

# Hedonic Motivation - Seeking pleasure/reward and avoiding pain/punishment

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 29, 2023 at 9:46 AM

This [Wikipedia article: Hedonic Motivation](#) is interesting:

Quote

**Hedonic motivation** refers to the influence of a person's pleasure and pain receptors on their willingness to move towards a goal or away from a threat. This is linked to the classic motivational principle that people approach pleasure and avoid pain,<sup>[1]</sup> and is gained from acting on certain behaviors that resulted from esthetic and emotional feelings such as: [love](#), [hate](#), [fear](#), [joy](#), etc.<sup>[2]</sup> According to the hedonic principle, our emotional experience can be thought of as a gauge that ranges from bad to good and our primary motivation is to keep the needle on the gauge as close to good as possible.<sup>[3]</sup>

Historically, approach and avoidance motivation have been linked to the hedonic characteristics of pleasure and pain.<sup>[1]</sup> The root word hedonic comes from the Greek word for “sweet”, which means relating to or characterized by pleasure.<sup>[1]</sup> This is interesting because even though hedonic motivation incorporates the pursuit of pleasure as well as the avoidance of painful situations, the concept has been traditionally linked to the positive connotation of pleasure.<sup>[2]</sup> For example, hedonic goods are bought so that the consumer may gain pleasure and enjoyment from the good,<sup>[4]</sup> and value experiences are also viewed as hedonic experiences.<sup>[1]</sup>

And a [Frontiers article: Truth, control, and value motivations: the “what,” “how,” and “why” of approach and avoidance](#) (which I have not yet finished reading but wanted to include):

Quote

The hedonic principle—the desire to approach pleasure and avoid pain—is frequently presumed to be *the* fundamental principle upon which motivation is built. In the past few decades, researchers have enriched our understanding of how approaching pleasure and avoiding pain differ from each other. However, more recent empirical and theoretical work delineating the principles of motivation in humans and non-human animals has shown that not only can approach/avoidance motivations themselves be further distinguished into promotion approach/avoidance and prevention approach/avoidance, but that approaching pleasure and avoiding pain requires the

functioning of additional distinct motivations—the motivation to establish what is real (truth) and the motivation to manage what happens (control). Considering these additional motivations in the context of moral psychology and animal welfare science suggests that these less-examined motives may themselves be fundamental to a comprehensive understanding of motivation, with major implications for the study of the “what,” “how,” and “why” of human and non-human approach and avoidance behavior.

The hedonic principle has existed for at least as long as we have had the capacity to write down our thoughts about ourselves, being recorded, for example, in the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. In modern times, the principle reached its fullest expression as a foundation for human psychology and ethics in [Bentham's \(1789/2007\)](#) influential *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*: “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain*, and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do” ([Bentham, 1789/2007](#)).