

What Would An Epicurean Use In Their Toolkit For Making Their Hedonic Calculus?

Post by “godek” of July 10, 2019 at 11:11 PM

What would an Epicurean use in their toolkit for the hedonistic calculus? I mean like the quotes you'd go by and nature and unnecessary desires, the virtues, etc. I am looking for ideas on making hedonistic calculus therapy worksheets. 😊

Post by “Godfrey” of July 11, 2019 at 12:57 AM

Wouldn't it just be net pleasure minus net pain? I use natural and necessary or unnecessary as a first step to evaluate a given desire, then I think about whether the various costs involved (pain) will add up to more or less than the resultant pleasure.

Pains to weigh include for example money (working overtime to earn extra money, spending savings, etc); prudent use of my time; prudent use of my energy; the effects on people and things that are important to me, and how that would affect my net pleasure.

The quote that I keep in mind is:

Ask this question of every desire: what will happen to me if the object of desire is achieved, and what if not? [VS71](#)

There was a recent thread that had a really good example. I'll try to find it....

Post by “Godfrey” of July 11, 2019 at 1:01 AM

Daily Life Decisions Applying An Epicurean Model

This is the name of the thread; I don't know how to link to it 😞

Edit by Cassius: I added it for you! [Daily Life Decisions Applying An Epicurean Model](#)

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2019 at 6:01 AM

to link, just click on the #3 (as in your preceding post, at the top right of the post) and you get a permalink that you can copy and paste anywhere. The forum software translates forum links into the name of the post, but it's still just a normal link. If you have any trouble with it let me know.

I see this works on desktop or phone.

Post by “Hiram” of July 11, 2019 at 9:39 AM

These PD's and the middle portion of LMenoeceus:

Quote

26. All desires that do not lead to pain when they remain unsatisfied are unnecessary, but the desire is easily got rid of, when the thing desired is difficult to obtain or the desires seem likely to produce harm.

29. Of our desires some are natural and necessary, others are natural but not necessary; and others are neither natural nor necessary, but are due to groundless opinion.

30. Those natural desires which entail no pain when unsatisfied, though pursued with an intense effort, are also due to groundless opinion; and it is not because of their own nature they are not got rid of but because of man's groundless opinions.

<https://theautarkist.wordpress.com/2018/05/20/hap...ics-the-ethics/>

Post by “Hiram” of July 11, 2019 at 9:49 AM

Michel Onfray frequently speaks of the mathematics of hedonic calculus. While reading a book recently on business planning, I found they recommend a spreadsheet with pros and cons of

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various business models, where a person may consider time involvement for each project and potential profitability.

... it WOULD be interesting if Epicureans today developed a model / excel sheet that can be used for hedonic calculus. Even a simple pros / cons sheet, like the ones used by accountants where the red / left side represents debit and the green / right side represents credit, to have a visual representation of what one is calculating and to measure and compare what one values most.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2019 at 9:55 AM

Yes it would be interesting to think about how to rank the pleasures and pain. Each line on a spreadsheet could represent a particular pleasure or pain, but there would need to be multiple columns (or other method) to rank each one according to important factors such as duration, intensity, and _____???

Exploring what those factors (what columns to include and how to quantify them) would be and thinking about how to quantify them would be helpful, even if in the end it's ultimately *impossible* to quantify them symbolically.

I even wonder if in the end it is detrimental to try to quantify them. But working through the exercise of showing the *difficulty* of quantifying them would itself be useful, just to establish that point. (IE, If it is difficult or impossible for a single individual to quantify their own rankings, then it is certainly impossible for one person or group to prescribe the rankings for another person or group.)

Post by “Hiram” of July 11, 2019 at 12:00 PM

A system of points: List them, and add (from 10 to 1, or from 5 to 1) according to order of priority, then add them. This is just to provide guidance and to systematize, to provide a graphic representation of what really matters.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2019 at 12:37 PM

in the end the entire exercise is necessarily subjective, but it would stimulate thought for the possible favors in "priority" to be listed.

What are some possibilities besides "duration" and "intensity" to describe the feeling?

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2019 at 1:26 PM

For example, in listing any pleasure, such as for example 'dinner on the town' I would think someone would need to consider --

- the duration of the pleasurable experience while it is ongoing
- the expected future physical pleasure (or pain) from the experience
- the expected future mental pleasure (or pain) from remembering the experience or from other longer-term ramifications of the dinner
- the "intensity" of the pleasurable experience (some kind of personal ranking system of intensity)?
- the repeatability of the experience (can it be done again in the future? how often?)

but those are just general categories and each one breaks down much further. It's probably also not possible even to come up with firm categories. But by listing the possibilities it opens up the issue to visualization.

Post by “godek” of July 11, 2019 at 2:17 PM

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mi...t?usp=ddrivesdk>

This is what I have come up with so far feel free to make changes. I made a copy in case of vandalism. I will make a gratitude list in their for all that have helped.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2019 at 2:37 PM

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The trick will be somehow creating enough columns and labelling them sufficiently to accommodate all of the factors that you want someone to think about.

Post by “Elayne” of July 11, 2019 at 4:35 PM

Besides the aspects of intensity, duration, etc-- perhaps add the "extent" or some word to describe whether the pleasure involves as many aspects for the person as possible? I'm thinking of PD 9, where he talks about if all pleasures could involve the entire person or the "principal parts"-- which suggests he was thinking of some pleasures only involving parts of us.

An example of a widespread (?) pleasurable experience to me would be listening to some favorite music while eating a bowl of cut fresh tomatoes and reading a good book. I've got all my senses involved-- hearing, vision, smell, texture, taste... plus my cognitions on the book. Whereas some pleasures, even if intense, may not occupy very many senses or cognitive faculties. I personally find that experiences which involve more faculties seem heightened in a way that seems different from intensity.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2019 at 4:46 PM

EXCELLENT Point Elayne. That "might" be the same as intensity, but probably not.

I think the "vessel" analogy is always useful so we're talking about something that indicates "how much of the vessel is occupied" by the activity.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2019 at 4:53 PM

Also Godek, I would keep in mind that if anyone were actually to use such a spreadsheet/diagram, the use would be a constantly moving target. A ranking would change from day to day or moment to moment.

So if you were thinking of how to commit such a project to software, be sure to keep each activity on a single line, and hopefully incorporate some way to sort the lines "continuously."

In other words make it easy to use the software to both sort and drag and drop to rearrange the lines. **Because if you were trying to list all your daily activities on the chart in order to help choose from among them,** (which is sort of a presumption of what we are doing?) and keep them sorted to maximize pleasure, the sorting is going to change almost moment by moment.

But just that kind of sorting is pretty much exactly what I think Epicurus was talking about doing - constantly.

Post by "Cassius" of July 11, 2019 at 5:03 PM

Godek to save you time here is an editable version too:
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d...dit?usp=sharing>

I recommend that anyone who plays with it downloads a backup copy to their local computer just in case someone in the future defaces / destroys it.

I would really like to turn the column headings to an angle so we could get more entries in, and have them readable, but I am not enough of a spreadsheet expert to do that.

Post by "Cassius" of July 11, 2019 at 5:12 PM

Maybe some kind of "legend" at the bottom of the spreadsheet would be needed to highlight the nuances of the factors that are listed in the columns. Those are probably some of what Godek listed in his initial list. Another consideration that jumps out at me is that somehow the entries need to consider that your personal pleasure in each category also incorporates the reflected pleasure that you would take in observing your friends' take pleasure in the results of your activity.

There are FAR too many considerations to list, but even starting the list (and making clear that the list is not complete) might be a good aide to thinking about the problem.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2019 at 5:31 PM

I just noticed this and I want to comment:

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I use natural and necessary or unnecessary as a first step to evaluate a given desire, then I think about whether the various costs involved (pain) will add up to more or less than the resultant pleasure.

I agree that the natural or necessary analysis is a good first step in the analysis, but it's good to remember that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the pleasures in either of these multiple categories, but because these categories are thumbnail rules for helping us predict the amount of pain that is going to come from the choice, as explained by Torquatus in On Ends.

The point of my posting is to emphasize that this is the starting point of the analysis, not the end point, and not a substitute in itself for the issue of "what will happen" and the eventual result of whether the end is net positive or net negative as to the pleasure/pain balance.

Thumbnail rules are highly useful, but they exist in a larger context that can sometimes be dramatically violated. The goal is to keep your eye on the END, which is pleasure, and never to let any tool (like virtue, or even this system of categories) to take the place of it.

Post by “godek” of July 11, 2019 at 6:05 PM

I really like [Hiram](#) idea of looking at it like how an accountant does their work. We have a ton of terms to try to relate them to epicurean philosophy for net pleasure vs net pains. Like loans, interest, investments, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, etc.

Like investment could be lesser net pains that we endure(invest) in to gain greater net pleasures. Other investments would be like taking more days off from work in order to spend more time with friends and family this type of investment is the net gratitude memories that we gain over time vs net profit we make at work. We could setup some type of a gratitude journal worksheet. Speaking of jobs perhaps we could make a job likability score sheet net profits vs net pleasure at the job.

Loans could be what the epicureans talk about mutual aid or time spend with friends but in the hopes that your friend returns the favor or if you are the benefactor please return the favor when the time comes.

Post by “godek” of July 11, 2019 at 6:32 PM

This is funny that Hiram brings this up because I am currently wanting to setup an investment. I think I will read the book my former accountant recommended to me which is called "The Intelligent Investor" by Benjamin Graham.

Post by “Cassius” of July 11, 2019 at 10:24 PM

There are a couple of lines of thought in this thread so i will break off the "spreadsheet" into a thread of its own

[An Epicurean Pleasure Maximization Spreadsheet](#)

Post by “godek” of July 12, 2019 at 3:20 PM

[Cassius](#) Even though it is just a question an answer worksheet should I eventually make it into a spreadsheet so it is easily moveable as you suggested?

I think This worksheet can help with the maximization of pleasure spreadsheet. So after one understands and gets on paper the common questions epicureans would ask their students with the correct answers(I will make more examples just a few for each question so they have an idea what to put there.). They can make the proper judgement of what to put in that spreadsheet.

Post by “Cassius” of July 12, 2019 at 4:11 PM

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Yes, Godek, compare your list with my list of considerations at the bottom of the current version of the spreadsheet.

I am a big fan of outlining and I am constantly shifting the items in the list to indicate priority, so yes any format that is easily shiftable would be good.

I do think making a Google spreadsheet with one consideration per line would make it easy to re-order the items to fit the current situation.

Once it is on Google docs then someone could download it and use for themselves locally (or copy to their individual google doc folder)

Post by “godek” of July 14, 2019 at 6:42 PM

Current project is "To pursue or to avoid a desire" worksheet. I think I will create a work sheet for each epicurean virtue and state on each one that it is just a means(tool) to mean an end and not an end in itself. My favorite virtue is gratitude so probably do a worksheet on that next. These are therapy worksheets based on epicurean thought. What do you fellow epicureans think of the title I picked?

Post by “Cassius” of July 14, 2019 at 7:43 PM

Sounds good to me. As an aside I don't know that there are specific virtues that are distinctly Epicurean, although it is probably fair to say that there are some virtues that Epicurus stressed more than other in the surviving records.

Post by “godek” of July 15, 2019 at 6:50 PM

I mean the virtues listed in dewitt's book.

Post by “godek” of July 15, 2019 at 7:02 PM

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RF...it?usp=drivesdk>

What do you think cassius? Should I add anything?

Post by “Cassius” of July 15, 2019 at 7:40 PM

Looks like it requires permission to view...

Post by “godek” of July 15, 2019 at 7:43 PM

This worksheet just a means a tool for you to pursue pleasure but not an end in itself ultimately you decide what to do.

Is the desire natural and necessary?

Is the desire natural but not necessary?

Is the desire neither natural nor necessary?

Question the desire what will happen if the desire is achieved and what will happen if it is not?

Ask yourself does this desire have pain if so does it give greater pleasure later?

Is the desire pleasurable but it brings greater pain afterwards?

Post by “godek” of July 15, 2019 at 7:57 PM

I think a lot of healthy pleasures start out as pains first then greater pleasure later. Going to figure out how to word that the best way. I think I read this in some recovery guide online.

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Post by “godek” of July 18, 2019 at 11:59 AM

I think since epicurean philosophy is material(matter science not money) and empirical. Also the fact that it states you need motion in order to create joy. I thought to add Newton's equal force law to fight the cycle of depression. So doing more especially activities that you enjoy and science shows is best for neurotypical humans to be happy we create more joy and help get rid or cope better with depression. But we also have to remember that we can't have too much of a good thing as epicureans state too. The belly doesn't require unlimited filling. Or about ascetic and extravagance that we need moderation in all things.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 18, 2019 at 1:30 PM

Quote

I thought to add Newton's equal force law to fight the cycle of depression. So doing more especially activities that you enjoy...

Yesterday I was listening to a podcast of an interview with the author of the book Stress Proof:

<https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/podca...body-and-brain/>

The author is a neuro-opthamologist (I never knew there was such a specialty!) so her approach is very biologically based. [godek](#) , there was some discussion of depression as it relates to stress, which is why I'm posting. But of interest to me was the contention that uncertainty is the greatest contributor to stress and some discussion of removing uncertainty, which sounded a lot like autarchy. The author professed her enthusiasm for Stoicism, but the material presented seemed more Epicurean to me! Anyway it's worth a listen; I plan to read the book sometime soon.

Post by “godek” of July 18, 2019 at 1:49 PM

Yes I agree sounds more epicurean. Plus stoicism contradicts

itself with fate so if you are fated to end up in a certain journey what is the point in being virtuous when one has no free will? which also goes against current scientific thought with

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quantum physics so basically therapists and psychology just cherry pick stoicism and the end result is really epicureanism most of the time. 😊

Post by “godek” of July 18, 2019 at 1:58 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

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yes epicureanism gives us some certainty. But I think epicureans are fine with some uncertainty as being too certain turns into dogma and just as bad as religion with it's superstitious beliefs. There is a famous quote that goes like this "only fanatics are so certain and the wise so full of doubts." I think there is some things in life that we can be certain of. [Cassius](#) am I wrong about that? I think there is some epicurean maxim or quote about accepting new facts when we get new facts in through our senses.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 18, 2019 at 3:03 PM

The uncertainty referred to isn't philosophical dogma, but lack of personal agency. Pursuing autarchy increases our personal agency, thus reducing uncertainty to a degree about events which may occur in our future.

Quote

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1043-what-would-an-epicurean-use-in-their-toolkit-for-making-their-hedonic-calculus/>

[PD16](#), Peter Saint-Andre translation

Chance steals only a bit into the life of a wise person: for throughout the complete span of his life the greatest and most important matters have been, are, and will be directed by the power of reason.

Regarding dogma, you're absolutely correct. Here's one example:

Quote

[PD24](#), Peter Saint-Andre translation

If you reject a perception outright and do not distinguish between your opinion about what will happen after, what came before, your feelings, and all the layers of imagination involved in your thoughts, then you will throw your other perceptions into confusion because of your trifling opinions; as a result, you will reject the very criterion of truth. And if when forming concepts from your opinions you treat as confirmed everything that will happen and what you do not witness thereafter, then you will not avoid what is false, so that you will remove all argument and all judgment about what is and is not correct.

Post by “Cassius” of July 18, 2019 at 3:41 PM

Yes Godek I think you are on the wrong track with your comments about "dogma" - I think Godfrey's quote is good but I would say it sounds Epicurean (as he did too, in another place) as I am not sure that autarchy deals with issues of knowledge.

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

But of interest to me was the contention that uncertainty is the greatest contributor to stress and some discussion of removing uncertainty, which sounded a lot like autarchy.

Godek in Diogenes Laertius you will recall that:

Quote

[The wise man] will found a school, but not in such a manner as to draw the crowd after him; and will give readings in public, but only by request. **He will be a dogmatist but not a mere skeptic;** and he will be like himself even when asleep. And he will on occasion die for a friend.

Of course you also have to recall that you are going to keep an open mind on things where proof is not clear:

Quote

24. If you reject absolutely any single sensation without stopping to distinguish between opinion about things awaiting confirmation and that which is already confirmed to be present, whether in sensation or in feelings or in any application of intellect to the presentations, you will confuse the rest of your sensations by your groundless opinion and so you will reject every standard of truth. If in your ideas based upon opinion you hastily affirm as true all that awaits confirmation as well as that which does not, you will not avoid error, as you will be maintaining the entire basis for doubt in every judgment between correct and incorrect opinion.

And in those times you are going to "wait" as against stated by DL.

But much of book four of Lucretius, especially the very important part about how knowledge is based on the senses, is targeted to the conclusion that we can and should have confidence in things that are clear, and that we should actually scorn those who allege that knowledge (which means our confidence in a certain fact) is impossible.