

*“CHERISH RECIPROCAL BENEVOLENCE,
WHICH WILL MAKE YOU AS ANXIOUS FOR ANOTHER’S WELFARE AS YOUR OWN.”*
— ARISTIPPUS OF CYRENE (C. 435-356 BCE)

CYRENAICISM — An Overview

Inception: The Cyrenaic school was founded by Aristippus (c. 435-356 B.C.)

Adherents: The school died out around the middle of the 3rd century B.C. [EBI Estimate]

Primary Value Proposition: The Pursuit of Pleasure

The Word of (about and/or attributed to) God:

- Cyrenaics deny the existence of God.

Core Beliefs: Cyrenaics are empiricists and skeptics. As empiricists, they believe that all that we have access to as a potential source of knowledge are our own experiences. These experiences are private to each of us. We can have incorrigible knowledge of our experiences (it is impossible to be mistaken about what we are currently experiencing), but not of the objects that cause us to have these experiences. This results in their skepticism—their conviction that we cannot have knowledge of the external world.

The Cyrenaic anticipates the problem of other minds — that is, how can I know that other people have a mind like I do, since I only observe their behavior (if even that), not the mental states that might or might not cause that behavior?

The Cyrenaics are unabashed sensual hedonists: the highest good is my own pleasure, with all else being valuable only as a means to securing my own pleasure, and bodily pleasures are better than mental pleasures. Although they did recognize some value in social obligations, and that pleasure could be gained through altruism, their iconoclastic theory stands well outside the mainstream of Greek ethical thought, with the traditional virtues of moderation, justice, and friendship being disparaged by them.

The Cyrenaics make fun of the Epicurean theory by saying that the homeostatic state of being free of desires and pain is the condition of a corpse.