

An Epicurean Understanding of Pleasure

Post by "Cassius" of October 6, 2021 at 8:38 PM

Also: The issues we are discussing now also relate back to the "Net Pleasure Maximization Worksheet" that I put together a couple of years ago. I don't think Don was around then but maybe if he had been I would have taken it further, but I received a lot of argument "against" it on just these grounds: that pleasure can't be quantified scientifically by time or intensity or anything else.

I still think that going through the exercise of thinking about categories can be helpful, and I think that what Don and others are saying right now about "persistence" is an example of thinking about one such category. But in the end, the categories are like all "forms" -- they fall short in capturing the fullness of the experience of the feelings involved. Even all the annotations at the bottom weren't sufficient caveats to translate the full effect into reality:

Post

[A Draft Epicurean Pleasure Maximization Worksheet](#)

Feelings cannot be reduced to numbers, and there are important limitations in the use of a "worksheet" as an aid in evaluating choices and avoidances. However it may be helpful to some people to visualize an illustration of the weighing process that some term the "hedonic calculus." Here is a draft example for your consideration and comment. Scores included here are of course fictional and for example only. A version of the spreadsheet in xlsx format is attached for downloading.



Cassius

July 11, 2019 at 10:25 PM

I have to include a picture because I thought it was neat looking 😊

Epicurean Net Pleasure Maximization Worksheet

"For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good."

Life Activity	Feelings Of Pleasure (+)					Net Score	Feelings of Pain (-)					Notes
	Intensity / Extent of Pleasure	Current Bodily Pleasure	Future Mental Pleasure	Future Bodily Pleasure	Total Pleasure Score		Total Pain Score	Intensity / Extent of Pain	Current Bodily Pain	Future Mental Pain	Future Bodily Pain	
Sleep		6			4	10	0					
Go to Work			4	4	4	12	7	-5		-2	-3	
Have Lunch with Friends	6	5	7	2		20	0					
Go to Gym	4		1	1	5	11	3	-8	-4	-4		
Go to Museum	5		5	5		15	15	0				
Read Lucretius	8		8	8		24	23	-1	-1			
Read Plato					0	-21	-21	-7		-7	-7	
Choose Activities To Maximize The Pleasure Score ... >>						92	57	-35	<< ... At A Cost In Pain You Find To Be Acceptable			

Scoring Considerations:

- (1) Feelings cannot be captured in numerical terms. All scoring is relative. Nature provides no absolute standards and no authority higher than your own feelings.
- (2) The goal of life is to maximize under your personal circumstances the net pleasure score in the gold box.
- (3) The theoretical scoring limit is that which can be attained when a person's experience is completely filled with pleasures with no mixture of pain. This theoretical limit is not attainable for indefinite periods by human beings, but is considered "god-like" and serves as the goal toward which to strive.
- (4) Maximizing net pleasure is achieved by choosing activities which maximize pleasure at a cost in pain that you deem acceptable.
- (5) All pleasures are pleasing, but some pleasures exact a greater cost in pain than do others.
- (6) Sometimes we choose pain when a choice that is painful in the present brings us greater net pleasure or lesser net pain.
- (7) In predicting the cost in pain of any activity, remember that pleasures neither natural nor necessary will frequently (but not always) exact the greatest cost in pain; pleasures which are both natural and necessary will generally (but not always) exact the least cost in pain.
- (8) Remember to consider how your choices produce pain or pleasure in your friends, because this impacts your own scoring.
- (9) A net score of zero does not indicate that there are "neutral" states of feeling. Activities may produce both pleasurable and painful results, but feelings, like oil and water, do not mix to produce a third category beyond pleasure and pain.

Note: Ok after checking back in the thread I do not see that Don participated so I am not sure if Don was here for this or not. In fact I don't see much discussion in the thread. I think the "debate" against it that I recall took place in non-public channels.

Note 2: Looks like Don was not here, but Godfrey probably was, although mostly in "lurk" mode 😊 Maybe if Don had been here we would all be spreadsheeting now! 😊

Note 3: The problem is those numbers may be useful for ballparking feelings at the current moment, but there's no reliable way to really come up with them other than pulling them "out of the air." So in the end the totals are largely meaningless. The exercise itself might be a useful way to "get in touch with your feelings" and to rank different choices against each other, but that's probably about it.