side of morality which was given by his successors soon disclosed a serious divergence between its demands and those of duty. At first the attempt was made to overcome this by widening the conception of pleasure so as to include the pleasures of the moral sense, and of sympathy; but after Butler the coincidence was usually not regarded as immediate, and arguments were devised to minimize the divergence as much as possible, and postulate an ultimate reconciliation in a future life.

Kant inherited from his perfectionist predecessors the desire for a rational principle of morality, while at the same time his predecessors in England awakened him to the prominence of pleasure and feeling in action, and to their worth as moral content. After failing to find a rational principle in pleasure on account of its contingent and empirical nature, he was forced to abandon its employment as a moral criterion, but he continued to allot to it such a part of the ground which it had previously occupied in his thought as more important claims did not preclude. The successors of Kant occupied various attitudes. Fichte, Hegel, and T. H. Green continued to regard pleasure as contingent and empirical, but still as possessing certain functional significance in moral action. Schopenhauer derived pessimistic conclusions from the failure to find adequate rational principles in pleasure. Schopenhauer, Herbart, and Lotze discovered a significance for morals in the pleasures of aesthetic contemplation. Last of all, Nietzsche found a certain functional significance in pleasure, as representing a primitive form of moral judgment.

II. THE PERFECTIONISTS

PLEASURE, FEELING, AND HAPPINESS DEFINED IN TERMS OF PERFECTION

The men of the Renaissance were in search of a wider, fuller life. They wished to enjoy all of the good things of this world. Pleasure, of course, seemed to be one of these good things, and so it had to be related in some way to the highest good. They also wished to avail themselves of all the best things in ancient philosophy. Descartes accordingly snatched upon the Aristotelian conception of self-realization, combined with it the Stoic conception of virtue, and made the union of the two, which he called "perfection," coincident with Epicurean pleasure and happiness, rightly understood. Malebranche went on to develop more fully the religious side of the doctrine. Thus there was at the outset a tendency to comprehend as much as possible under the conceptions of perfection and happiness.

On the other hand, the new method introduced by Descartes finally tended to narrow the bounds of moral activity. Nothing could be moral, which could not be deduced from the concept of perfection. As the mathematical method became applied more rigidly, the contents of perfection became more limited, and only those pleasures could still be regarded as moral which could be included within these contents. As happiness continued to be identified with perfection, only certain classes of pleasures could be included within it. Furthermore, as the interests of the school were intellectual rather than practical, the cognitive aspects of pleasure received their attention, rather than its real nature as affection.

To the whole school, perfection is the *summum donum*. Happiness is the reward which leads us to seek perfection, and so is extremely closely connected with it. The general tendency—and it is a strong one—is to define both happiness and pleasure in what seem to us purely cognitive terms. As their psychology did not know our modern tripartite and bipartite divisions, their happiness and pleasure had volitional characteristics, as well as the affective characteristics which we attribute to them; but their chief interest and attention were almost wholly devoted to ascertaining the function, and determining the value for moral action, of the cognitive elements which they attributed to pleasure.

Happiness is "the consciousness of all the perfection of which we are