

A Draft Epicurean Pleasure Maximization Worksheet

Post by "Cassius" of July 11, 2019 at 10:25 PM

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.

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	10	0					
Go to Work				4	4	4	12	7	-5		-2	-3	
Have Lunch with Friends		6	5	7	2		20	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.

Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2019 at 8:49 AM

CLARIFICATIONS:

An Epicurean Pleasure Maximization Worksheet

Nature Provides No Authority Higher Than Your Own Feelings To Guide You Among The Choices Available To You

Feelings Of Pleasure (+)

Feelings of Pain (-)

You can choose to organize your life to maximize this number (net pleasure)....

..or you can organize your life to minimize this number (total pain)

	Feelings Of Pleasure (+)			Feelings of Pain (-)			Net Score
Sleep							10
Go to Work			4				12
Have Lunch with Friends	6	5	7				20
Go to Gym	4	1	1				11
Go to Museum	5	5	5				15
Read Lucretius	8	8	8				23
Read Plato							0
							57
							-35

Choose Activities To Maximize The Pleasure Score >> 92 **57** -35 << At A Cost In Pain You Find To Be Acceptable

Scoring Considerations: (1) The goal of life is to maximize the score in the gold box - to attain the largest net positive score possible to you under your circumstances. (2) This is done by choosing activities which maximize pleasure, but do not include those deemed to be acceptable to you. (3) The highest possible pleasure score is attained when that person chooses the activities which maximize pleasure, but do not include those deemed to be acceptable to you. (4) The highest possible pleasure score is attained when that person chooses the activities which maximize pleasure, but do not include those deemed to be acceptable to you. (5) The highest possible pleasure score is attained when that person chooses the activities which maximize pleasure, but do not include those deemed to be acceptable to you. (6) In predicting the cost in pain of any activity, consider the "natural/necessary" classification system: choosing pleasures which are neither natural nor necessary will frequently (but not always) exact the greatest cost in pain; choosing pleasures which are both natural and necessary will generally exact the least cost in pain. (7) In considering the total results, remember to consider how your pleasure will be increased or decreased by the impact of your choice on your friends.

But as a practical matter the two goals are not the same!

Epicurus taught maximal net pleasure - not minimal total pain.

The point of "**As a practical matter the two goals are not the same**" is to emphasize this distinction:

If one's overriding goal were truly minimizing the number of painful experiences in life, then one would never choose any activity (getting a shot from a doctor; going to the gym; fighting to protect oneself) which involved any element of pain whatsoever.

The true goal is not *avoiding pain at all cost*, but *maximum net pleasure*, which is why Epicurus described the reasoning this way:

Quote

And since pleasure is our first and native good, for that reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but will often pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them. And often we consider pains superior to pleasures when

submission to the pains for a long time brings us as a consequence a greater pleasure. While therefore all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, not all pleasure is should be chosen, just as all pain is an evil and yet not all pain is to be shunned. It is, however, by measuring one against another, and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences, that all these matters must be judged. Sometimes we treat the good as an evil, and the evil, on the contrary, as a good.

And it is important to emphasize the limitation stated in the heading: **There Are No Absolute Scores, and Nature Provides No Authority Higher Than Your Own Feelings To Assign A Relative Score To Each Item**

Feelings cannot be reduced to numbers. A Worksheet can only serve as a primitive method of conceptualizing the relationships between them for our own personal reflection. There is no target maximum number of "maximum net pleasure" applicable to everyone. To the extent that thinking about feelings in terms of numbers is helpful at all, it is only to the extent that ranking their values to us might be of some help in organizing our activities to emphasize the ones that will in the end bring us the largest net benefit.

Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2019 at 9:06 AM

The Okeefe answer would be "But "absence of pain" is the highest pleasure, so if you simply breathe air, eat bread, and drink water, there will be no pain on the right side of the ledger, and the left side will be all 10's in every column!"

Maybe some people can rationalize that as what Epicurus meant - but I haven't been able to do so, nor do I think most people of normal sensibilities would do so. And since I think that the Greco-Roman world of Epicurus and Lucretius was populated with pretty much the same kind of people alive today, I don't think that Epicurus' philosophy would ever have become popular if "minimal total pain" is what he really taught.

Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2019 at 10:21 AM

List of potential revisions:

(1) It would not be correct to assume that an activity which has a +5 pleasure score and also a -5 pain score results in a "neutral state."

Nor would it be correct to presume that totally offsetting pain and pleasure scores that resulted in a **final** score of 0 would represent a neutral state. This is a limitation of the abstraction of reality to numbers, and I will clarify the diagram to warn against that implication, probably as part of the caution that pleasure and pain cannot be reduced to numbers anyway.

PD3. The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. ***When such pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is no pain either of body or of mind or of both together.***

I think this is a statement that pleasure and pain are discrete - a sensation of pleasure is very different from a sensation of pain. In total their quantities can be compared, but they do not blend together - they are like oil and water and stay separate.z

But an activity can and generally will generate some pleasure and some pain as different aspects of a single activity.

Additional Citations

Letter to Menoecus

And since pleasure is our first and native good, for that reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but will often pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them. And often we consider pains superior to pleasures when submission to the pains for a long time brings us as a consequence a greater pleasure. While therefore all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, not all pleasure is should be chosen, just as all pain is an evil and yet not all pain is to be shunned. It is, however, by measuring one against another, and by looking at the conveniences and inconveniences, that all these matters must be judged. Sometimes we treat the good as an evil, and the evil, on the contrary, as a good.

Torquatus in On Ends

To take a trivial example, which of us ever undertakes laborious physical exercise, except to obtain some advantage from it? But who has any right to find fault with a man who chooses to enjoy a pleasure that has no annoying consequences, or one who avoids a pain that produces no resultant pleasure? On the other hand, we denounce with righteous indignation and dislike men who are so beguiled and demoralized by the charms of the pleasure of the moment, so blinded by desire, that they cannot foresee the pain and trouble that are bound to ensue; and

equal blame belongs to those who fail in their duty through weakness of will, which is the same as saying through shrinking from toil and pain. These cases are perfectly simple and easy to distinguish. In a free hour, when our power of choice is untrammelled and when nothing prevents our being able to do what we like best, every pleasure is to be welcomed and every pain avoided. But in certain emergencies and owing to the claims of duty or the obligations of business it will frequently occur that pleasures have to be repudiated and annoyances accepted. The wise man therefore always holds in these matters to this principle of selection: he rejects pleasures to secure other greater pleasures, or else he endures pains to avoid worse pains.

(2) It is possible that the "intensity / extent" column should be eliminated as this aspect is likely already incorporated in the present/future bodily/mental pleasure columns

Post by "godek" of July 12, 2019 at 10:52 AM

I don't think it really matters if it is subjective or not it does make us think and feel differently when we write it down on paper according to research by David d. Burns M.D. Like when you feel depressed you can write down all the good things that happen that day because we have a tendency to ignore the positive. If I am interpreting subjective correctly in your posts on the other post.

Post by "godek" of July 12, 2019 at 11:05 AM

What software did you use to make that spreadsheet? I like how you changed it up so it fits on a printed piece of paper.

Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2019 at 11:21 AM

That is google docs as well, Godek.

Post by “Cassius” of July 13, 2019 at 2:13 PM

I have attached to the original post in this thread an xls / Libreoffice Calc version of the spreadsheet which should be usable in any spreadsheet software. I prepared it in the free Libreoffice format so that it would be accessible to the most people. I will see about uploading this back to Google docs as well.

This should be the same document, in Google Sheets - <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d...dit?usp=sharing>

Post by “Cassius” of November 4, 2019 at 10:46 AM

Compare this to the hedonist calculus equation posted by Charles: [The Hedonistic Calculus - explained through an equation](#)