

# "Absence Of Pain Is Pleasure" - How Would You Articulate That To Someone?

Post by "Rolf" of April 16, 2025 at 5:22 PM

## [Quote from Cassius](#)

Thinking back to past romances, some of those people were better at different aspects of life than others. Some were smarter, some were more athletic, some were richer - any combination of characteristics you can think of - some brought different combinations of pleasures and pains to the table, all of which I can choose to think of as a lump sum or I can choose to evaluate them independently, and each step of the way during the review those aspects are going to ring painfully or pleurably. But the bottom line is that if you remember it as affecting you at all, you remember it either positively or negatively, with greater or less duration, greater or less intensity, or greater or less part of the body or mind that is affected. But if you judge it to have affected you, and if it did not affect you painfully, then it is justifiable to judge the affect to have been pleasurable, because you choose to judge all experiences in life to be pleasurable unless they are painful.

Some of the cites behind that are here:  
[https://wiki.epicureanfriends.com/doku.php/the\\_norm\\_is\\_pleasure\\_too](https://wiki.epicureanfriends.com/doku.php/the_norm_is_pleasure_too)

Hmm, I'm not necessarily referring to a past relationship that was both good and bad. What I'm talking about is more the bittersweet feeling that comes with reminiscing over something pleasant that has been lost. Romantic heartbreak, a child moving away from home, a close relative passing away.

For the sake of example, let's assume that that which has been lost was primarily or purely pleasant. When reminiscing over these, one feels both joy over the good memories and sadness over the loss. A bittersweet feeling.

How is this to be reconciled under the Epicurean view of "pleasure or pain, not both"?

## [Quote from kochiekoch](#)

Hi Rolf and welcome! 😊

'Bittersweet' memories of past romances are rough. I know.

Epicurus, I believe would have counseled to have gratitude for the pleasure of the experience and the skills acquired for the next romance. This way the pleasure outweighs the pain.

Sounds trite and true but valid in my opinion: 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all'.

<https://www.historythroughfiction.com/blog/famous-literary-quotes-four>

Thanks Koch, happy to be here!

I'm not asking about how Epicurus would handle past romances, but how these bittersweet feelings are reconciled within the Epicurean view of pleasure and pain. According to the Epicurean view, pleasure and pain cannot be felt simultaneously (in the same part of the body?). Thus, I am unsure how such bittersweet feelings fit in.

That said, I completely agree with your approach to breakups. 😊

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

*PD09: If every pleasure were condensed and were present at the same time and in the whole of one's nature or its primary parts, then the pleasures would never differ from one another.*

Pleasure can be examined in terms of intensity, location and duration. If you really look at your present experience at any time, you may find that you're happy even though you just stubbed your toe. Or that your toe feels intense pain, but your belly is pleasantly full. As to mental pleasures of the bittersweet variety, I think of them as comparable to multitasking. Current neuroscience (to my understanding) has found that multitasking is in actuality just rapid task switching. In the same way, I would posit that bittersweet is actually bitterthensweetthenbitterthensweetetc. The pleasant memory prompts the pain of loss, which might then be replaced by a pleasant memory and so on. Or a pleasant memory may prompt the pain of loss, and the pain of loss lingers. Or vice versa.

An experiment that I occasionally do is when I feel like I'm in a neutral state, I try to really examine how I'm feeling. I always find that I'm experiencing pleasure and/or pain: it's just that the intensity may be very low, or a pleasure somewhere is offsetting a pain elsewhere. We are constantly experiencing pleasure/pain, both as a complete organism and in our various parts. Some of these concepts need to be felt as well as reasoned out, which is part of the point of the Epicurean canonic.

Aha! It's starting to click for me now. "Bitterthensweetthenbitterthensweet" is a good way of describing it. I certainly agree that "these concepts need to be felt as well as reasoned out" - these things can be awfully confusing from a logical perspective but clear as day when

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/3499-absence-of-pain-is-pleasure-how-would-you-articulate-that-to-someone/?postID=34793#post34793>

experienced. Sort of in the same way that people can debate endlessly on the meaning of "pleasure" and "pain", when in fact it is terribly obvious to anyone (or anything) that has been alive.

The experiment you mentioned is a good idea. I'll have to try that. Though to be honest, when I start focusing intensely on how I feel, I usually end up fixating on minor bodily aches and pains...

Thanks for your replies, everyone!