

Illustrations and Analogies For Explaining the "Two And Only Two Feelings" Argument

Post by "Cassius" of May 20, 2026 at 7:01 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

But by treating those terms as equivalent you could easily give people the idea that you only experience pleasure if you are completely free from pain, which is obviously not what Epicurus said.

That is the huge problem that requires that whenever this is discussed an explanation is given. From the point of view of "any individual moment or experience," as in PD3, any feeling is either pain or pleasure but not both or either mixed or both or either.

But you're obviously correct that this is not immediately obvious, because people can and do jump to the conclusion that it means a feeling of essentially nothingness. Some people in fact will try to argue that some kind of sensationless floating is truly the ideal state, but to me that is bogus and absurd and should be recognized as such.

I think the explanation for the letter to Menoecus is that Epicurus was writing to a student who could be expected to know the importance and implication of the "if you are alive you are experiencing one or the other" context that Torquatus argues to Cicero.

But clearly everyone today who does not have access to authoritative texts and teachers is highly likely not to know that or agree with that, and that's the source of the whole problem. It wouldn't have been a problem when lots of teachers and texts were around and anyone could easily find the explanation, but it's a huge problem now when you have very few sources explaining it, other than Torquatus, who almost no one takes the time to read in any level of detail.

So those terms "can" be interchangeable but as you observe, they aren't exactly the same set of letters in the same order, so they have to be explained in order for the point to be clear.

In the end I don't think there's a way around that, but to observe that there's no way around it is probably just to say what Epicurus and Lucretius stress over and over - that "philosophy" is necessary in order to live the happiest life possible.