# The Normal Curve of Pleasure

### Post by “kochiekoch” of July 22, 2024 at 1:28 PM

Hi there!

It was requested, during the 20th chat, that I post my idea that I discussed, that pleasure and pain can be described using a Normal, or Bell curve.

Normal curves are used to describe just about anything. And are common mathematical models.

Standard deviation diagram - Normal distribution - Wikipedia

(Beware the Wikipedia article contains lots of heavy math I can't begin to fathom).

It dawned on me, that if you use pleasure inputs, for the horizontal axis, and pleasure felt, for the vertical axis, the curve would describe pleasure from and Epicurean perspective. As inputs increase, in response to pain felt, pleasure rises on the curve, finally reaching a peak at the top of the curve which is also the limit. As inputs continue to increase, the pleasure decreases as you are on the downward slope of the curve.

To give an example, say you are VERY HUNGRY! And are presented a large quantity of food. You start at the left bottom of the curve, the maximum of pain, and the minimum of pleasure, and chow down! As you are filling yourself your hunger pangs decrease, and your pleasure increases. Eventually, you peak out in pleasure at the top of the curve, but you compulsively keep eating. As you do this, the pleasure decreases, and pain increases on the declining slope of the curve until you are in as much pain as you were to begin with.

I hope you find this idea useful. Enjoy!

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### Post by “Cassius” of July 22, 2024 at 1:43 PM

Can you do an actual diagram Steve ?

Are you saying both the X and Y axis are labeled pleasure?

I was expecting pain to be on there somewhere so it would help to visualize this more precisely.

## Post by “kochiekoch” of July 22, 2024 at 8:47 PM

>>Can you do an actual diagram Steve ?<<

Nope, I'm not so techie.

Best I could come up with is the link to the diagram on the Wikipedia page:

(Give that a minute to load).

Standard deviation diagram - Normal distribution - Wikipedia

Imagine a common "Bell Curve". That's all it is.

>>Are you saying both the X and Y axis are labeled pleasure?<<

No. The horizontal or X axis would be labeled inputs, like food eaten, and the vertical, or Y axis would be labeled pleasure-diminishment of pain. How you feel eating the food and eventually overindulging in it. The very bottom of the curve, on either side, would be the maximum of pain, minimum of pleasure, and the top of the curve, would be the minimum of pain, maximum of pleasure.

It's something I like about this model. It predicts a maximum of pleasure at the top of the curve. Just like Epicurus.

Interestingly enough, an unnatural and unnecessary desire-pleasure would take off like a missile up the curve. Forever alternating between pain and pleasure but never reaching satisfaction at a peak. Going on to infinity, as Epicurus suggests. It describes the hedonic treadmill.

>>I was expecting pain to be on there somewhere so it would help to visualize this more precisely<<

Yeah, but you can see it's found only on the Y, or vertical axis. Pain diminishes going up the vertical axis, toward the peak, but increases post peak if inputs continue along the horizontal, or X axis.

LOL! You're pretty uncomfortable if you keep eating all the way to the bottom of the post peak curve!

## Post by “Cassius” of July 22, 2024 at 9:48 PM

I remember that we discussed trying to plot things out in the past, and see this is mentioned in this thread / post from 2019,

In that discussion we were talking plotting out duration of life in relation to pleasure predominating over pain, if I recall correctly

It's probably still worth experimenting with various scenarios by actual plotting of diagrams at some point.

Post

## RE: Against the stoics

Excellent points Charles and Todd.

Todd, I was referring to a discussion we had on a Skype call, the one Charles is referring to, in which @JAWS referred to "the area under the curve." We have not yet done a graphic but have that on the to do list.

Basically we were discussing the feasibility of illustrating the issue of how long we should want to live by a standard x-y graph, with "pleasure" on the vertical Y axis, and time on the X axis.

That would make "the area under the curve"…

Cassius
October 4, 2019 at 6:50 AM

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### Post by “Cassius” of July 23, 2024 at 11:15 AM

Anybody coming across this thread and getting motivated to plot some bell curves might want to also consult the earlier thread in which a "spreadsheet" was discussed:

Post

## A Draft Epicurean Pleasure Maximization Worksheet

**Feelings cannot be reduced to numbers,** and there are important limitations in the use of a "worksheet" as an aid in evaluating choices and avoidances. However it may be helpful to some

people to visualize an illustration of the weighing process that some term the "hedonic calculus." Here is a draft example for your consideration and comment. Scores included here are of course fictional and for example only. A version of the spreadsheet in xlsx format is attached for downloading.

...

Cassius
July 11, 2019 at 10:25 PM

Even though pictoral and mathematical representations are limited, and cannot possibly capture the "feelings" that are involved in pleasure and pain, I continue to think that the process of working through them is useful, especially in that trying to formulate them emphasizes *how* in the end a mathematical analysus cannot hope to capture in objective form the full human pleasure/pain evaluation, which is inherently subjective, especially as to "mental" pleasure and pain.

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## Post by “kochiekoch” of July 23, 2024 at 5:59 PM

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> It's probably still worth experimenting with various scenarios by actual plotting of diagrams at some point.

Yeah, it looks like I'm not the only person that thought of using a normal curve to describe pleasure. Normal curves can be used to describe all sorts of things. And are! 🙂

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Wow! That worksheet is really numerically specific! I wonder how you get specific numbers for pleasure.

As far as the worksheet is concerned, I can see your point. I don't think you can quantify pleasure that specifically either.

The Normal curve though is pretty generalized and follows Epicurus' idea's well IMO.