

# Is All Desire Painful? How Would Epicurus Answer?

Post by "Don" of May 9, 2025 at 11:32 PM

## [Quote from TauPhi](#)

Canonical pleasure is a feeling but "feeling pleasure" is something completely different and these two are not interchangeable.

I touched on this in my reply to [Cassius](#) but I felt a desire to respond directly to your post as well.

I disagree. As I mentioned above, from my reading, the Epicureans were firmly rooted in the physical world. Epicurus hit on using pleasure as a criteria of truth specifically because it was a visceral feeling which does "arise in every animate being."

Diogenes Laertius 10.31.34: *Now in The Canon Epicurus affirms that our sensations and preconceptions and our feelings (pathe) are the standards of truth ... They affirm that there are two states of feeling (pathe), pleasure and pain, which arise in every animate being, and that the one is favourable and the other hostile to that being, and by their means choice and avoidance are determined.*

Grief, sadness, joy, and all the emotions or feelings fall either under pleasure or pain.

I'm not a huge fan of Brene Brown, but her recent Atlas of the Heart set out to classify our emotions:

[https://brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Atlas-Resources\\_02\\_List-of-Emotions\\_FeaturedCover.png](https://brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Atlas-Resources_02_List-of-Emotions_FeaturedCover.png)

In [looking over her chart](#), I think every one of those emotions or experiences can be classified as either pain or pleasure (or painful or pleasurable if you like). That's what Diogenes is referring to when he says of the Epicureans "there are two states of feeling (pathe), pleasure and pain, which arise in every animate being."

I'm still not sure desire is a feeling: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-a...on-and-a-desire>

The subtitle of that article gets at something that's been tickling my brain: "Emotion and desire are intimately related, but which one comes first? " I would substitute "feeling" for "emotion" for out purposes, but it'll do. I also like "some desires are purely physiological or biological, although even these, whether or not they be satisfied, *give rise to* emotions." (my emphasis added) . I still think we can have feelings about a desire but I don't think that I think that desire

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4444-is-all-desire-painful-how-would-epicurus-answer/?postID=35205#post35205>

itself is a feeling.

In looking at Brene Brown's list, I keep thinking: We can have a desire for longing. We can wish for contentment. We can want to have our grief taken away. We can want ice cream. We can lust for sex. We can't just *desire/wish/want/lust*. We have to desire desire/wish/want/lust for *something*. There has to be an object, internal or external, *of* our desire/wish/aspiration/want. I think this is why I'm reluctant to assign the word "feeling" to desire. Now, we can pile feelings on top of desire if we don't get what we want (or if we do get what we want).

#### [Quote from TauPhi](#)

He knew that when reasoning is involved people are prone to make mistakes in their judgements. Types of desires is a neat tool to increase our chances to reason well and to make choices that minimise pain and maximise pleasure.

I like the way you worded this. I'm not sure how I can fit it into what I wrote above, BUT I wanted to acknowledge that I like the way you worded this AND to say I agree with your idea.