

Continuous Life Improvement

Post by “Garden Dweller” of October 2, 2019 at 9:04 PM

The Pursuit of Happiness: 21 Steps to Continuous Life Improvement

Learning how to examine one's life and change it to maximize happiness is a very powerful skill. Increasing one's tranquility and happiness can lift the human spirit to a high level of grace and dignity.

In this text, we propose a process of examining one's life and carefully reconstructing it to maximize tranquility and happiness. We encourage each reader to examine his own life and make improvements based on his own judgment and free will.

This strategy is not for everyone: it requires a certain level of discipline to be able to choose behavior and action that benefits one's life over the long term, rather than selecting instant gratification. If one is able to make decisions with maturity, the process of Continuous Life Improvement can lift one to a high level of happiness and contentment.

1. Be Sensitive and Learn From Your Senses!

Listen to what your body is telling you about the world. Your senses are your most direct and real connection with the physical world, and should be trusted more than dreams, imagination, things that you have heard from others or what you have been taught by others. Be sensitive to how your mind/body processes and reacts to physical sensations, and learn to recognize and distinguish negative sensations (pain) from positive sensations (pleasure).

Our written language is somewhat limited in the meanings it can convey through a single word. The words "pain" and "pleasure" are not adequate to describe the positive and negative sensations which we receive from our environment. Some synonyms for pain that one may sense include distress, dismay, discomfort, worry, anxiety, disturbance, fear, bother, discontent, displeasure, stress, distastefulness and unpleasantness. Synonyms for pleasure that one may sense include joy, peace, relief, comfort, contentment, enjoyment and satisfaction.

Learn to recognize which of your own feelings are positive, and which are negative by "listening" to or being aware of your own senses. Try to connect events, behaviors and actions which trigger these positive and negative feelings to identify cause and effect for positive and negative feelings.

Many sensations are not strongly painful or pleasurable, but one can often recognize that the body prefers one behavior over another, for example, depending on the outdoor temperature, the body may prefer sunshine to shade, or vice versa. Be open to these types of subtle

sensations, both positive and negative.

2. Respond to Negative Feedback!

Be conscious of negative sensations and identify the actions, behaviors and situations that cause them. Find ways to change those behaviors to reduce or eliminate the negative sensations. Negative sensations include pain, discomfort, distress, anxiety, stress and fear.

When you recognize a negative sensation, try to determine which behavior or action caused the negative sensation and change it. Continually be aware of your sensations and strategically make changes in your life that relieve negative sensations. Eliminating behavior and actions that are the cause of negative sensations is a very powerful way to improve one's life. Repeating this process over time will create enormous improvement in one's life.

3. Be Rational!

The senses occur in the present moment, so one must use the rational mind to evaluate the cause of that sensation, which may have happened in the past. For example, "after drinking that tea, I became somewhat nervous and agitated...", which might lead you to suspect that drinking that type of tea causes a certain level of distress. One can then eliminate this behavior to reduce one's level of distress.

It is not always clear which behavior caused which sensation. The rational process of identifying cause and effect is an important skill and requires one to recall one's actions over time and discover clues that indicate which behavior affected one's sense of well being. Use cause and effect analysis to choose how to modify your behavior to reduce negative sensations.

4. Develop a Strategy!

A behavior or action which causes a negative sensation should be modified or eliminated to reduce the negative sensation. There may be a number of behaviors and actions that work together to cause negative sensations. Because the world is complex, this may require a multilevel strategy in response as one improves one's life.

Changes in one area may have unintended consequences in other areas. A unified strategy that makes changes in many areas may be more effective than making a single change at a time. Learning from others and comparing strategies may be effective if others are following a similar philosophy.

5. Be Good to Yourself!

Choose behavior that maximizes positive sensations. Fill your day with pleasant places, people, activities and events. Listen to what your senses are telling you, and take action to move toward that which is pleasant. Seek out beauty, comfort, joy and contentment. Continually reassess a behavior or action to determine whether it continues to be pleasurable, or if it is

becoming less positive over time. Improve your life every minute by constantly thinking about how you could increase your happiness and tranquility.

6. Use Long Term Cost/Benefit Analysis!

It is important to rationally choose behavior and actions which maximize positive sensations. Use a long term cost/benefit analysis to assess whether a short term pleasure is worthwhile over the long term. For example, a sexual relationship may cause emotional distress in the future if one is not selective about the type of person one has a relationship with. Avoid behavior that causes long term negative impacts on one's life.

Assess a short term negative sensation which may resolve a problem based on the long term positive effects which it might bring. A visit to the dentist is unpleasant, but it can relieve a toothache and promote long term dental health. When considered on a rational basis, one can endure the short term pain for the long term benefit.

There are many such compromises which one must make in life. By focusing on the long term benefit, one can remain aware of the reason one is accepting the short term negative sensation. When the long term benefit no longer exists, one should then end the short term negative sensation.

In some cases, the best strategy may be to select a behavior which minimizes the negative effects of an activity which has some benefits. Working to earn money is a necessity in today's world. One can select a career with a minimum of negative impacts on one's life, and one can live frugally to minimize the amount of money needed. The negative aspects of one's time being controlled by others can be rationalized by the money which one can save for a future life unencumbered by work.

7. Control Desires!

Recognize that there are some desires which are needs that every human must satisfy, for example, the need for food, water, shelter and friendship. Respect these desires and focus on satisfying them with appropriate responses.

Desires which are not necessary for one's basic needs are often desires which can damage one's happiness if one pursues them. Pursuing desires for political power, sexuality, wealth, conspicuous consumption and fame might bring fleeting satisfaction, but over the long term cause distress and pain.

Learn to recognize the difference between desires which are necessary for one's happiness, and those desires which are unnecessary and often destructive to one's long term happiness. Use discipline to say no to unnecessary desires. Consciously reduce one's thoughts about unnecessary desires.

8. Be Loyal to Yourself!

It is important to be relentlessly and completely true to your own self-interest. Every other person who you are in contact with will try to influence your behavior toward their interests. Organizations and governments will try to impress your mind with the "duty" to put their interests first. Businesses will try to influence your behavior in a way that is likely to increase purchases from them and will increase their profits.

In order to find true happiness, it is important to put your interests in the primary position. Delegating decisions which serve the best interest of others can lead to bitterness, dismay, and the feeling of being cheated. By following your own best interest, you will be honest, true, predictable and reliable to yourself and to others.

9. Choose Wisely!

There will be many decisions made throughout your life. They are all important. It is crucial to rationally choose the path your life follows, and to have the discipline to follow through with those choices. Many choices are difficult, and only by carefully considering the potential outcomes can one choose the optimum path. The best method is to rationally consider long term outcomes of action in the present. Consider, decide and act to live your life.

10. Cultivate Friendship!

Friendship is a necessary human need. Your state of mental well-being is affected by the mental state of those around you, in particular family and friends with whom you have frequent contact over a long period of time. It is human nature to need association with friends.

Seek out people with positive thoughts and lifestyles and get to know them. Reach out to communicate with friends regularly. Invite others and meet with others as often as you can to build a group of friends. Eat with friends, share your food with friends. Help friends, and ask friends for help when you need it. Learn how to develop friendship and how to respond to the social dynamics within a group of friends.

Support your friends to help keep them in a positive state of mind. Work to maintain lifelong friendships. As friendship develops over time, one gains trust and the friendship strengthens to the point of one's friends being almost as important as one's self.

Post by "Garden Dweller" of October 2, 2019 at 9:05 PM

11. Add Behaviors Which Bring Happiness!

As you make decisions on behavior throughout your life, be sensitive to feelings of joy, kindness, love, beauty, grace and other positive emotions. Select behavior and seek out

situations that promote and maximize these feelings.

12. Shut Down Negative Thoughts!

You are enjoying something, and suddenly a thought comes flying out from your deep subconscious that causes you doubt, guilt, fear or anxiety. For example, you are taking a nice hot shower and enjoying it. Suddenly a thought comes through telling you that you should not waste hot water. Consider that thought, assess whether it is valid, and if not, let that thought pass, and continue to enjoy the shower. Don't jump every time your subconscious mind comes up with an objection to something that you enjoy.

13. Recognize and Avoid Asceticism!

Ancient ascetics believed that the spirit was good and the body evil, and by punishing the body one enhanced the spirit. Some ascetics pursue this philosophy to the point of causing pain through self-flagellation, self-starvation and purposefully living in pain or discomfort. Some ascetics use a display of their self-torture as a way to draw attention to themselves. Avoid this behavior and always seek to increase happiness and tranquility in your life.

Asceticism includes simplifying or minimizing one's life to an extreme level. When simplifying one's life, do it to the extent that it increases happiness and tranquility. Don't punish one's self with pain or suffering for any reason other than cases where one gains a long term benefit through short term pain.

14. Ignore Negative Inputs!

Listening to negative news is debilitating. The information that enters your mind is what shapes your mind. Choose your incoming communication deliberately. Avoid media which push programming and choose media which allow you to select the information you wish to receive. Avoid people who are caught in negative thought patterns and who constantly speak about threats, dangers, crime and injustice.

Develop the state of your mind by choosing what enters your brain. Seek out a group of like-minded people to fill your day with thoughts of friendship and caring. Be kind and greet others with a smile to help others rise above the negativity. Doing so will benefit you as much as others.

15. Know that Happiness is Easy to Achieve!

It is easy to get the things necessary for basic human needs: food, water and shelter. A person who can obtain these basic things can be happy.

If your thoughts start to worry about how you are going to earn money to pay for something, ask yourself if you really need that item. Be calmed by the knowledge that basic human needs are easy to acquire, and anyone who has the basic human needs can be happy.

In addition to these items, by nature a human needs friendship, fascination (intellectual focus) and physical fitness. Friendship means social interaction and being part of a group of friends and family. Fascination and intellectual focus are the things one is passionate about. Often fascination is related to learning, building or creating. Physical fitness allows a person to be active and able to do a wide range of activities and it promotes health.

Note that the last three types of human needs can be satisfied without the need for money, if one chooses the right methods of obtaining these needs.

Comfort yourself with the knowledge that happiness is easy to achieve.

16. Preserve the Health of Your Body

Your level of happiness over the long term depends on how you treat your body. Neglect and abuse can bring pain. Eat healthy foods, exercise and use your body to maintain your fitness level. Use appropriate hygiene and preventative medical care. Exercise is an example of a short term discomfort that has long term benefits. Strive to achieve a healthy mind in a healthy body.

Our senses are the most direct and true connection with the natural world, far more direct than our understanding and learning about the natural world that we receive through communication with others. One should carefully guard against anything that would disturb, modify or distort one's senses and sensory observation of the natural world. One should moderate the use of intoxicants which distort one's perception of the world. Avoid alcohol and drugs in excess.

17. Stay Frugal, But Enjoy!

Would you like to be able to decide how to spend your time each day? Frugality can give you this choice by reducing your expenses to an amount that you can fund with part time work or a small investment income. Reducing your desires to those things which you actually need will help you reduce your spending.

It is very important to spend less than you make. Spending more than you earn, buying on time, taking on credit, all of these bind you to servitude. When you spend money, think about the time that you will need to work to pay for that item.

It is good to save and invest. The purpose of savings are to allow you to live without work taking up your available time.

If you are fortunate to have a level of savings and are financially well off, feel free to do things with your money that bring you happiness. Be generous to others.

18. Rational Behavior Decisionmaking

In order to use reason to live a life of happiness and tranquility, one applies rational decisionmaking to ones life based on the philosophy of Epicurus.

Rational Behavior Decisionmaking involves selecting one's behavior and activities, including:

Which activities we choose to do each day

Which people we associate with

How we speak to and treat other people

Recognizing nature through our senses

What we consume

Distinguishing between pleasure and pain, and determining which actions or events led to the experience of pleasure or pain

Levels of Rational Behavior Decisionmaking

Present Moment Comfort Enhancement

Be attentive to one's body and how one could improve comfort and contentment.

At frequent intervals, one should be aware of one's current physical state and imagine what one could do to increase comfort, such as drinking to relieve thirst, finding a good sitting position, wearing clothes that do not bind or chafe, or getting up and stretching after being inactive for some time. When physically active, enjoy the exercise but know the limits and take a break when appropriate.

Present Moment Positive Emotion Enhancement

Over one's life, one should learn specific behaviors that enhance feelings of joy, kindness, love, grace and other positive emotions (pleasurable emotions). Behaviors which bring pleasure might include calling a friend for a conversation, preparing a meal, writing a poem, taking a nap, designing a project, organizing one's desk, reading a book or going for a walk. The behaviors which an individual finds pleasurable are individual to that person. Each person must make themselves aware of the types of behaviors which enhance one's positive emotions, and in the present moment, should select that behavior which the individual feels would be most pleasurable. It may be helpful to make a list of behaviors that have been enjoyable in the past to help one remember the options that one has in the present moment.

Future Distress Reduction

There are a number of problems which one can avoid in the future by taking action today. Examples are preparing a financial budget to avoid a lack of funds, exercising to improve future health, medical care to heal a wound, working today to avoid future poverty, brushing one's teeth to avoid tooth decay. Select this type of preventative behavior when a relatively minor negative experience today will prevent a major discomfort tomorrow.

Future Positive Emotion Enhancement

Some actions one can do today can reap benefits in the future. Examples are planting a seed to enjoy the future crop, getting an education which will improve one's career, investing savings so that one may enjoy free time from employment. Select this type of action strategically, with a consideration as to risk and reward, in particular regarding what one is giving up today.

Self Preservation and Maximization of Pleasure

Life is what allows us to enjoy pleasure, so preservation and extension of one's life is the prime directive to maximize one's ability to experience pleasure.

In one's rational behavior decisionmaking process, one should always consider the risk of death or injury associated with the behavior, and the impact of the behavior on one's health and longevity.

Suggestions for starting out with a system of rational behavior choices:

Make a list of foods which cause indigestion or other problems and avoid them.

Consciously select the food and drink which you consume using science-based knowledge of a healthy diet as well as your preferences in flavor and taste.

Make a list of things which you enjoy doing and which bring pleasure, so you can refer back to them when you have time and don't know what to do.

Make a list of preventative actions you wish to take and know how they need to be applied in order to be effective.

Imagine the type of life one would like to have in the future and ask oneself what can one do today to bring that life into effect.

If there is an activity which you particularly enjoy, for example, a morning walk or afternoon tea, deliberately schedule these activities on your calendar so they don't get neglected and double booked by more mundane tasks and responsibilities.

19. Avoid Politics

Politics and discussion of politics involves dispute, disagreement, suspicion, rumor, lies, deception and retribution. To avoid the negative emotions that these actions bring, avoid participation in politics.

You may wish to participate in democratic voting. It may be best to inform yourself by researching the candidates or proposals in a very focused way rather than relying on media to inform you. Elections cause the media to behave in damaging ways. Often the candidates and

media will try to convince the audience that things are desparately bad and changes must be made or disaster will strike. This leads to distress among those who are convinced by the narrative. To avoid this negative impact on your well-being, avoid watching media, in particular television. Select your news source based on its rational qualities and balanced reporting. Text-based news sources are best.

In some cases, you may wish to engage in political activity to defend a cause which is important to you. Be selective about how you choose to be an activist on an issue. Working in a support role will be less damaging to your mental health than being a candidate for office. However, if there are no other potential candidates and you see a need to protect something important to you, you may wish to be a candidate for an elected position. Do your best and try not to get caught up in the negative side of politics.

20. Overcome Your Fears!

What if I become destitute?

Remember that even in the simplest shelter, with simple food and water, one can achieve happiness. The things that one really needs are easy to get. By accepting a simple life, spending less than one earns and saving money for emergencies, one can maintain a secure, if simple, standard of living and achieve happiness.

How will I find a suitable partner if I am not rich?

The way to find a partner is to be socially engaged, to have a circle of friends that includes a number of potential partners, and to have inner peace and tranquility that allows for good communication with potential partners. A flashy car, new clothes, jewelry and trendy haircut are not required.

I will miss something in life if I do not become rich!

You need some wealth to live. However, extreme wealth does not necessarily bring happiness. In fact, it is more difficult for an extremely wealthy person to achieve tranquility. Work toward a level of wealth that allows you a simple life.

21. Simplify Your Life!

Most people will benefit from reducing the complexity of their lives. Simplification frees up the most valuable commodity which a person can have: time. However, simplification and elimination of things is not a goal in itself. Simplification and minimalism have value to the extent that they improve one's life through reducing stress related to maintenance of things and by freeing up the time it takes to maintain them. It is also a frugal way to avoid unnecessary expenses. The goal of simplification and minimalism is to achieve a level of tranquility that is not disturbed by responsibilities and the maintenance of the things one owns.

Once a person reaches a minimalist state of tranquility and is enjoying the free time that simplification provides, one should seek to add behaviors and actions which increase happiness to one's life. One may choose actions and behaviors that maximize positive effects while minimizing responsibilities and negative effects.

As one learns which things truly add value and happiness to one's life, one can choose those beneficial behaviors which have a minimal impact on one's financial resources. One can focus one's time on a select group of friends that one knows are rational, kind, caring and without the overhead of drama, anger or deceit. One can spend time researching a subject which one is passionate about. One can create art, build furniture or perform music. One can express themselves through writing. Simplification of one's life can lead to a flowering of expression that is made possible by reducing one's responsibilities and maximizing free time.

Conclusion

In order to continuously improve one's life, one needs to eliminate negative behavior and select behavior and actions that promote positive emotions.

These are the things that one needs to be happy:

FOOD

WATER

SHELTER

FRIENDSHIP

FASCINATION

PHYSICAL FITNESS

All of these things are easy to get. Some require a small amount of money. All of them require one to make good decisions about how to live one's life.

August, 2016

Post by "Cassius" of October 2, 2019 at 9:28 PM

Wow that is excellent! That took some effort!

There was only one place that raised a question in my mind - the heading *Ignore Negative Inputs* i wonder whether some word other than ignore would be better.

But that is very minor.

I do have a more substantive thought that some here will recognize that we have been raising recently, and that is the issue of focusing on pleasure " over the long run" vs. "short term." It is interesting to consider the role of time in the analysis and whether it is what Epicurus intended to favor the longer time as always better. There is in fact the specific reference in Menoeceus to choose not the longest, but the happiest life (if i recall the wording). It is interesting to consider the limits of long vs short term analysis in that light. Some of us have been discussing - if not "length of time" then in what other ways is pleasure measured. "Intensity"? And how should those relative measurements be compared? Because it appears that Epicurus clearly did not advise to always choose the "longest" pleasure (this may relate to the "purity" of the experience as well, in terms of whether it is "pure pleasure" or "mixed" with pain (which is itself something that must be approached carefully).

But I want to repeat - great work and thanks for posting!

Post by “Hiram” of October 3, 2019 at 9:39 AM

[Garden Dweller](#) Is it okay if I share this in the Society of Epicurus page?

Post by “Garden Dweller” of October 3, 2019 at 10:03 AM

At the time I wrote that piece, I had left employment a few months prior and was living off of savings and investments. My focus was on how my long term "sacrifice" of saving enabled me to live a free life of my own choosing. That is the background for my focus on rational hedonism and the need for careful decisions.

Today, after four years of freedom, my challenge has more to do with balancing my personal comfort with the need to do some strenuous activity to get some exercise. So my situation has turned from denying today's pleasures for future satisfaction, to doing slightly uncomfortable things today for a better sense of well being afterwards, and longer term health benefits.

I am trying to learn how to make those latter decisions and would add advice about how to choose actions with short term discomfort resulting in long term benefit.

I would like to rewrite parts, especially paragraph 18. It is clumsy and doesn't say what I want it to say.

Post by “Garden Dweller” of October 3, 2019 at 10:12 AM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

[Garden Dweller](#) Is it okay if I share this in the Society of Epicurus page?

Yes

Post by “Cassius” of October 3, 2019 at 10:21 AM

Your observations point out GD why the "hedonic calculus" is so flexible and individual and that point itself is something that we need to stress and remember. Every time we put a modifier in front of "pleasure" we risk implying something that is too restrictive , so clarity is always important.

Post by “Hiram” of October 3, 2019 at 1:36 PM

[Quote from Garden Dweller](#)

Yes

What name should this be attributed to? Garden Dweller sounds too impersonal.

Post by “Garden Dweller” of October 3, 2019 at 2:51 PM

Post by “Hiram” of October 3, 2019 at 4:05 PM

Well you learn something new every day! I just learned how easy it is to make "tables" on Wordpress.

Here's the essay. Feel free to share it:

<http://societyofepicurus.com/the-pursuit-of...fe-improvement/>

Post by “Martin” of October 5, 2019 at 12:30 AM

"7. ... Use discipline to say no to unnecessary desires. Consciously reduce one's thoughts about unnecessary desires.":

From the context of the surrounding text, I guess you mean unnecessary desires which are not worth the prior or subsequent pain when fulfilled.

With the necessary desires being easy to fulfill for me, I spend most of my effort on unnecessary desires which I expect to bring me the most pleasure (including permanent pleasure from memories of great experiences) for the least pain.

An alternative approach which is often taken by Epicureans is to define necessary or natural desires so widely that those which are left out are only those we should not pursue.

I prefer a much more narrow definition because it helps me in prioritizing in difficult times by focusing on the necessary. When the crisis is resolved, I can expand my effort again on the unnecessary ones which bring great pleasure.

Post by “Cassius” of October 5, 2019 at 5:06 AM

[Quote from Martin](#)

From the context of the surrounding text, I guess you mean unnecessary desires which are not worth the prior or subsequent pain when fulfilled.

Excellent catch, Martin. I think that's always a very important point - otherwise the "natural and necessary" categorization becomes a very un-Epicurean absolute rule, which would violate the more fundamental Epicurean observation that pleasure is pleasure is pleasure, all pleasure is desirable in itself, and the first question is always to ask what would happen practically if the particular desire/pleasure is pursued.

Given what I think is Epicurus' clear rigorously-consistent thought processes, I cannot imagine that he intended an intellectual classification which varies with circumstance to override the general rule that [Pleasure is the guide of life](#). But that is just what happens when people (not referring to Garden Dweller) elevate the useful categorization tool to an end in itself, just like that happens whenever any tool is so elevated to an end in itself, just like "virtue."

That observation applies the the very development and use of a set of observations like this "Continuous Life Improvement" list. As GD is finding, priorities shift with circumstance and written rules, no matter how generally and insightfully written, require adjustment to those circumstances.

Post by “Garden Dweller” of October 6, 2019 at 12:01 PM

[Quote from Martin](#)

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With the necessary desires being easy to fulfill for me, I spend most of my effort on unnecessary desires which I expect to bring me the most pleasure (including permanent pleasure from memories of great experiences) for the least pain.

Yes, on original writing, the focus in that paragraph is in part on desires such as those which come from advertising, consumerism or media lifestyle marketing. These desires are not really beneficial or pleasing other than in initial acquisition and over the long term they don't provide

enough pleasure for the cost of money, time, or mental energy expended on them. Perhaps these desires are better described as false promises rather than unnecessary.

There may be other desires that one has created in one's own mind that have promise but for which resources (time, money, energy) are lacking, or for which other desires rank higher on the priority list. These desires may be better described as deferred or delayed, with the meaning that they would be nice if one could afford them, but given limited resources, other things have priority. These desires are not "unnecessary", they are just too expensive for now.

And there are desires which fail the hedonistic calculus test, for example, I would rather not work in employment for several months more to pay

the additional cost of a luxury car, so a standard model fills the need at a lower cost to my free time.

Post by “Garden Dweller” of November 8, 2019 at 7:08 PM

I intend to edit the following sections and welcome comment:

[Quote from Garden Dweller](#)

16. Preserve the Health of your Body

Your level of happiness over the long term depends on how you treat your body. Neglect and abuse can bring pain. Eat healthy foods, exercise and use your body to maintain your fitness level. Use appropriate hygiene and preventative medical care. Avoid alcohol and drugs in excess. Exercise is an example of a short term discomfort that has long term benefits. Strive to achieve a healthy mind in a healthy body.

This section will be replaced with:

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Our senses are the most direct and true connection with the natural world, far more direct than our understanding and learning about the natural world that we receive through communication with others. One should carefully guard against anything that would disturb,

modify or distort one's senses and sensory observation of the natural world. One should moderate the use of intoxicants which distort one's perception of the world. Avoid alcohol and drugs in excess.

Post by “Garden Dweller” of November 8, 2019 at 7:11 PM

[Quote from Garden Dweller](#)

18. Use Rational Decisionmaking!

Rational decisionmaking means that one considers a number of criteria before making a decision on a behavior or action. For example, the choice of food that one eats is a complex prioritization that one makes every day.

Consider the following criteria used to select which food to eat:

Healthy

Low Cost

Tastes Good

Makes you feel good the next day

Easy to Cook

One might rate these criteria as to importance on a 1 to 10 scale. For example:

Importance Rating

10 Healthy

7 Low Cost

8 Tastes Good

5 Makes you feel good the next day

3 Easy to Cook

Then one might select a few food options and rate them according to the criteria:

Pizza Salad Fried Rice

2 8 7 Healthy

7 8 5 Low Cost

8 6 7 Tastes Good

2 10 8 Makes you feel good the next day

3 8 5 Easy to Cook

Multiply each rating by the importance rate for that row and sum:

Pizza Salad Fried Rice

20 80 70 Healthy

49 56 35 Low Cost

64 48 56 Tastes Good

10 20 16 Makes you feel good the next day

9 24 15 Easy to Cook

152 248 182 Total

The highest total amount indicates which choice would be most beneficial, based on the priority level given to each criteria.

This type of rational decision method for choosing food is an example of how one should approach many decisions, both mundane daily decisions such as what to eat, as well as long term life decisions. The criteria and rating system used in this example is a simplification of the process that people use to make decisions in real life.

The point here is not that you should use a spreadsheet to decide what to eat. The purpose of this example is to show how to make decisions based on consideration of the most important criteria, rather than based on immediate gratification. A certain level of discipline is needed to select the behavior or action that is most beneficial to one's life over the long term.

Display More

I intend to replace this with:

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In order to use reason to live a life of happiness and tranquility, one applies rational decisionmaking to ones life based on the philosophy of Epicurus.

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Which activities we choose to do each day

Which people we associate with

How we speak to and treat other people

Recognizing nature through our senses

What we consume

Distinguishing between pleasure and pain, and determining which actions or events led to the experience of pleasure or pain

Levels of Rational Behavior Decisionmaking

Present Moment Distress Reduction

Be attentive to one's body and respond to distress in the present moment.

One should constantly monitor your body's senses: are you sitting comfortably, are your clothes and shoes comfortable, are you warm or cold, are you hungry or thirsty, do you have any mental stress or physical discomfort? When you sense any of these distress indicators, take action to remedy the discomfort as soon as you can.

Present Moment Positive Emotion Enhancement

Over one's life, one should learn specific behaviors that enhance feelings of joy, kindness, love, grace and other positive emotions (pleasurable emotions). Behaviors which bring pleasure might include calling a friend for a conversation, preparing a meal, writing a poem, taking a nap, designing a project, organizing one's desk, reading a book or going for a walk. The behaviors which an individual finds pleasurable are individual to that person. Each person must make themselves aware of the types of behaviors which enhance one's positive emotions, and in the present moment, should select that behavior which the individual feels would be most pleasurable. It may be helpful to make a list of behaviors that have been enjoyable in the past to help one remember the options that one has in the present moment.

Future Distress Reduction

There are a number of problems which one can avoid in the future by taking action today. Examples are preparing a financial budget to avoid a lack of funds, exercising to improve future health, medical care to heal a wound, working today to avoid future poverty, brushing one's teeth to avoid tooth decay. Select this type of preventative behavior when a relatively minor negative experience today will prevent a major discomfort tomorrow.

Future Positive Emotion Enhancement

Some actions one can do today can reap benefits in the future. Examples are planting a seed to enjoy the future crop, getting an education which will improve one's career, investing savings so that one may enjoy free time from employment. Select this type of action strategically, with a consideration as to risk and reward, in particular regarding what one is giving up today.

Self Preservation and Maximization of Pleasure

Life is what allows us to enjoy pleasure, so preservation and extension of one's life is the prime directive to maximize one's ability to experience pleasure.

In one's rational behavior decisionmaking process, one should always consider the risk of death or injury associated with the behavior, and the impact of the behavior on one's health and longevity.

Suggestions for starting out with a system of rational behavior choices:

Make a list of foods which cause indigestion or other problems and avoid them.

Consciously select the food and drink which you consume using science-based knowledge of a healthy diet as well as your preferences in flavor and taste.

Make a list of things which you enjoy doing and which bring pleasure, so you can refer back to them when you have time and don't know what to do.

Make a list of preventative actions you wish to take and know how they need to be applied in order to be effective.

Imagine the type of life one would like to have in the future and ask oneself what can one do today to bring that life into effect.

If there is an activity which you particularly enjoy, for example, a morning walk or afternoon tea, deliberately schedule these activities on your calendar so they don't get neglected and double booked by more mundane tasks and responsibilities.

Post by “Garden Dweller” of November 11, 2019 at 11:46 AM

[Quote from Garden Dweller](#)

Present Moment Distress Reduction

Be attentive to one's body and respond to distress in the present moment.

One should constantly monitor your body's senses: are you sitting comfortably, are your clothes and shoes comfortable, are you warm or cold, are you hungry or thirsty, do you have any mental stress or physical discomfort? When you sense any of these distress indicators, take action to remedy the discomfort as soon as you can.

I agree that focusing one's attention on negative things is not good for the mind. I may need to go through the full text and change the focus from negative sensory inputs to ways of enhancing comfort. ...

Present Moment Physical Comfort Enhancement

Be attentive to one's body and how one could improve comfort and contentment.

At frequent intervals, one should be aware of one's current physical state and imagine what one could do to increase comfort, such as drinking to relieve thirst, finding a good sitting position, wearing clothes that do not bind or chafe, or getting up and stretching after being inactive for some time. When physically active, enjoy the exercise but know the limits and take a break when appropriate.

Post by "Cassius" of November 11, 2019 at 11:59 AM

Is there a companion "Present Moment Mental Comfort Enhancement" to go with this one? I scanned back but apologize if I missed it.

Post by "Garden Dweller" of November 11, 2019 at 1:38 PM

What types of things would one do to increase mental comfort?

Post by “Elayne” of November 11, 2019 at 1:47 PM

Garden Dweller, for me mental pleasure would include things like remembering past pleasures, planning future pleasures, learning something new, spending time with friends, reading... I do not go looking for mental pain, but if it shows up, I would check to see if I had slipped into any sort of idealistic thinking or false beliefs that cause fears. And counter that with reality!

Post by “Cassius” of November 11, 2019 at 2:05 PM

Yes those would be categories, but just as we can list specific aspects of bodily pains being replaced by pleasures, we ought also to be able to do the same with mental -- and since mental pains and pleasures are specifically mentioned by Torquatus as being capable of being more intense than physical/bodily ones, they are probably from many perspectives as important or more important than bodily.

I hedge by saying "from many perspectives" mainly because I know that sustaining bodily life is a requirement for any other kind of pleasures, but for most of us, sustaining bodily life really doesn't require all that much effort nowadays - or, at least, we generally have a lot of time to devote to mental issues in addition to bodily ones.

Post by “Garden Dweller” of November 12, 2019 at 11:14 AM

Some mental pains that I can imagine are anxiety, worry, desire for revenge, fear and anger. I know that one of the basic goals of Epicurus is to reduce or eliminate fear/anxiety/worry in humans.

I am using the terms Rational Decisionmaking and Rational Behavior Decisionmaking in place of the term Hedonistic Calculus. Section 18 is an attempt to describe Hedonistic Calculus, how one would make behavior decisions using criteria that align with Epicurean philosophy. I don't like the philosophical term Hedonistic Calculus because the word hedonist makes me think of eating grapes off a cross while participating in an orgy, and the word calculus reminds me of difficult to understand mathematic concepts, when in fact the term Hedonistic Calculus means a careful choice of behavior to maximize one's joy and happiness.

You can see in the original section 18 I used a mathematical explanation, or a spreadsheet explanation of hedonistic calculus. After reflection, I don't like this explanation, it is not the way I make decisions about my life. That is the reason for the rewrite of this section.

Either the English language is failing me with words to describe what I mean, or perhaps I need to find better words to describe things like "Present Moment Physical Comfort Enhancement". That phrase is clumsy and not quality writing. I could remove the word Physical which would reduce the clumsiness and make it less specific. One could write an entire book on the hedonistic calculus, and I am trying to describe it in a few paragraphs.

Post by "Godfrey" of November 12, 2019 at 12:00 PM

Rational Decisionmaking sounds rather Stoic; maybe something along the lines of "optimizing pleasure" would be a better replacement for hedonic calculus. Or "using pleasure for making decisions".

If it's not too trendy, Present Moment Physical Comfort Enhancement could become "mindfulness of pleasure".

Post by "Cassius" of November 12, 2019 at 1:15 PM

except that "mindfulness" is almost trademarked by the Stoics 😊

Post by "Cassius" of November 12, 2019 at 1:18 PM

Garden Dweller I agree your concern about hedonism, and i agree with Godfrey's comment re "rational". I think we are seeing the implications of Epicurus' deemphasis of " logic" . there is indeed a limit to which logic and reason can take us. We are really in the realm of "feeling" although even that word is surrounded with negative stereotypes.

Post by “Cassius” of November 12, 2019 at 1:19 PM

i almost never use the word "hedonism" myself exactly for the reason you state.

Post by “Garden Dweller” of November 12, 2019 at 1:53 PM

Tell me if I am over-interpreting the Epicurean approach:

A student of Epicurus, when confronted with a pain causing problem, will use a strategic method to relieve the pain, including:

Analysis of the root causes of the problem, which may be complex and not easily discerned.

Consulting with others on how best to resolve the problem, including use of the body of knowledge obtained through scientific method.

Respond to the problem by means of a strategy focused on achieving a state of pleasure, which may be by use of a number of complex problem solving methods, if needed.

Simple problems may have simple solutions, but more difficult problems may need a coordinated approach with a number of methods.

This is what I mean by rational decisionmaking.

Post by “Cassius” of November 12, 2019 at 2:49 PM

That makes good sense to me.

Part of what we always dance around in coming up with formulas is the issue of whether the goal of avoiding pain is somehow entirely separate or more important than that of pursuing pleasure.

That's where I think the perspective has to focus on that there really is not a conflict here. Yes there are times when a train is coming at you and your immediate attention is focused on getting out of the way, but in reality since the feelings are only two, then **every** choice, and not only when you are standing in the path of the train, but **always**, is basically that of avoiding a

pain by choosing a pleasure, or choosing a temporary/smaller pain in order to experience a longer/larger pleasure.

Once your perspective opens up to including EVERYTHING that you experience/feel as either a pain or a pleasure, then there really is no issue of worrying that you are at any point "shifting into neutral" and doing something that is neither a pain nor a pleasure. Each and every action is geared toward the same ultimate result.

And that's why I also think that Epicurus seems to have tended to collapse the wording into saying that [PLEASURE is the guide of life](#). Each time he could have said "pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain" but I think when the overall goal is seen as pleasure, which is really the same thing as avoiding pain, then it makes sense to talk in terms of the one word "pleasure" (even using the "accursed" term "hedonism") rather than always saying "pursue pleasure and avoid pain."

Because it seems to me that really both terms are encompassed in "feeling" and so ultimately what we are discussing is the competition between ultimate goals: Are the ultimate goals set by "feeling" or by "gods" or by "Ideal forms / virtue." And of course Epicurus comes down for "feeling."

Post by “Garden Dweller” of November 12, 2019 at 8:32 PM

I have applied the edits to sections 16 and 18.

Post by “Cassius” of November 12, 2019 at 8:37 PM

This is getting to be very elaborate! 😊

Post by “Martin” of November 14, 2019 at 10:12 AM

Cassius, I guess that in your statement above

"Part of what we always dance around in coming up with formulas is the issue of whether the goal of avoiding pain is somehow entirely separate or more important than that of avoiding pleasure"

you do not mean "avoiding pleasure" but rather finding pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2019 at 10:16 AM

Thanks Martin! As usual my typing is atrocious. Fixed - changed to "pursuing."

Post by "Elli" of November 16, 2019 at 2:37 PM

Yes, I agree in any difficult situation we have to think of what would be the right strategy to overcome this situation that is against the goal of pleasure. But we have to keep in mind that we have to not be delayed or to be very hurry. This is what the greeks said with the word [eu+kairia] "opportunity".

"You would attempt something, only when you can attempt it in the appropriate circumstances and in the appropriate opportunity. But when comes the right opportunity, you must be ready to grab it. Epicurus forbids us to stay idle, when we think about fleeing, and gives us the hope of a way out even from the most difficult situations, as long as we are not in a hurry before the time nor too dilatory when the right time arrives".