

The Hedonistic Calculus - explained through an equation

Post by "Cassius" of November 4, 2019 at 10:43 AM

Charles --Very interesting! This is similar to a discussion we had in regard to coming up with a "pleasure maximization spreadsheet." [A Draft Epicurean Pleasure Maximization Worksheet](#)

One of the first problems that makes this hard is in regard to "intensity." What does "intensity" really mean, and how do we judge it in comparison with duration / time and the other factors as well?

Given this statement in the letter to Menoecus it seems clear that Epicurus would not say that "time" can alone be a determining factor, and that blasts away what is at first glance an attractive method of ranking:

And even as men choose of food not merely and simply the larger portion, but the more pleasant, so the wise seek to enjoy the time which is most pleasant and not merely that which is longest.

To me the issues all point back in the direction of the "calculation" of what is "**most pleasant**" being totally subjective. Parsing out the elements and describing them in terms of a spreadsheet or a formula can in fact be very helpful to a thought process, but I think it probably has to be stressed at the beginning, middle, and end that the decisionmaking is personal and not quantifiable through "reasoning."

And on that conclusion I think you will get strong affirmative support from [Elayne](#) !

In fact, maybe the number one helpful benefit from going through this exercise is to come to an understanding of why it is impossible! Efforts to reduce an individual personal goal into an equation or an abstraction must fail, in the same way a map, no matter how detailed, is never a fully accurate equivalent of reality.