

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

Post by "Cassius" of May 20, 2026 at 9:49 PM

[Quote from Todd](#)

I was going to go through the some of the other examples, but I've realized that I just don't like this article at all.

It 's not easy to get comfortable with this approach because it's a difficult subject to get your arms around, but that's exactly why we have to get our arms around it.

it is going to strike most people as discretionary and debatable whether to divide things into binary classes in the first place. I can certainly see the objections. But that is clearly what Epicurus was doing. Why did he do that? Discussing these examples help get to the questions that have to be answered in order to understand why he was doing this and is the first step before applying it.

There are all sorts of gradations between light and dark depending on how these words are used and the circumstances you are talking about. Yet at the same time, it is also valuable to form individual circumstances into concepts, and then consider the concepts as discrete and mutually exclusive for purposes of being able to communicate and then apply the generalities as ideas.

That's why it's important to talk through these things.

If people who are sympathetic to Epicurus aren't comfortable with the approach - and I agree many of us/them aren't - then we can't expect others to get comfortable with it either. Yet this kind of categorization is exactly what Epicurus was doing in order to view things conceptually and construct a philosophy. And this kind of process is probably necessary in any philosophy that doesn't break down into absolute skepticism.

Epicurus is also asserting that a philosophy is exactly what is necessary in order to live happily and get the most out of life. There's no way to understand his expansion of the definition of pleasure without analyzing what he is saying philosophically. And I doubt we can do that without stepping through the analysis that for example David Sedley goes through in his "Inferential Basis of Epicurean Ethics."

it's not easy, and it won't make everyone comfortable (because people often prefer to avoid making decisions when they aren't backed into a corner to do so) but if it were easy there wouldn't be so much disagreement about philosophy in the first place.

Why use letters and form them into words? Why develop a language that's inevitably imprecise? Here's where I think we can say good things about mathematics, for example, because even though mathematics can't substitute for real things, mathematics helps us make all sorts of useful predictions about the way real things operate, so it is definitely useful so long as we keep in mind its limitations.

I doubt there's any better example of this than "pleasure" and "pain." There are literally innumerable examples of specific pleasures and specific pains, and they vary tremendously from each other. And yet it is still useful for us to speak conceptually about "pleasure" and "pain" as if there is some common element about them. And of course there is - we find pleasure agreeable and pain disagreeable. But those words "pleasure" and "pain" tell us absolutely nothing about the specific experience other than that we feel them to be desirable or undesirable.

If we don't talk philosophically and make this clear, we end up giving people the idea that the pleasure of cutting your fingernails is exactly the same experience as the pleasure of building a rocket ship to fly to the moon -- which is absurd.

Of course that's the road the Utilitarians tried to go down in finding ways to calculate things like the greatest good for the greatest number, but it simply can't be done because all people and all circumstances have unique aspects to them.

So we have to be able to both talk intelligently in generalities while still being absolutely clear that everything is constantly in motion and no two situations are truly exactly the same.