



Universität
Basel

Research Project

Predicted pleasure, motivation, and psychological utility

Third-party funded project

Project title Predicted pleasure, motivation, and psychological utility

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According to economics people base their decisions on how valuable they expect the result of the decision to be. Economics assumes that a decision maker can map the value of every outcome of a decision onto a single scale, called utility. This way they can choose between outcomes that are very different. They can trade off the pleasure of eating a desert now with the expected pain of a heart attack later by comparing the expected utilities from eating and suffering from a heart attack. Psychologist focus on how we best describe utility itself, how the mind represents it, and which factors it is influenced by. Historically it has been hypothesized that the mind represents utility in terms of the pleasure and pain of decision outcomes. It has also been hypothesized that pleasure and pain are the ultimate causes of motivation. It would thus follow that the utility a decision maker predicts for an outcome corresponds to the pleasure s/he expects for that outcome, and this in turn drives the degree to which s/he is motivated to pursue the outcome. In this project we seek to provide evidence that motivation to pursue an outcome can be high while predicted pleasure can be relatively low, or more generally, that motivation and predicted pleasure may diverge. This raises the question whether predicted pleasure or motivation underlies utility. We attempt to show that overt behavior that seeks to bring about an outcome can be influenced either by predicted pleasure or by motivation, even if they diverge. This would suggest that the utility of the outcome could be based on either predicted pleasure or motivation, even if the two are not the same.

Keywords liking; wanting; preference; hedonic consumption; psychological utility; motivation; pleasure; predicted pleasure; predicted utility; decision utility

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