

CHAPTER TWO

CAKES AND ALE

IT IS NOW our business to find a starting-point from which to conduct our exploration into philosophy. At once we find ourselves in a curious dilemma: there is no place to begin. In order to understand any phase of philosophy, it is necessary first to understand all the other phases; for, as we have seen, philosophy must take everything into consideration. Metaphysics and ethics, for instance, are so interrelated that each is essential to the other. This may be made clear by an analogy. If we were studying a suspension bridge instead of all reality, we might approach it from the point of view of ethics by asking wherein the bridge is valuable and which parts of it are more valuable than others. From observation we might conclude that its greatest value, its "highest good," is the floor or pavement, because by using that people actually get across the river. As for the steel cable draped across the piers, we might even ignore that entirely, regarding it as a mere convenience or ornament. This mistake would arise because we had failed to consider the structure of the bridge. A structural examination would at once show us that the cable is of paramount importance, since the bridge

would collapse without it. On the other hand, we cannot understand the structure without some knowledge of the purpose for which it is to be used. Ideally we should advance on all fronts simultaneously.

As there is no real escape from this dilemma, we must make the best of it and arbitrarily decide to begin with ethics as the more definite and immediate problem. A student of philosophy probably desires to understand life in order to live it better, and this motive is ethical. Let us assume, therefore, that the universe exists, that it is somehow organized, and that we can know something about it. If so, we may turn our attention to the striking fact that some things are apparently better than others. Some persons get along more successfully, are more admired, seem happier than others. Some things are of more use to human life than others: there seems to be a clear difference in value between a hospital and a rubbish heap. Philosophy must inquire what makes these differences. It must not accept apparently obvious value; for example, a conqueror winning rich new oil-fields for his country may seem to be its greatest asset, but may really be a liability. Rather, philosophy must take everything into consideration. It must ask whether values are unrelated, or whether they can be unified into a general theory of worth.

At this point philosophy and literature are especially close together, for literature is primarily concerned with human values. This does not mean that a chief function of literature is ethical or that it should be judged on ethical standards. Indeed, when a novel makes too many direct moral statements it is frequently ineffective. But it should and does analyze the effect of certain kinds of conduct on human beings, and thus throws light on ethical problems.

There have been many ethical theories and combinations of them. Our purpose is not to cover them all, but to choose those best illustrated in literature. Let us discuss four theories, three Greek and one Oriental in origin. The aim of each of

them is to discover the "highest good" or what is best for human welfare. They make, respectively, the following assertions.

1. The highest good springs from the senses and emotions, and seeks the ideal of pleasure or happiness.
2. The highest good springs from the will, and seeks the ideal of duty.
3. The highest good springs from the intellect, and tries to achieve wisdom, or the rational balancing of all factors in life.
4. The highest good springs from one specific emotion, and seeks the ideal of love or altruism.¹

The first theory is called hedonism, the second Stoicism, the third Socratic ethics, and the fourth Christianity. We shall consider them in this order.

When the straitlaced steward Malvolio rebuked Sir Toby Belch for reveling the night away in drunken singing, Sir Toby replied, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"² So saying, he uttered the perennial protest of the hedonist against all moralists and killjoys. Moral codes and social customs come and go, but the pleasures of the senses remain. The welfare of civilization, the ultimate purpose of life, the hope of heaven—all are vague and uncertain ideals; but the warm glow of satisfaction following a good dinner is an immediate value that no argument can take away. Though it may be short-lived, yet for the time being it is irrefutable. So with all direct activity of the senses. Whether it takes the form of eating, love-making, vigorous exercise, enjoying a sunset, dancing, or listening to music, such activity appeals to many people as something fundamentally good—perhaps the only fundamental good there is. Life

is not to be analyzed and worried about, but to be enjoyed. This is the simplest and most attractive of all ethical theories: the highest good of life is pleasure.

Before we examine the good and bad points of hedonism, let us approach it by means of a famous poem, *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. Most people know this poem in the English version written by Edward FitzGerald in 1859, a book which our Victorian grandparents considered rather daring.³ FitzGerald was more than a mere translator, since he added ideas of his own, tried to render the spirit instead of the letter, and created a haunting new verse form which has ever since been associated with this poem. At first it seems unlikely that such a retiring classical scholar, the friend of Tennyson and Thackeray, should have been interested in a glorification of pleasure; yet he lived at a time when the expansion of science had raised doubt of established standards, and his own character was hedonistic in a quiet way. Indeed, a biographer remarks, "FitzGerald's habits were absolutely simple; his only plan of action was to do what he liked and not be bothered," which is always one aim of the hedonist.

Omar himself was a Persian scientist who lived about the time of the Norman Conquest, a time when the Seljuk Turks had overrun Persia and had made life there insecure. From the Sultan's court, where he was fortunate in obtaining harborage, he observed how brief and uncertain was the happiness of his friends. He was far from a useless pleasure-seeker, being a skillful mathematician, astronomer, and reformer of the calendar. Yet his researches merely convinced him of the futility of speculation and the transitory nature of every human experience. In this mood he wrote his series of epigrams (*rubaiyat* means simply "quatrains"), connected only by general subject matter and similarity of tone. If you read FitzGerald's adaptation for the first time,⁴ you will feel that it contains beautiful music and imagery but little coherence; ideas seem to be thrown out at random, without

plan. We need, therefore, to pick out several of these ideas from the separate quatrains.

Throughout much of the poem we notice that Omar is an agnostic; that is, he believes that it is not possible for anyone to find the meaning of life. There are two possible ways of trying to find it: through the exercise of reason, and through supernatural aid in the form of appeals to the gods. Neither is successful. Saints and sages alike have been trying it for centuries, but all have died with their quest unfulfilled. In his youth, Omar confidently sought for knowledge, only to find that no one could explain why we are born or what our destiny is:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
 Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
 About it and about: but evermore
 Came out by the same Door where in I went.⁵

Though he was able to solve a number of specific problems, to learn about planetary motions and mathematical processes, he could never unravel the only problem that mattered to him, the "master-knot of human fate." Nor was an appeal to the gods any more useful; the heavens that he studied so long offered no key to the value of human life.

And that inverted bowl they call the Sky,
 Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die,
 Lift not your hands to *It* for help—for *It*
 As impotently moves as you or I.⁶

Having failed in both respects, therefore, he concludes that the world has no discoverable meaning.

If this is true, there follows from it that in such a meaningless world what one does is unimportant. An action is significant only if it has lasting consequences; and to Omar such consequences are impossible because nothing endures. He was obsessed with the brevity of life and the finality of

death. The poem is filled with image after image of the ephemeral nature of human beings. Life is compared to a pebble cast in the sea, to a bubble of wine poured from a bowl, to a tent wherein a Sultan stays for a night and which is then folded up, to a mirage in the desert, to a patch of snow on the sand. Moreover, death not only terminates life, but reduces all men's actions to a common level. After a man is dead, what he did during life, whether he was good or bad, does not matter. FitzGerald expresses this idea in a striking stanza:

And those who husbanded the Golden grain,
And those who flung it to the winds like Rain,
Alike to no such aureate Earth are turned
As, buried once, Men want dug up again.⁷

That is, whether you were a miser or a spendthrift, your body after death must return to dust to be forgotten; people don't care to have you alive again, no matter what you were. Duty, kindness, and value can have no more meaning than life in general has.

What, then, remains to make life endurable? Only one thing: the immediate present moment as it exists each day. None of these moments will last; but as each one races by, you can snatch from it whatever of beauty or pleasure it may hold, then relinquish it gracefully and turn to the next one. This is the essence of pure hedonism, summed up in Horace's phrase *carpe diem*, "reap the harvest of the day," and recurring throughout history as man's compensation for failure to find meaning. "Take the cash and let the credit go," says Omar. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow may never come, but today there is poetry, wine, or love to be enjoyed. Do not waste it in repentance or worry. To make this idea vivid, Omar uses a number of symbols, of which the most important is his emphasis on wine as the best source of enjoyment and cure for worry. He who drinks can live in the present. Fears

and scruples have no power over him, secure in his reliance on "the Grape that can with Logic Absolute The Two and Seventy jarring Sects confute." Omar even inserts an ironical bow at the religious detractor of drinking. Did not God make the grape? he asks. God's creations should be used as blessings; and if we regard the vine as evil, then God who put it there is evil too. This symbol of wine is carried through to the last stanza of the poem, where Omar declares that the monument he desires after his death is an empty glass inverted at his place in the feast.

Though we shall return to Omar's poem for one additional idea, let us first examine the origins of his particular kind of hedonism. Though it has doubtless been a motive of human action ever since man descended from the trees, it was first formulated by a Greek named Aristippus, a contemporary of Plato. Since Aristippus lived in Cyrene, his followers are known as Cyrenaics. Their doctrine, similar to that implied in the *Rubaiyat*, is the most complete and uncompromising form of hedonism. Everything in life is uncertain, they declared, except individual sensations. General ideas, codes of conduct, public opinion, and the will of the gods are all ambiguous and problematical. Though a man may think he is following the gods' decrees, some new interpretation of those gods or some whim of the priesthood may prove him mistaken. Whether he is doing good or evil, whether he is acting for social betterment or injuring his city, he cannot be sure. But if he is eating a ripe fig, then he knows indubitably that he is experiencing a certain sensation of taste, and that the sensation gives him pleasure. Consequently, the only attainable certainty about life is that it consists of a series of pleasurable and painful sensations: on one side the delight of eating, drinking, exercise, sex, personal freedom, or the feeling of superiority; on the other the vexation of starving, abstinence, physical pain, slavery, or the feeling of inferiority. Every creature—animal, child, or adult

—instinctively seeks the pleasurable and avoids the painful sensation. Thus the simplest and most logical good, the natural manifestation of life, is to live pleasurably.

It will be noted that the Cyrenaics did not talk about "happiness." Pleasure is an individual, immediate sensation; happiness is a lasting state of mind which may or may not result from a series of particular pleasures. The possibility of attaining such a state the Cyrenaics considered very doubtful. It is better, they felt, not to seek for happiness, which depends on too many circumstances beyond one's control. Pleasure, on the other hand, is really certain; that is, each separate pleasant sensation, as it comes, is undeniably there. Though it may shortly vanish and be replaced by pain, yet at the moment nothing can remove it. As a person may remark while looking at the Grand Canyon, "Whatever happens later, nothing can take away this experience," so the Cyrenaic feels that by sacrificing happiness to the joy of the moment he has wrung an elemental certainty from a fickle and hostile universe. In short, his recipe for enjoying life is this: Instead of having a general plan or aim, adapt yourself rapidly to each sensation as it comes, and then give it up without regret for a new one.

Though the Cyrenaic view can be presented rather attractively, the reader should already feel that this first attempt to explore the value of life is a superficial one. One warning may be necessary: He should not object to it on the ground that it is selfish or immoral. That would be begging the question, for it would assume that one ethical standard is bad merely because it contradicts some other ethical standard. If we assume that unselfishness is the highest good, then any self-gratification is evil; but we have no right to assume this without investigation. Instead, we must inquire whether the Cyrenaic ideal is really possible of attainment, and whether it involves any self-contradiction. Can one base his life on a series of separate pleasurable sensations? To a certain extent

everyone does so; we cannot deny that the individual pleasures of each day are an important factor that makes life worth living. Yet when we attempt to base our entire ethical conduct on this standard, at least three objections arise.

The first objection is that pleasures cannot be constant or even very frequent; there are long gaps between them. If the value of life depends on the succession of pleasures, then those gaps become painful. And there is no adequate way of filling them, for if the hedonist relies on memories of the preceding joy or anticipations of the next one, he is beginning to hedge from his assertion that only sensations themselves have value.

In the second place, even when pleasures come they may not satisfy us; in fact, the more we have the less likely we are to appreciate the next one. Unfortunate as this may be, any ethical theory must take account of it. Our senses quickly grow dulled and demand ever more stimulation. Food must be seasoned more and more highly to give us the tang we insist on. When we buy a new car, it must be slightly larger than the old one to give us the same feeling of pleasure. Having grown satiated and emotionally exhausted, we find that the series of pleasures must be cumulative, not equal, if they are to have the desired effect. Since there is a limit to such acceleration, the Cyrenaic standard is not a lasting one.

The third objection is the most serious. Any honest attempt to practice the standard convinces most people that it is actually self-destructive. Free indulgence in pleasure inevitably results in pain, so that the more effectively a hedonist achieves his ideal the more certain he is to defeat it. This comes about in two ways, by natural reaction and by the effect on other persons. The first point need only be mentioned. It is obvious that overeating, drunkenness, and sexual promiscuity bring immediate or eventual pain and disease; and as soon as the hedonist raises the question of which is more important to him, pleasure now or pain later,

he is casting doubt on his whole system. Still worse is the fact that several people want the same pleasure. When the hedonist insists on having a particular sensation at the present moment, he comes into conflict with others who oppose his desires and injure him in order to defend their own pleasures. The hedonistic standard is no real solution of anything.

From these weaknesses in the Cyrenaic theory arises the paradox that the extreme hedonist, basing his life on the search for pleasure, almost never attains happiness; and the harder he seeks, the more certain he is to fail. There is a peculiar sadness and bitterness about hedonistic literature. If we look again at the *Rubaiyat*, we find that the whole poem is suffused with sorrow. FitzGerald called it "a desperate sort of thing, unfortunately at the bottom of all thinking men's minds." Omar, far from having illusions as to the value of the brief pleasures, resents the necessity of relying on them, and feels deep sadness that life is as meaningless and transitory as he believes it is. He exclaims in sentimental longing:

Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!

Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of Things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire! ⁸

Cyrenaic hedonism, then, does not prove to be a satisfactory standard.

About a century after Aristippus, a new kind of hedonism appeared in Athens and endeavored to overcome these defects. Its leader was Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), a man who has suffered the curious fate of being identified with the very doctrines which he opposed. No one has been more maligned. To most people an Epicurean is an advocate of sensual

excesses, and an epicure is synonymous with a gourmand. When Chaucer describes a rich and hospitable country gentleman who loved good food so much that it fairly snowed meat and drink in his house, he calls him "a very son of Epicurus." In reality, Epicurus advised his disciples to live on bread and water. He was a cheerful, abstinent man, living quietly in his famous garden, conversing with his friends and writing books on philosophy for his students and the general public.⁹ He was more truly a philosopher than the Cyrenaics, since his system includes a complete metaphysic as well as an ethic.

Epicurus's standard, in brief, was not pleasure, but happiness. Instead of being based on a series of momentary sensations, life should be planned so as to gain the greatest total happiness; if necessary, one should forego a pleasure now in order to attain a greater satisfaction later. Though ultimate pleasure is still the criterion, Epicurus finds it in an almost mathematical formula: seek the maximum remainder of pleasure minus pain. This point of view led him to two interesting conclusions.

It led him, first, to define happiness in terms that would have seemed ludicrous to the Cyrenaics. To him, happiness meant merely the *absence of pain*. If a man is alone in a wilderness with no source of active joy, but with enough food and exercise to keep him in reasonable health, then, feeling no pain, he is happy. In his letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus writes, "When we do not feel pain, we no longer need pleasure. . . . When we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasure of profligates and those that consist in sensuality, as is supposed by some, . . . but freedom from pain in the body and trouble in the soul."¹⁰ Consequently we should be content with little: "It is not the stomach that is insatiable, as is generally said, but the false opinion that the stomach needs an unlimited amount to fill it."¹¹ We should live in retirement, avoiding what Epicurus calls "the prison of affairs and politics."¹² We should find satisfaction not so much in

present experiences as in memory and imagination. This withdrawal into a completely peaceful state is the Epicurean ideal of *ataraxy*. It is obvious that if such an ideal evades some of the difficulties of early hedonism, it straightway encounters new ones. Persons of normal vitality are not attracted by it; they are dubious of a standard that urges them to avoid human existence. A man may be actuated either by the desire for pleasure or by a sense of duty; but this seems to fall between the two and miss the values of both. Though Epicurus frowns on the man who would commit suicide, he seems to be guilty of a kind of mental and moral suicide.¹³ His withdrawal from life eventually kills hedonism and leads the ethical inquirer toward the ideal of stoicism.

The second conclusion to which Epicurus came proves equally unsatisfactory. From his general notion of passive happiness, he properly goes on to discuss the means of attaining it. What principles should govern our actual conduct? Since the aim is to avoid trouble, we should refrain from doing anything which calls attention to ourselves. Therefore obey the laws as they exist, follow the social customs of those around you, and do not question the conventional moral code of the state. This results in the paradox that the "immoral" Epicurus is the most "moral" of philosophers, simply because to violate the code arouses opposition and risks trouble. A man should not steal or murder, not because there is anything wrong in it, but because detection would result in trouble and pain. In Epicurus's words:

Injustice is not an evil in itself, but only in consequence of the fear which attaches to the apprehension of being unable to escape those appointed to punish such actions.¹⁴

This conclusion nullifies the whole system. If the purpose of ethics is to scrutinize moral codes to find values behind them, and if Epicurus refuses to scrutinize or question a moral code,

then he provides no satisfactory ethics. He deliberately declines to take everything into consideration as a philosopher must do. We must conclude that neither the active nor the passive phase of Greek hedonism is an adequate point of view toward values. Let us turn next to two samples of hedonism in later literature.

Since Greek times hedonistic ethics has undergone many reversals of popular favor, ranging from the sensuality of the early Renaissance to the horror with which the seventeenth-century Puritans regarded pleasure. Hedonistic periods have taken various forms, but have generally been brought about by a sudden discovery that something which had formerly been valued was really of little importance. The Renaissance, for example, marked the end of an era of otherworldliness in which the fate of one's soul in the next life had seemed more vital than the conditions of living in the present one. When that point of view was discarded in favor of an emphasis on life here and now, the first reaction was naturally an attempt to gain as much pleasure as possible from the world.

Of these hedonistic periods, none is more interesting than the decade of the 1920's, bounded by the first World War on one side and the depression of 1929 on the other. At this time the breakdown of standards formerly regarded as important is especially clear. Not only had the moral codes and progressive ideals of the nineteenth century merely led to disaster, but the high hopes engendered by wishful thinking during the war itself were soon demolished after the Treaty of Versailles. Nothing in the past was worth saving. At the same time came a decade of sudden scientific advance and material prosperity. People had the money and machines to do anything; but no one knew what ought to be done, or whether anything was worth doing. The result was that sense of meaninglessness in which hedonism flourishes.

No writer has been better fitted to record this era than Aldous Huxley. Nephew of Matthew Arnold, grandson of Darwin's disciple Thomas Henry Huxley, brother of the biologist Julian Huxley, he comes from a famous literary and scientific family. He attended Eton and Oxford, survived the war, had long experience in journalism, and mastered a fictional technique by writing three successful novels between 1921 and 1926. He therefore reached literary maturity as the postwar decade was ending, just in time to paint a brilliant picture of it in one of the most interesting modern novels, *Point Counter Point* (1928).

Reading this book is an enjoyable and stimulating experience for anyone. The reader is carried along by its rapidity of movement, the original twist of its ideas, and the vivid humor of its situations. There is little consecutive story; individual strands of action appear and disappear surprisingly, dispersing the reader's attention among a large cast of characters, yet resulting in an unexpectedly clear picture of one stratum of upper-class English society. The people are hardly intended to be real. Some are caricatures; many are based on a single exaggerated trait such as hypocrisy, timidity, or love of power; only one is subtle or complex. But they are all excessively articulate, able to analyze their own motives and express their own philosophies to the last shade of meaning. Huxley is quite aware of this, and consciously sacrifices reality to create a novel of ideas. In this sacrifice the reader willingly follows; indeed, so great are Huxley's cleverness and satiric power that one is almost hypnotized into believing that these people might exist.

Though it is unfair to look at only one aspect of so rich a novel, our purpose is to study it as a treatment of hedonism. To understand this we must first examine two specific elements of Huxley's technique.

The first springs both from his family connections with science and from the temper of the age, which led many

people to turn to science as one phase of life in which some confidence might be placed. Science answered the call by solving some questions, but by raising many more serious ones to replace them. It explained many phenomena, and yet in the process of explaining them it succeeded in making them even more mysterious. This is reflected in Huxley. He has a tendency to regard events and people, mental and spiritual facts, as physical mysteries: first he reduces them to their lowest physical terms and then makes us see how astounding they are. We are not accustomed, for instance, to associate the emotional effect of music with its immediate physical source; Huxley does so when he writes:

Pongilconi blew, the fiddlers drew their rosined
horsehair across the stretched intestines of lambs;
through the long Sarabande the poet slowly medi-
tated his lovely and consoling certitude.¹⁵

Regarded in this way, life becomes incredible and almost meaningless; and, as we noted in Omar Khayyam, this sense of meaninglessness is a premise of hedonism.

The other device Huxley describes as the technique of "multiplicity," or the inclusion and sudden contrasting of many diverse points of view expressed by a crowd of characters. An ordinary human situation is made vivid by his describing how opposite types of people meet it under the most antithetical circumstances, as when a sudden memory of childhood flashes successively across the mind of an old man watching his grandson, a terror-stricken youth about to commit a murder, and a credulous girl seduced by a man she has considered a saint. Similarly Huxley plays in different keys on such themes as death, illicit love, and, most important for our purpose, hedonism. For one reason or another, and with varying degrees of success, many of his main characters consciously crave pleasure as the end of life. Two of them will illustrate the point: a Cyrenaic and an Epicurean.

There is no better picture of the modern Cyrenaic than the formidable Lucy Tantamount, the "refined and perfumed imitation of a savage or an animal," endowed by nature with every quality that would make possible a life of immediate pleasure. Her mother calls her a leprechaun, which, she remarks, is not an easy creature to rear. If she had any scruples, they were dissipated by the postwar collapse. Her avowed aim in life is to do what she likes and never to admit anyone's right to question her actions. What she likes is to experience one pleasant sensation after another without thought of the next day or the next minute.

Her success in doing this is extraordinary, for she has certain advantages which allow her almost to evade the difficulties confronting the Cyrenaic. One is her personal attractiveness and persuasive technique; when things grow tiresome because no thrill appears imminent, she can cajole or bully her friends into providing one. Most of them exert themselves to furnish pleasures, on the mistaken assumption that she will be grateful. Another advantage is that one of her most titillating varieties of pleasure is fighting to get her own way, so that the very opposition aroused by her selfishness is transformed into a new kind of diversion. She is a fully active hedonist, not taking her joys as they come, but setting out to wrest them from the world. The greatest fun, she declares, consists in breaking rules; perhaps the Victorians really had a better time than we, because they had so many more rules to break. "I simply won't let myself be bullied by the universe," she asserts. When she enters a love affair, it is to enjoy herself consciously, to enslave her lover, but never to become emotionally involved. If the lover is of some novel or interesting type, perhaps a stranger whom she meets on the street, so much the better; he will provide a new thrill. If he is too demanding, she discards him; if he is too submissive, she takes delight in arousing his hopes and then dashing them.

Here, then, seems to be the perfect Cyrenaic, the pleasure-seeker who attains her goal as part of the very search; but Huxley does not leave us with that impression. With all her advantages Lucy is not happy. She can never relax, for there is always the fear that tomorrow may provide no excitement. For her not prosperity, but boredom, is just around the corner, and the more loudly she asserts that the universe must not bully her the more uneasy she is that it might do so in spite of her. She develops a morbid fear of being alone; to associate with herself is tedious to her. She finds that all her diversions, to be satisfying, must grow progressively stronger, a process which cannot continue forever. When it culminates in her extravagant attempt to experience a new sensation by picking up the Italian boy on the street in Paris, we have the impression that nothing further is possible, and she quietly vanishes from the book a hundred pages from the end. Both here and in his other novels Huxley implies that the Cyrenaic cannot ultimately escape pain and ennui.

The Epicurean hedonist is more subtly developed, but represented as no more successful. He appears several times in Huxley's novels, portrayed so sympathetically that his creator must have a sincere affinity for him, yet realistically dissected as if the author were guarding himself against a tendency of his own. Usually this character is a scholar, subconsciously desirous of avoiding the responsibility of active life or human relations, and using academic research or writing to rationalize this impulse. An early trace of him can be seen in the young Theodore Gumbriel in *Antic Hay*. He is fully developed in Anthony Beavis, the hero of *Eyeless in Gaza*, and is mildly satirized in *After Many a Summer* in the portrait of the Oxford scholar Jeremy Pordage. But the best rounded and most human example is Philip Quarles in *Point Counter Point*.

Philip is a novelist who keeps a notebook. In it are recorded his plans for a new novel, his impressions of scenes

and people that may be grist for his mill, and his comments on life. These comments are exceedingly penetrating, for he is the most intelligent person in the book, so intelligent that he is a little terrifying. Everything in his environment he subjects instinctively to a cool, dispassionate analysis; his mind engulfs it, dissects it, and transforms it into an acute generalization. The accidental death of a dog leads him to compare animal with human morality; when a group of tanned young Englishmen pass him on a steamer deck, he remarks that the habit of exercise explains the British Empire.

In the realm of logical cerebration, then, Philip is at home and contented. But in the realm of personal relations he is uneasy. Though he can analyze emotions in others, he is unhappy when he feels them himself. This makes him an intellectual Epicurean; his happiness depends on a withdrawal into his own mind. A boyhood accident that prevented him from playing normal games increases this tendency, until he reaches the point where people make an impression on his mind but not at all on his feelings. He does not want his feelings touched or his routine interfered with. When his wife tries experimentally to draw him out of himself, even simulating flirtations with other men to arouse his jealousy, she finds him always good-humored and always impervious. In short, like a good Epicurean he cannot be bothered.

His failure to attain happiness comes, properly enough, as a kind of nemesis from his intelligence. He understands himself too well, for he realizes not only that his happiness depends on withdrawal from life, but also that it ought not to. He analyzes himself as mercilessly as anything else, and is aware that his intellectual labors are mere self-indulgence. Knowing what he should do, he lacks the stamina to make himself do it, and so inevitably despises himself. Reading about a species of female angler-fish that reduces its mates to parasites, he notes a striking analogy to Lucy Tantomount and to Riviera society; simultaneously half his brain is telling

him that he ought to show more feeling when his wife threatens to leave him. To show such feeling is difficult and a nuisance; he puts it off until tomorrow, and continues reading about angler-fish. In his own notebook he writes, "Shall I ever have the strength of mind to break myself of these indolent habits of intellectualism and devote my energies to the more serious and difficult task of living integrally?"

From these and many other portraits, it appears that although Huxley describes pleasure-philosophy with insight, he believes that hedonism is not enough; in his recent books he has even been turning to mysticism as one antidote for it. In *Point Counter Point* he introduces two characters who directly oppose pleasure as an end of life. Rachel Quarles placidly points out that the reason few people are happy in the modern world is that almost everyone tries to be and constantly wonders why he is not. "Why am I not having a good time?" is the question on everyone's lips. But, as Rachel remarks, happiness is like coke—a by-product in the process of making something else. Still more important is the character of Mark Rampion, the advocate of balance and sanity, who tries to relegate hedonism to its proper place by arguing for "wholeness of life." He distrusts everything that interferes with complete, natural human existence: artificial civilization, for instance, or romantic illusion, or prudery, or animalism. His philosophy is summed up in a conversation with Philip and two other men, curiously enough during a late dinner at a fashionable restaurant; this plea for health and sanity in a perverted world may fairly represent Huxley's own attitude at the time:

Nobody's asking you to be anything but a man. A man, mind you, not an angel or a devil. A man's a creature on a tightrope, walking delicately, equilibrated, with mind and consciousness and spirit at one end of his balancing pole and body and instinct

and all that's unconscious and earthy and mysterious at the other. Balanced. Which is damnably difficult. And the only absolute he can ever really know is the absolute of perfect balance.¹⁶

At this point we may well ask ourselves whether we have been fair to hedonistic ethics. Our conclusions in the main have been adverse. Alluring as the criterion of pleasure may be, it seems on theoretical grounds insufficient and in practice unable to produce a satisfactory life. Nevertheless one might argue that the cards have been stacked against these hedonists, in that each has been restricted in some rather serious way. Perhaps it was not their philosophies but their limited personalities that caused the difficulty. If Omar was a sentimentalist who bewailed the passing of spring and demanded that his happiness last forever, was that the fault of hedonism? Lucy Tantomount, war baby and pampered rich girl, temperamentally ruthless, would under any circumstances be bored with life and leave a trail of bitterness behind her. Philip Quarles's mind was so warped by his childhood accident that his behavior is hardly a fair test of any philosophy. Why judge hedonism by such abnormal practitioners?

The question may be answered in several ways. We might point out that any philosophy must to some extent be judged by the kind of people who are led to adopt it; if hedonism attracts distorted personalities, so much the worse for it. Or we might reply that all persons are hedged about by restrictions, whether external or psychological, and that a philosophy must be realistic about them if it is of any value. Ethics is an attempt to find the best sort of life, not for perfect abstract beings, but for man in his habit as he lives; and an ethical theory is weak just in so far as it fails to do this. Instead of answering thus, however, let us meet the argument directly by examining hedonism under the most favorable conditions, by asking what happens when it is given full sway in a person not bound by any ordinary restrictions at all. Let us imagine

someone who is free from the possibility of boredom, of remorse, of envy, of hatred, of conventional moral standards, of anything which impedes most people in their search for happiness. Then would a satisfactory life of pleasure be possible?

Such a person, of course, is hard to imagine; he is likely to become a mere idea, a non-human abstraction. Only a tolerant, flexible, and very human writer could create him successfully—in fact, hardly anyone but Shakespeare. In the character of Sir John Falstaff we have the ultimate test of hedonistic ethics.

Falstaff appears in the two parts of *King Henry the Fourth*, and his death is described in *Henry the Fifth*. Though his fame is so great that he ought to be the hero of the play, he was conceived as a mere piece of comic relief. Within two acts, however, he has so effectually relieved the serious historical material as to overshadow the whole play. Originally he was created to account for the unconventional behavior of Prince Hal, son to Henry IV and heir to the throne, who, instead of attending court functions like a proper prince, frittered away his time at the Boar's Head Tavern. Hal was not a wastrel, however; indeed, since he was to become in due time the hero-king of England, the audience must never be permitted to lose respect for him. The attraction at the Boar's Head must be so overwhelming as to lead anyone to ignore his plain duty. Therefore we have Sir John Falstaff, a knight of good family and formerly some wealth, now suffering from "consumption of the purse," reduced to making a living by shady deals with highwaymen, not yet quite in disgrace but equivocally poised between court and prison. Often Prince Hal solemnly assures himself that he is merely conducting a sociological experiment to see how the other half lives before taking up his serious duties, and that he can give up the Falstaff habit at any time; the fact is Falstaff bewitches him, and not until he actually becomes king is he able to emerge

from the fat knight's influence. And in the audience no one but the Malvolios can blame him.

When a reader of Shakespeare first meets Falstaff, the character may seem conventionally comic, even farcical. He is fat and unwieldy, subject to all the jokes made about fat people. He is often drunk. He is clearly a descendant of the old stock figure of the "miles gloriosus" or braggart soldier, cowardly at heart but lying vigorously concerning his deeds of valor. He is getting old (since he admits to being almost sixty, he must be somewhat more than that age), yet tries ridiculously to act young; one excuse he gives for robbing merchants on the road is that "young men must live." But from this stereotyped figure Shakespeare develops a complete high-comic portrait, which we must examine in so far as it illustrates hedonism.¹⁸

That Falstaff is a positive Cyrenaic hedonist needs no demonstration. He lives for active pleasure and loves it so intensely that we share his feeling in spite of ourselves. He has such vitality that he can enjoy every pleasure more vividly than the average person. With disarming gusto does he relish eating and drinking, wenching, robbing, talking, acting, playing jokes, observing life. Just as Omar used wine as a symbol of the world's delight, so Falstaff is at his most eloquent in praising it: it is a blessing, he says, because it stimulates a man's imagination and makes him a better conversationalist:

It ascends me into the brain; dries me there all the foolish and dull and crudy vapors which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes; which delivered o'er to the voice, the tongue, which is the birth, becomes excellent wit.¹⁹

This love of physical pleasure makes him typical enough of this philosophy, more attractive than most hedonists, perhaps, because somewhat wittier and less intense.

Falstaff, however, has one great advantage over all others of his kind: he is not impeded by any of the restraints which we have seen interfering with the ordinary life of pleasure. Other hedonists abide our question; Sir John is free. This point is so important that it must be examined in some detail. Falstaff is free because nothing that worries other people is of the slightest concern to him. He has no standards. He is impervious to ridicule, moral imperatives, demands of honor, truth, social position, or personal sensitiveness. This is not a pose; he honestly and instinctively does not care a hoot about any of these things. Consequently he, if anyone, might be a successful hedonist.

Take, for example, his attitude toward law and public morality. Moral standards are in the way of most hedonists, and must be despised or elaborately circumvented if they are not to spoil the fun. But they are part and parcel of Falstaff's fun, because they are such good jokes that they add to the gaiety of life. He is honestly indifferent to their serious implications; they mean nothing to him, and he is puzzled and amused that otherwise intelligent people should bother with them. When Hal mildly hints that purse-snatching is hardly the life for a gentleman, he answers, "'Tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation." The best example of his nonchalance in breaking the law appears when he conscripts a troop of soldiers for the war; walking along a country road, he thinks delightedly of the good day's work he has made of it. First, he drafted only gentlemen's sons and newly engaged bachelors who paid him a total of over three hundred pounds to let them off; then he collected as substitutes a crowd of tattered hoboos, discharged servants, and cheating tapsters who wouldn't need to be paid anyway. Truly a fair profit, and what was the difference? The men were only cannon fodder in any case, good enough to fill a ditch. His joy is so infectious that we feel the pleasure of a good trick to have meant more to him than the money.

Most people, again, are sensitive about honor and courage; a man's enjoyment of life is disturbed if he is called a coward. To Falstaff such matters mean nothing either way; he is brave or cowardly, whichever provides more fun at the moment. When the sheriff comes to arrest him for stealing, for which he might have been hanged, he walks behind the arras and calmly falls asleep. He is active in the battle, actually leading his motley regiment into the fight for the pleasure of seeing them shot. To be sure, some of his activity consists in skillfully feigning death when the Earl of Douglas attacks him; but, as he remarks, what do you expect? It was time to do something, or he might have been killed! Poinc sums it up by saying that Sir John will never fight longer than he sees reason; that is, he will fight as long as there is any fun in it, but when things get too serious, of course he runs away. Life should not be taken seriously. And so Falstaff recites his catechism of honor, this word to which men pay such homage. Can it set a leg? Can it do anything practical? No; for it is a mere word, nothing but air and no use if you are dead—or living either, for then slander will ruin it.

No less is he free from standards of truth. Many hedonists are willing enough to lie, but would prefer not to be found out. What makes people tell the truth is fear of not being believed if they have a reputation for lying. Falstaff does not care either way. It gives him as much pleasure to be caught up as to succeed in the lie; a good lie, like a good dinner, is one of the riches of life to be enjoyed. This is the point of the famous tavern scene in which the Prince and Poinc, having just robbed the robbers themselves of their plunder, trick Falstaff into a glowing account of his own valor. But it is evident that he does not lie in the hope of deceiving anyone, but merely to add to the general entertainment. His mendacity is so obvious that no one could possibly believe it: in one breath he calls for a drink of sack, and in the next, after wiping his mouth, protests that he has drunk nothing all day.

He exaggerates openly so as to make the best possible story, beginning mildly by asserting that singlehanded he defeated four rogues in buckram, and increasing the number in every sentence until it reaches eleven. At another time, the Prince overhears him boasting that Hal owes him a thousand pounds and will rue the day if he does not settle. "Sirrah, do I owe you a thousand pound?" demands the Prince. "A thousand pound, Hal?" Falstaff replies. "A million! Thy love is worth a million; thou owest me thy love." To gain the maximum pleasure from life, it is an advantage to be a liar so impregnable that one has not the slightest concern about being found out.

Finally, Falstaff is free not only from all external standards but from personal sensitiveness. This is the rarest of all kinds of freedom, the freedom from fear of ridicule. He is invulnerable because he laughs at himself as cleverly and as heartily as others could. Again, this is not a pose; he thoroughly enjoys the humor of his own absurdities. His stoutness he ascribes to his arduous and sorrowful life: "A plague of sighing and grief; it blows a man up like a bladder." When the Prince tells him to put his ear to the ground and listen for hoofbeats, he inquires, "Have you any levers to lift me up again, being down?" And by a stroke of genius he even uses his size to justify his sins. When Hal half seriously berates him for cheating the hostess of the tavern, he utters this overwhelming *apologia*:

Dost thou hear, Hal? Thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty.

Thus Falstaff transforms every phase of his personality and environment into huge enjoyment of life, and extracts pleasure even from ridicule and disgrace.

If, then, hedonism can ever be a sufficient philosophy of life, it should be here. Falstaff is the ideally unrestricted person whom we imagined: intelligent, clever enough to turn everything to account, indifferent to consequences, not vulnerable in any of the usual ways. Anyone who is adaptable and not too exacting could enjoy him as a friend and even envy him his personality. In spite of the tricks he plays and the ill turns he did them, the people around him loved him to idolatry. Prince Hal lied to the sheriff to save Falstaff's life, and privately paid back the money he had stolen. Mistress Quickly, the Hostess, whom Falstaff gulled and robbed, was broken-hearted at his death, repudiating indignantly the suggestion that he might have gone to hell. The red-faced drunkard Bardolph, whom Falstaff had infuriated by remarking that a fly on his nose looked like a damned soul in hell-fire, exclaimed, "Would I were with him wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell!" To that extent his life was sufficient.

It would be pleasant to end here our discussion of Falstaff, but Shakespeare does not do so. We find at the end that, even under these almost perfect conditions, Falstaff's philosophy is not successful and his freedom only an illusion. For he is not free from human feelings or from overconfidence. Imperceptibly, without being fully conscious of the fact, he grows so fond of the Prince as to be dependent on him, and so sure of his own power that he presumes on it too far. Hal's love is in truth worth a million to him. The perfect hedonist must be able to relinquish any pleasure at any time, to hold it lightly enough so that he can turn easily to the next one; and when the companionship and favor of this "most comparative, rascalliest, sweet young Prince" becomes a necessity to Sir John, he is doomed to disillusionment. For there is a strain of calculation in Hal which warns him that, as King Henry the Fifth, he must no longer tolerate his old friend. On the public street, in the most humiliating circumstances,

he repudiates Falstaff. Compelled for the first time to take something seriously, the knight's morale is broken and he loses heart.

The blustering thief, Pistol, whose talk is impressively sonorous but incomprehensible, says the last word on Falstaff. Meaning to convey that Sir John dies of a broken heart, he announces, "His heart is fractured and corroborate!" Even the most perfect of all hedonists does not die happy; and when hedonism once breaks down, one is left more exposed to pain, more defenceless, than is true of any other philosophy of life.

It would be unfair to conclude from our discussion that hedonistic ethics is of no value at all. All we can say is that, taken alone in its extreme form, without admixture of other codes of conduct, it fails. Happiness is not attained by a direct search for it as the highest good of life. Some sort of personal happiness is the goal of most systems of ethics; the question is merely whether the hedonist goes about in the right way to attain it. A dash of hedonism would sweeten any of the sterner ethical doctrines, to which we must now turn.