

Candidate 5 evidence

- philosophy assignment

Is happiness all that you should prioritise and value in life?

Happiness, it is something everyone wants and strives to achieve but does that mean it the most important thing in life? It has been a discussion in philosophy for centuries with many different opinions, some saying happiness and pleasure is the most important thing in the human experience and should be valued that way while others saying happiness is not the most important and other things are worth valuing. One view comes from philosopher Jeremy Bentham who is the father of our modern day understanding of utilitarianism, he believed happiness and pleasure experienced by the majority is the most important thing in life. Opposite to that is philosopher Robert Nozick who with his thought experiment the 'experience machine' said that happiness is not the most important thing and that humans value many other emotions in life. This essay will discuss these points into a further detail.

One view that happiness and pleasure is the most important thing, comes from Jeremy Bentham, he believed happiness is the most important thing and being in constant pursuit of it is morally good and always worth doing. He put this into the group of utilitarianism but particularly hedonism which is the idea that experiencing happiness for the majority is morally good. He believed it is human nature to value two things pleasure and pain, and what motivates and guides us is increasing pleasure and reducing pain. his theory of the greatest happiness principle ties with this as Bentham claims that the best way to decide what to do is to choose the outcome that maximises happiness for the majority and minimises pain for the minority. Bentham created a seven-part theory to help us calculate any given situation to decipher if it will bring the most happiness and pleasure to us this is called the 'hedonic calculus' it includes 7 factors, examples being duration (how long it will last), intensity (how intense is the feeling) and

certainty (how certain is the experience of happiness will be endured) plus many more. Bentham's theories and his idea of utilitarianism is still relevant today and has been applied to many of our modern world's decision making, for example this can be seen in government policies like free health care for all and an equal right to education. Bentham's theories are strong as they are simple to understand and easy to apply to our everyday lives, however some would claim that they lack depth and would not be suitable when applied to real experiences in life. Bentham's theory still stands, and many believe it is an uncomplicated way to make life better and easier for everyone. Overall, he makes a valid argument as to why happiness is the most important thing and should be valued that way.

Another argument opposite to Bentham's which argues that the experience of happiness and pleasure isn't the most important comes from American philosopher Robert Nozick, who with his thought experiment named 'the experience machine' makes the point that humans value a lot more than that, and it is unrealistic to have the expectation to feel happy all of the time. He asks us to imagine an experience machine where every pleasurable experience is possible. You could choose to always feel happy and experience pleasure and could live your 'dream' life though none of it would be real. Your memory would be wiped of ever being plugged so you would not know that what you are experiencing is fake. Surely everyone would choose to plug in and stay there forevermore, however what Nozick points out is that when presented the choice majority of us would choose to stay unplugged, because we value a lot more than just feeling happy, we want our life to be rooted in the real. This shows that things like truth, connections and real experience is valued just as or even more so than happiness and pleasure. Perhaps if all you knew was being in this machine and that constant state of happy it would mean you would not understand it, because you cannot fully understand and embrace happiness unless you have lived through those low points in life. Also, it is within human nature to find a problem, something we do not like, or we wish to change so being in this machine and getting to experience your 'dream' life you would still find something to be upset or sad about, so this idea of constant

happiness is unrealistic. Nozick's theory highlights the complexities of life and though the struggles are hard, and things may not be perfect all the time that does not mean it is not important. However, some would argue that if someone is happy then it doesn't matter how real it is, and there is nothing wrong if we all lived in our own perfect world because it is fair and nothing bad happens and we may already be living in a fake reality so what's wrong if that fake reality in which we live in is a pleasant one. Still Nozick's theory is a logical one and realistic, it teaches us to value a lot more than just happiness and pleasure, it is the things like truth, real life connections and the experience of every emotion that are just as if not even more so important.

Though Nozick's claims are very strong and makes logical sense it doesn't completely disprove hedonism or Bentham's view completely (which wasn't his intent), if anything it shows that people prefer a different kind of happiness, not one in which we experience all the time but happiness and pleasure can still be valued the most or valued for our own sake. For example, many ignore certain issues to preserve their own happiness believing in comforting lies and ignoring difficult truths like poverty or climate change its not because they do not care but rather that they value and care about their own happiness as well. Whereas Bentham's argument does make sense it would not exactly work when tried as following Bentham's theory could lead to you putting so much pressure on yourself all the time to feel happiness and experience pleasure it could just lead you to feeling no happiness at all. Also, there are plenty of other ways to feel happiness without 'forcing' it. Everyone feels happiness as and emotion in day-to-day life even as fleeting as it is, the constant pursuit of it would possibly lead everyone to not enjoy happiness as it should be. Nozick proves that people are not willing to sacrifice their own truths and meanings to feel this constant state of happiness and pleasure. Overall Nozick's points are stronger and weakens Bentham's claims as he provides an accurate way to view life.

In conclusion happiness as an emotion is very subjective and is different when applied to every different person. Both philosophers discussed bring forward two very different points of views, both of which are logical and make sense, Bentham claiming that the feeling of happiness and experience of pleasure is the most important things in our lives and should always be valued by everyone that way. whereas Nozick claims that there are other things we value just as much if not more and happiness is not the most important thing. In my opinion I believe that Nozick's theory is better as it is an accurate representation of what our human minds are like and is also an interesting tested logical argument that works when we apply it to our lives.

Philosophy National 5 Resource Sheet	
Candidate Name	Scottish Candidate Number
<p>IS happiness most important thing? Discussion for long time Bentham... Nozick... Small summary</p>	
<p><u>Bentham</u> happiness most important thing util... hedonism... Increase happiness → reduce pain greatest happiness principle + hedonic calculus, 7 factors - duration, intensity, certainty etc. applied modern world decision making</p>	
<p><u>Robert Nozick</u> / Thought experiment Experience machine - any pleasurable experience possible memory wiped plugged in Everything we want - none real presented choice - stay unplugged - rooted in real Care more than just happy not understand happiness until lived bw points + human nature to find problem highlights complexities of real life H- if someone happy doesn't matter if it real</p>	
<p><u>Mixed</u> Nozick doesn't disprove hedonism & Bentham's view prefer different kind happiness avoid serious issues poverty CC Bentham argument make sense - wouldn't work when tried other way to feel happiness, not forcing it following B's theory lead to pressure on self If people aren't willing to sacrifice truths & meaning Overall weakens Bentham's claim</p>	
<p>happiness is subjective philosophers two different points of view Both logical & make sense (explain theories +) which I think better (Nozick & why) Tested logical argument - applied to life</p>	