

Bentham’s Hedonic Calculus: A Field Test

Introduction: Jeremy Bentham believed that the “good life” could be assured by the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain.

Field Test Assignment: Could this effectively work? The assignment below is a field test of Bentham’s ideas about calculating this using your own experiences.

Task I: Complete a log based on at least SIX experiences over the next 3 days. Answer the reflection questions at the end.

The log should include the following:

1. Column for Experiences.
2. Column for Pleasure Rating 1 to 5 with explanation.
3. Column for Pain Rating -1 to -5 with explanation.
4. Explanation of Overall Rating using at least one the following characteristics of Pleasure/Pain:
 - a) Intensity - How strong will the pain or pleasure be?
 - b) Duration - How long will the pain or pleasure last?
 - c) Certainty - How likely is it that the pain or pleasure will occur?
 - d) Propinquity (nearness in time) - How soon will the pain or pleasure be experienced?
 - e) Fecundity (productivity) - How likely is the pleasure or pain to be followed by similar pleasure or pain?
 - f) Purity - How much pain is mixed with the pleasure and vice versa?
 - g) Extent - How many people are affected?

Sample Log:

Experiences	Pleasure Rating and Explanation	Pain Rating and Explanation	Overall Rating and Explanation
1. On Sunday, I changed the oil in my snow blower.	(+2) I had the pleasure of seeing the snow blower start	(-3) When I was doing this a rare combination of wind, snow, and rain “blew up.”	Pleasure – Pain = Overall rating (-1) The pleasure rating was based on the <u>intensity</u> of the pleasure when the snow blower started. The pain rating was based on the <u>duration</u> of the experience, which was not all that long.

Task II: Reflection Questions (please answer each separately):

*Please review all powerpoints, videos, worksheets and articles from this unit and incorporate all relevant philosophical concepts into your answers.

1. Bentham claims, "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of sovereign two masters, pain and pleasure." Should the avoidance of pain and the promotion of pleasure be the ultimate goals in achieving a good life? Are there other things to be valued aside from seeking pleasure and avoiding pain? Explain (be sure to incorporate relevant philosophical concepts discussed in class).
2. Referring to the data compiled in your activity log (sum of your six overall ratings), what conclusions did you reach concerning your attainment of the "good life" according to this process? How do you feel about your results (i.e. accurate/inaccurate, agree/disagree etc...)? Explain.
3. Is hedonic calculus a useful tool to evaluate your life?
Complete your own PMI chart to evaluate the usefulness of the hedonic calculus process/results (pluses, minuses and interesting aspects).

PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING
The positives (or "pluses") of using this type of system.	The negatives (or "minuses") of using this type of system.	<u>At least 2</u> interesting things you thought about when doing this field study.

Rubric

Category	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1	Below Expectations
KNOWLEDGE Demonstrates a thorough understanding of relevant key philosophical terms (i.e. happiness, duty, altruism, 'good life', virtue, egoism, existentialism, etc...)	Extensive	Considerable	Some	Limited	Lack of understanding
THINKING Demonstrates extensive critical thinking and insight for all reflection questions PMI chart thoughtfully completed	Extensive	Considerable	Some	Limited	Lacking in thought
COMMUNICATION Clear evidence of proofreading with almost no errors Sentence structure is consistently clear	Expensive	Considerable	Some	Limited	Lacking in collection and use
APPLICATION Logical application of rating characteristics (intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, extent) Experience log fully completed - collection and analytic use of data to draw relevant conclusions	Consistently	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Not shown

Teacher Comments: