3.1 MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM VALUES

EXAMPLE A

(a) Use a graphing device to estimate the absolute minimum and maximum values of the function $f(x) = x - 2\sin x$, $0 \leqslant x \leqslant 2\pi$.
(b) Use calculus to find the exact minimum and maximum values.

SOLUTION

(a) Figure 1 shows a graph of f in the viewing rectangle $[0, 2\pi]$ by $[-1, 8]$. By moving the cursor close to the maximum point, we see that the y-coordinates don't change very much in the vicinity of the maximum. The absolute maximum value is about 6.97 and it occurs when $x \approx 5.2$. Similarly, by moving the cursor close to the minimum point, we see that the absolute minimum value is about -0.68 and it occurs when $x \approx 1.0$. It is possible to get more accurate estimates by zooming in toward the maximum and minimum points, but instead let's use calculus.

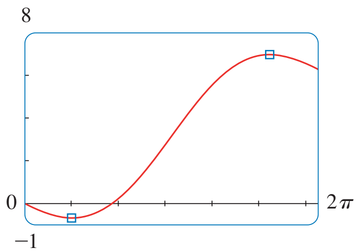

FIGURE 1

(b) The function $f(x) = x - 2\sin x$ is continuous on $[0, 2\pi]$. Since $f'(x) = 1 - 2\cos x$, we have $f'(x) = 0$ when $\cos x = \frac{1}{2}$ and this occurs when $x = \pi/3$ or $5\pi/3$. The values of f at these critical points are

$$f(\pi/3) = \frac{\pi}{3} - 2\sin\frac{\pi}{3} = \frac{\pi}{3} - \sqrt{3} \approx -0.684853$$

and
$$f(5\pi/3) = \frac{5\pi}{3} - 2\sin\frac{5\pi}{3} = \frac{5\pi}{3} + \sqrt{3} \approx 6.968039$$

The values of f at the endpoints are

$$f(0) = 0 \qquad \text{and} \qquad f(2\pi) = 2\pi \approx 6.28$$

Comparing these four numbers and using the Closed Interval Method, we see that the absolute minimum value is $f(\pi/3) = \pi/3 - \sqrt{3}$ and the absolute maximum value is $f(5\pi/3) = 5\pi/3 + \sqrt{3}$. The values from part (a) serve as a check on our work. ■