

Pleasure And Pain Modeled With Math

Post by “Don” of December 5, 2023 at 6:05 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Judging by this, "calculus" wasn't even a word in Greek. So "hedonic calculus" would be a later overlay onto choices and rejections, which probably doesn't add any clarity to this thread. ☐☐

Jeremy Bentham came up with the idea of the "felicific calculus" although he didn't use that exact phrase in his [An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation](#) (1789). If you want to see someone apply mathematics to pleasure and pain, that book is a tour de force!

The words Epicurus used translate to things like decide, judge, etc. Section 129 of Menoikeus is probably the most succinct exposition. Here's my paraphrase/translation:

[129] *Because we perceived pleasure as a fundamental good and common to our nature, and so, as a result of this, we begin every choice and rejection against this, judging every good thing by the standard of how that pleasure affects us (i.e., how we react to considering experiencing that pleasure). And because pleasure is the fundamental and inborn good, this is why not every pleasure is seized and we pass by many pleasures when greater unpleasant things were to result for us as a result: and we think many pains better than pleasures whenever greater pleasure were to follow for a longer time by patiently abiding the pain.*

κρίνοντες “judging, deciding + (accusative” πᾶν ἀγαθὸν “every good thing,” i.e., “every pleasure” against or by the κανόνι τῷ πάθει “the standard of how we react to what happens to us when we experience - or consider experiencing - that specific good thing.

“And against this (that pleasure is a fundamental good and common to our nature), judging every good thing (i.e., every possible pleasurable experience) by the standard of how that pleasure affects us or how we react to considering experiencing that pleasure.”

By the way, I'm translating πάθει (pathei) in its literal sense as "that which is experienced."

See also:

DL 10.34 (Diogenes' commentary)

They affirm that there are two states of feeling, pleasure and pain, which arise in every animate being, and that the one is favourable and the other hostile to that being, and by their means choice and avoidance are determined

κρίνεσθαι < κρίνω "judge, decide"

So, it seems to me we're more of a judge than a mathematician.