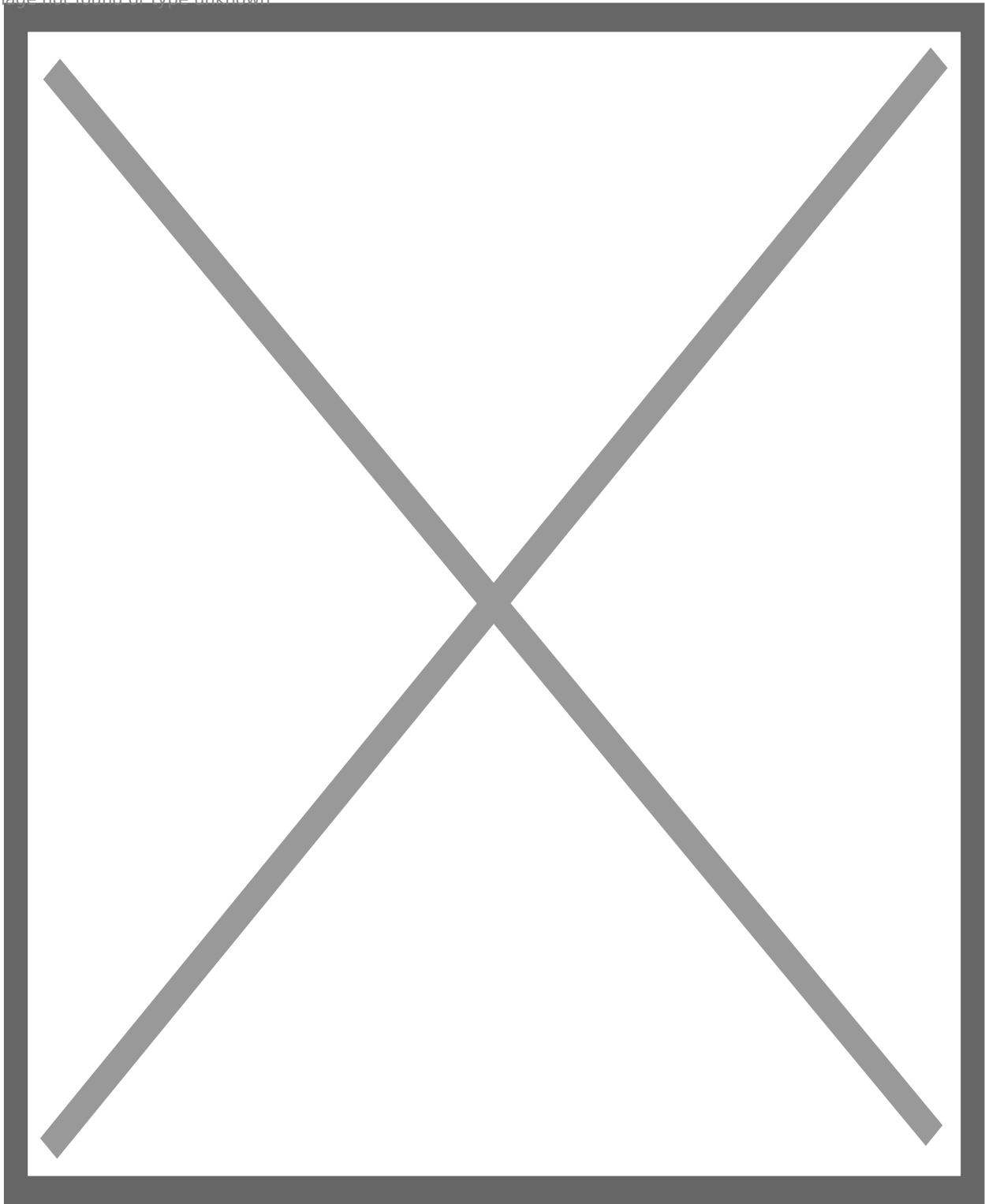


# **NPR Fresh Air: Dr. Anna Lembke on pleasure, pain, and addiction**

**Post by “Don” of August 27, 2021 at 8:02 AM**

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[In 'Dopamine Nation,' Overabundance Keeps Us Craving More](#)

Psychiatrist Anna Lembke's new book explores the brain's connection between pleasure and pain. It also helps explain addictions — not just to drugs and...

www.npr.org

An intriguing episode of NPR's Fresh Air with Dr. Anna Lembke.

I was initially pulled in by the pleasure and pain in the title and found some very interesting points for discussion here on the forum.

Dr. Lembke clearly states evolution has given us pleasure and pain to guide us in what to pursue and what to avoid. I found her choice of words interesting.

Is homeostasis similar to Epicurus's concepts of ataraxia and aponia? Did Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett also talk about homeostasis?

I had never heard the term anhedonia "absence of joy."

Lembke's "Radical honesty" sounds a lot like Epicurean frank speech.

Side note: One aspect of Epicureanism I find intriguing is that it deals with a real, physiological phenomenon - pleasure and pain - that can be researched. Stoics don't have that. Platonists don't have that. I don't know if that's a strength or not (I'm inclined to think it is), but the fact that I can find science videos and podcasts relevant to the philosophy is interesting.

Thoughts?

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### **Post by “Don” of August 27, 2021 at 8:32 AM**

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/202001/the-neuroscience-seeking-pleasure-and-avoiding-pain>

Here's another article from the popular magazine Psychology Today. I found the last section intriguing in light of the Stoic tendency/practice of enduring pain to "overcome" it.

I'm also wondering if the usual translations of choice and avoidance is more due to modern nomenclature than Epicurus's original wording which was more choose and flee from.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 27, 2021 at 9:21 AM**

I do remember Elayne mentioning anhedonia perhaps even once or twice on the podcast

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**Post by “Don” of August 27, 2021 at 4:06 PM**

I find it intriguing that homeostasis and katastematic have the same roots in light of my question above:

*Is homeostasis similar to Epicurus's concepts of ataraxia and aponia?*

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**Post by “Cassius” of August 27, 2021 at 4:19 PM**

I'm going to say "No" because I don't even think Epicurus talked or was concerned about katastematic pleasure much at all, as per the [Nikolsky](#) article. On the other hand absence of pain and absence of disturbance do seem to have figured into the discussion mix from Epicurus himself.

What is the definition you're working with for 'homeostasis'?

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**Post by “Don” of August 27, 2021 at 4:26 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

What is the definition you're working with for 'homeostasis'?

Basically, the body's systems in equilibrium.

If I remember correctly, a common Epicurean theme is sailing calm waters and safe harbors. Ataraxia itself has an "untroubled waters" connotation.

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**Post by “Don” of August 27, 2021 at 5:11 PM**

In looking (briefly) at some of the translations of *katastematic*, it seems to me that *balanced* or *steady* would be a better definition than "static." It comes from *καθιστημι* according to LSJ with connotations like *restore*, *return*, *set in order*, etc. So it's not a static state, it's a return to order (*ataraxia* and *aponia*) after the "excitement" of *euprosyne* and *khara*.

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### **Post by "Eikadistes" of August 27, 2021 at 5:46 PM**

This is a great find, Don, because – as I recall from the Epicurean Philosophy Facebook group – we've had numerous Stoic opponents rail against Epicureanism like it's a *Gateway Drug to Hard Pleasures*. This reinforces the centrality of **stability** in Epicurean philosophy and provides an obvious reason why not all pleasures are to be chosen.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 27, 2021 at 7:55 PM**

#### [Quote from Nate](#)

This reinforces the centrality of stability in Epicurean philosophy and provides an obvious reason why not all pleasures are to be chosen.

As a small adjustment if this were being stated formally, I would probably say "importance" rather than centrality lest someone take that as an indication that stability is the very center. Not to be picking nits but I think everytime someone uses a modifier or word other than pleasure they are opening themselves up to logical inconsistencies.

Also, I don't think we have a good handle on the modifiers even when used clearly. *Stable* and "without pain" and "without disturbance" I think are adverbs, as are descriptions of intensity and duration. All apply to pleasure and don't stand alone. Plus I don't think we have a handle on how to rank even those, and it may well be that the reason we don't is that such a ranking is purely subjective.

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### **Post by "Don" of August 27, 2021 at 8:48 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Stable

and "without pain" and "without disturbance" I think are adverbs

ataraxia and aponia are nouns not adverbs. They are states, best translated into English by words ending in -ness, e.g., painlessness or calmness.

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**Post by “Cassius” of August 27, 2021 at 9:11 PM**

You're right I should probably say "accompaniments" rather than adverbs, but I would still maintain that they are manners of experiencing pleasure, (without pain and without disturbance) and don't really convey anything in themselves. Anytime we're talking "without" something I presume the main topic to be what's there in the first place, regardless of what might not be there at the same time.

And I do see this as part of the huge problem of people thinking that "painlessness" and "calmness" are worth pursuing in themselves. I see that as variations on the "virtue" problem, since as you know I think (and I think we both agree Epicurus thinks) pleasure alone can be considered worth pursuing in and of itself.

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**Post by “Don” of August 27, 2021 at 10:17 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

they are manners of experiencing pleasure

Like different flavors of ice cream?

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**Post by “Godfrey” of August 28, 2021 at 1:18 AM**

Since this thread began with a modern science topic, it might be pertinent to mention Lisa Feldman Barrett. As I understand it she seems to consider "affect" to be a type of guiding faculty. She pictures affect as a combination of pleasant/unpleasant along, say, an x axis, and calmness/agitation along, say, a y axis. One's affect at a given moment would be described by a point somewhere in the two dimensional space defined by these two axes.

I find this conception useful because it illustrates 1) that "pleasure" isn't the endpoint of an arrow or the center of a target but a combination of factors including pleasantness and arousal. And 2) calmness combined with unpleasantness would be considered lethargy (or something similar). When people speak of "without pain" or "without disturbance" and interpret those as pleasure, I think it helps to look at this 2D model to understand more of the nuance involved.

So LFB, as I recall, refers to positive or negative affect as a neurological guide which we might be able to equate to pleasure or pain. Although hers isn't the language of Epicurus, I find it a helpful way to understand pleasure as the guide/goal.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of August 28, 2021 at 3:23 AM**

### [Quote from Don](#)

Like different flavors of ice cream?

I don't would say the better analogy would be like eating ice cream in an ice cream parlor vs in a jail cell vs in a war zone vs in a hospital etc.

To me the important thing is first that you are in fact experiencing pleasure from eating ice cream, but we're also taking into account that the pleasure of eating it may be interrupted or disturbed (in a war zone or jail cell) or whether at the same time you are experiencing other pain (in a hospital with appendicitis).

This is something that I think we debated at times over the last several years under the "doing more than one thing at once" category. My view is that you can experience pleasure from eating ice cream but at the same time be worried or afraid about getting shot (war zone) and having the pleasure interrupted, or even while you experience physical pain in another part of your body (hospital).

With the point being that the best way to experience pleasure is without interruption or disturbance and without any accompanying pain of any kind.

The issue I see is that to isolate the absence of disturbance or interruption or pain in itself, without first focusing on the primary point that you are experiencing pleasure from some positive activity of body or mind is to imply that there is some substance to the "absence of" something, which I think is not true.

With an analogy being that matter has positive attributes (weight, shape, size, etc) while void has no attributes other than absence of matter, which gives matter space to be and move in. Matter is equivalent to void in one way only - quantity of space - and I would say pain is equivalent to pleasure in one way only - quantity of experience - as indicated by the quantity reference in PD3.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 28, 2021 at 3:25 AM**

Godfrey so you are saying she sums pleasure and pain together to get a "net result" number which she then charts?

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 28, 2021 at 3:51 AM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Like different flavors of ice cream?

Don also I think we have to take into account here also the "purity" or "pure pleasure" or "unalloyed" issue that is addressed in [PD12](#) and [PD14](#) and I think other places as well.

And this in turn probably stems from the purity argument by Plato in [Philebus](#).

The issue in contention seems to derive from some logical argument that having something without any mixture of something else is superior or better than having it mixed with something that is less desirable. Probably this is related to the contention that in order to be a highest good, it indeed has to be highest and not capable of improvement. Thus in order to discuss the highest state of pleasure possible, logically the pleasure experience which is best must be unalloyed and not combined with anything else (actual or fear of interruption or pain).

I know it is tedious to constantly refer back to Platonic logical arguments, but I think that is exactly what Epicurus would have had to face in ancient Athens. Due to that he needed to

either inoculate his students against the argument or deprogram them if they had already fallen for it. And the evidence for that is right there in [Philebus](#) which appears to be Plato's number one work denouncing pleasure as the goal of life. I would estimate the challenge would be similar to what we face today in many places in dealing with presumptions created by the Bible.

With of course the ultimate reason for the argument always going back to the "what is the greatest good?" formulation. In order to have an answer to that question which meets the Platonic objections, we have to have a description of a way of experiencing pleasure that is both unalloyed (with no pain) and continuous (with no disturbance).

If you're experiencing pleasure with any mixture of pain or interruption, then you're saying that this pleasure experience could be improved, and if it can be improved then it's not the best, and if it's not the best then it's not the "greatest good."

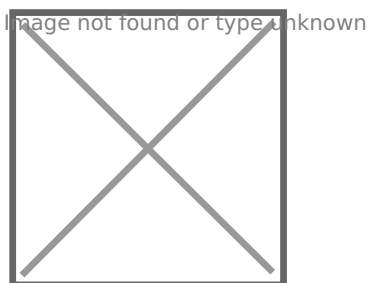
All of that is largely a word game, but for someone devoted to logical analysis it's a game you find yourself playing as part of philosophy.

Better just to point at puppies and kittens and babies and say "See, unperverted life pursues pleasure and avoids pain" but Torquatus says that some people (even some who call themselves Epicureans) say that that's not a good enough argument.

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## Post by "Don" of August 28, 2021 at 6:58 AM

On Lisa Feldman Barrett's affect:



[Affect is a form of cognition: A neurobiological analysis](#)

In this paper, we suggest that affect meets the traditional definition of "cognition" such that the affect-cognition distinction is phenomenological, rather...  
[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

This is an older paper (and WAY into the weeds!) but I thought this quote was helpful:

## Quote

The term "core affect" has been recently introduced to refer to a basic, psychologically primitive state that can be described by two psychological properties: hedonic valence (pleasure/displeasure) and arousal (activation/sleepy).

This is the idea of the "affective circumplex" (the name for the 2d grid).

[Google Image Result for https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Emilio-Vivancos/publication/331781233/figure/fig1/AS:764176179920896@1559205207611/The-circumplex-model-of-affect-Source-Russell-and-Barrett-1999\\_Q640.jpg](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Emilio-Vivancos/publication/331781233/figure/fig1/AS:764176179920896@1559205207611/The-circumplex-model-of-affect-Source-Russell-and-Barrett-1999_Q640.jpg)

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## Post by "Don" of August 28, 2021 at 7:14 AM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

I don't would say the better analogy would be like eating ice cream in an ice cream parlor vs in a jail cell vs in a war zone vs in a hospital etc.

I'm not sure I agree with your analogy. Pleasure and pain are the most basic categories of feelings. I think that's why Epicurus can say "the feelings are two." But within those two, if you drill down, you have joy, excitement, sorrow, calmness, boredom, anxiety, etc. All are words or divisions we give to degrees or types of pleasure and pain. Pleasure is "ice cream". Strawberry, Rocky Road, and vanilla are joy, excitement, and anticipation.

I have more thoughts on your other points. I'll get that posted asap.

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## Post by "Don" of August 28, 2021 at 12:14 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Don also I think we have to take into account here also the "purity" or "pure pleasure" or "unalloyed" issue that is addressed in [PD12](#) and [PD14](#) and I think other places as well.

I don't think those PD's say what you're trying to make them say.

To my interpretation, [PD12](#) and its ἀκεραίου τὰς ἡδονὰς (akeraious tas hedonas) "pure pleasures" are simply pleasures experienced without the taint of fear. I think the Epicurus Wiki translation does a good of highlighting this: [http://wiki.epicurism.info/Principal Doctrine 12/](http://wiki.epicurism.info/Principal_Doctrine_12/)

#### Quote

Thus, concludes Epicurus, the study of nature is necessary, for without an understanding of nature, it is quite impossible to enjoy one's pleasures unsullied by fear.

It's not the pleasures themselves that are "pure" it is the experience of pleasure that is pure. Without understanding nature and eliminating the fear of the gods, you can't experience pleasure without that nagging in the back of your mind of fear of the supernatural gods raining down punishments on your heads or being scared of lightning, thunder, earthquakes, etc. as some form of divine retribution.

And [PD14](#) doesn't talk about "pure pleasures" but the "truest safety" from other people. So, there's no purity of pleasure problem there. The "surest safety" is simply that which is free from anxiety or fear of harm from other people.

That's all I have time for now (sorry), but I have more thoughts on your other points. "Film at 11" 😊

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### Post by "Cassius" of August 28, 2021 at 12:55 PM

Obviousky I didn't say it very well because I thought I was trying exactly what you said 😊

Absolutely pleasure is pleasure and pain is pain and the two are entirely separate - that is explicit in PD3.

Why I think we are both talking about is walking and chewing gum at the same time -. We can experience more than one thing at once, with one hand feeling pleasure and the other feeling pain (though there are probably better examples).

I think that Epicurus has explicitly ruled out a single sensation being both pleasure and pain at the same time, which is why the conclusion I think you and I both agree on focuses on the total experiences of the person, not a single sensation.

## Post by "Don" of August 28, 2021 at 3:14 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Obviousky I didn't say it very well because I thought I was trying exactly what you said



LOL! Well, there's how schisms get started! 😄

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

Why I think we are both talking about is walking and chewing gum at the same time -. We can experience more than one thing at once, with one hand feeling pleasure and the other feeling pain (though there are probably better examples).

Okay, I might be able to go with that. And, in lights of that then, I might be able to see your "ice cream in prison" metaphor. I was using the flavors of ice cream to demonstrate the "flavors" of pleasure: euphoria, joy, excitement, orgasmic, etc. You, I think, were using the ice cream to demonstrate that we can experience pleasure tinged to various degrees with pain. Correct me if I'm mischaracterizing your position. If that's it, I can acknowledge that. Our goal, if you will, is to try to increase the pleasure side of that ledger and minimize the pain side.

The tricky thing is that Epicurus recognized that not feeling pain in itself is a pleasurable feeling. Which brings me back to the ideas of balance and homoeostasis as pleasure. This seems to me to be Epicurus's "health of the body and serenity of the mind."

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## Post by "Cassius" of August 28, 2021 at 3:28 PM

I don't have a problem really with considering the experience of feeling balanced and in equilibrium as a pleasure.

The bogie-man I am always on the lookout for is the identification of any particular type of pleasure as higher or better than the rest, because then I think the advocate of such a position has fatally undermined the logic of the position that "pleasure" is the greatest good.

I prefer to think of the pleasure of eating ice cream while also feeling in balance, or in equilibrium, as the best way to describe what is being discussed.

At any particular time I think we're experiencing a lot of different pleasures (and pains, unfortunately) and at a high level we're looking for the net sum of everything. We might be crippled or have lost a leg, and have pain in our remaining stub of a leg, but otherwise be living a confident and successful life full of all sorts of pleasures. It wouldn't be right to say that the pain we experience in that situation doesn't exist, but it also wouldn't be right to say that the loss of the leg totally ruins a life that is otherwise highly pleasurable.

I don't think you're likely to go in the direction I am concerned about Don, but I am very confident that the Okeefe "Epicurus had a special definition of pleasure as absence of pain" crowd (not to single him out but just as an example) \*would\* go in that direction. They are constantly defining katastematic pleasure as the highest pleasure, saying that active pleasure (including joy and delight) are useful only to get to that state of painlessness, and strongly planting in the minds of their readers that that state has nothing to do with what ordinary mortals think of as "pleasure" at all.

There's no doubt that certain portions of the texts can be read that way, and I can't say enough bad about that position, so it's a constant struggle to make sure that it doesn't creep in when in truth the waging of a campaign against it (and thus to place ordinary pleasure back in its rightful place, as per Gosling & Taylor, [Nikolsky](#), and yes even DeWitt) is probably one of the main reasons for this forum. 😊

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## Post by "Godfrey" of August 28, 2021 at 3:40 PM

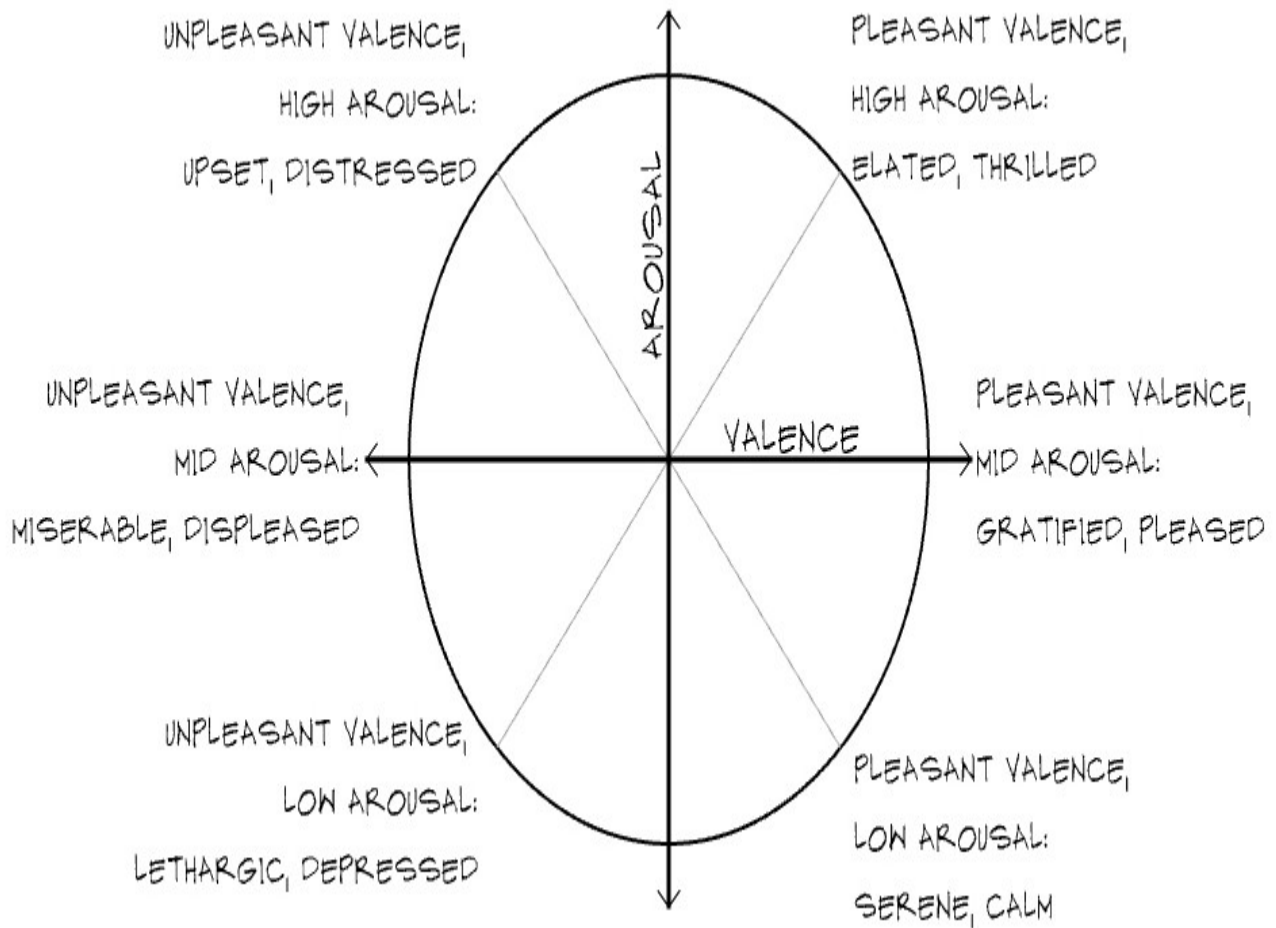
Quote from Cassius

Godfrey so you are saying she sums pleasure and pain together to get a "net result" number which she then charts?

No, what she calls pleasantness and unpleasantness are represented by opposite directions on an axis of hedonic valence (+ and -). This axis is intersected by an axis of arousal, with intensity of calm in one direction and intensity of agitation in the other direction. I don't think she's trying to describe pleasure and pain; she's trying to illustrate what her data is showing her regarding what she calls "affect".

Epicurus didn't have access to today's neuroscience. He was working with observations and against Platonic abstractions. LFB's work is among the latest neuroscience so I find it extremely interesting and potentially useful that her conclusions in many ways seem to correspond with Epicurus' conclusions. Her "affective circumplex" is a modern model which is devoid of Platonic distraction. As an initial observation, I interpret "affect" as similar to "the faculty of feelings". As such, what might be considered maximum pleasure would be a point on the "pleasant" side of

the hedonic valence axis and intersecting the circumscribing circle. This would represent maximum pleasantness with neither too much agitation or too much calm.



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### Post by "Godfrey" of August 28, 2021 at 3:58 PM

More on the affective circumplex (pleasure graph?):

It doesn't rank pleasures such as mental v visual or chocolate ice cream v pistachio.

"Absence of pain" (or absence of unpleasantness) would be anywhere on or to the right of the arousal axis. So it's not a mystical state, it's a range of "pleasures" including elation, gratification and serenity at any given time.

Correcting my previous post, maximum pleasure would be any point on the circle to the right of the arousal axis. So maximum pleasure might involve being very calm, but it might also involve being totally stoked, man. Or anywhere on the right side of the circle in between.

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**Post by “Cassius” of August 28, 2021 at 4:44 PM**

Is there some reason for the circle rather than just the two axes?

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**Post by “Don” of August 28, 2021 at 5:27 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Is there some reason for the circle rather than just the two axes?

It's the natural curve from high pleasure valence/low arousal to low pleasure/high arousal and right around.

Think of it as plotting points like:

X0, Y10

X1, Y9

X2, Y8

etc.

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**Post by “Godfrey” of August 28, 2021 at 6:56 PM**

That's an excellent question! Apparently it's not as I've been interpreting it. I've been thinking of the circle as a limit, but some googling reveals:

*Circumplex: a circular depiction of the similarities among multiple variables. (APA Dictionary of Psychology)*

*The circumplex model focuses on determining how traits and emotions are structurally similar, and its underlying assumption is that a relatively seamless circular ordering, or circumplex, is an economical description of the relations among traits and emotions. (from an introduction to an*

*out of print book on circumplexes)*

So I think that anything being mapped would occur on the circle and not within it. This is actually even more interesting because the intersection of the axes could be considered a neutral state, but if all states in this model must occur on the circle itself then there is no neutral state.

Perhaps someone else is more familiar with this idea?

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### **Post by “Don” of August 28, 2021 at 7:05 PM**

Quote from Nikolsky

The two parts of the division about which Epicurus is speaking - απονια and αταραξια, on the one hand, and χαρα and ευφροσύνη, on the other - are not separate, mutually exclusive types of pleasures. According to Plutarch, who examines these concepts in Chapters 7 and 8 of his dialogue A Pleasant Life Impossible (1091a-1092d), the states of painlessness and tranquillity invariably bring about joy. This essential connection between the concepts mentioned by Epicurus compels us to view Epicurus' passage quoted by Diogenes Laertius not as a classification of pleasures but rather as a definition of two coexistent aspects of any pleasure: its passive aspect, i.e., a certain state of the body or the mind, and its active aspect manifesting itself in an emotional response of the soul.

I'm skimming [Nikolsky](#) and came across this passage. Is it me or do the "two coexistent aspects" sound somewhat like the arousal axis on the circumplex? I need to go back and read that more closely.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 28, 2021 at 8:38 PM**

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

This is actually even more interesting because the intersection of the axes could be considered a neutral state, but if all states in this model must occur on the circle itself then there is no neutral state.

Thanks for that, [Godfrey](#) ! I think you're right. The only truly "neutral" state would be at the intersection of the two axes which can't actually exist if the affect exists in the circle. So Epicurus was "right" in a sense that there is no neutral state. You're either feeling pleasure or pain.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 28, 2021 at 8:48 PM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

So Epicurus was "right" in a sense that there is no neutral state. You're either feeling pleasure or pain.

Anytime someone says "So Epicurus was 'right'..... you can expect me to agree, however:

I'm not able to take the time to read Feldman and comment on the analysis other than what you guys are saying.

The reason I am posting this comment is that as to the position that there is no "neutral state," I want to go on record as not being sure whether that position was intended to be something that he was taking on based on observation (such as on observation of babies and kittens and puppies) or whether that is a position he took on some kind of "logical" ground, as he did in the case of the swerve, and of the existence of the void. If it's the latter, that would be another reason to be cautious in drawing parallels with neurological or medical research.

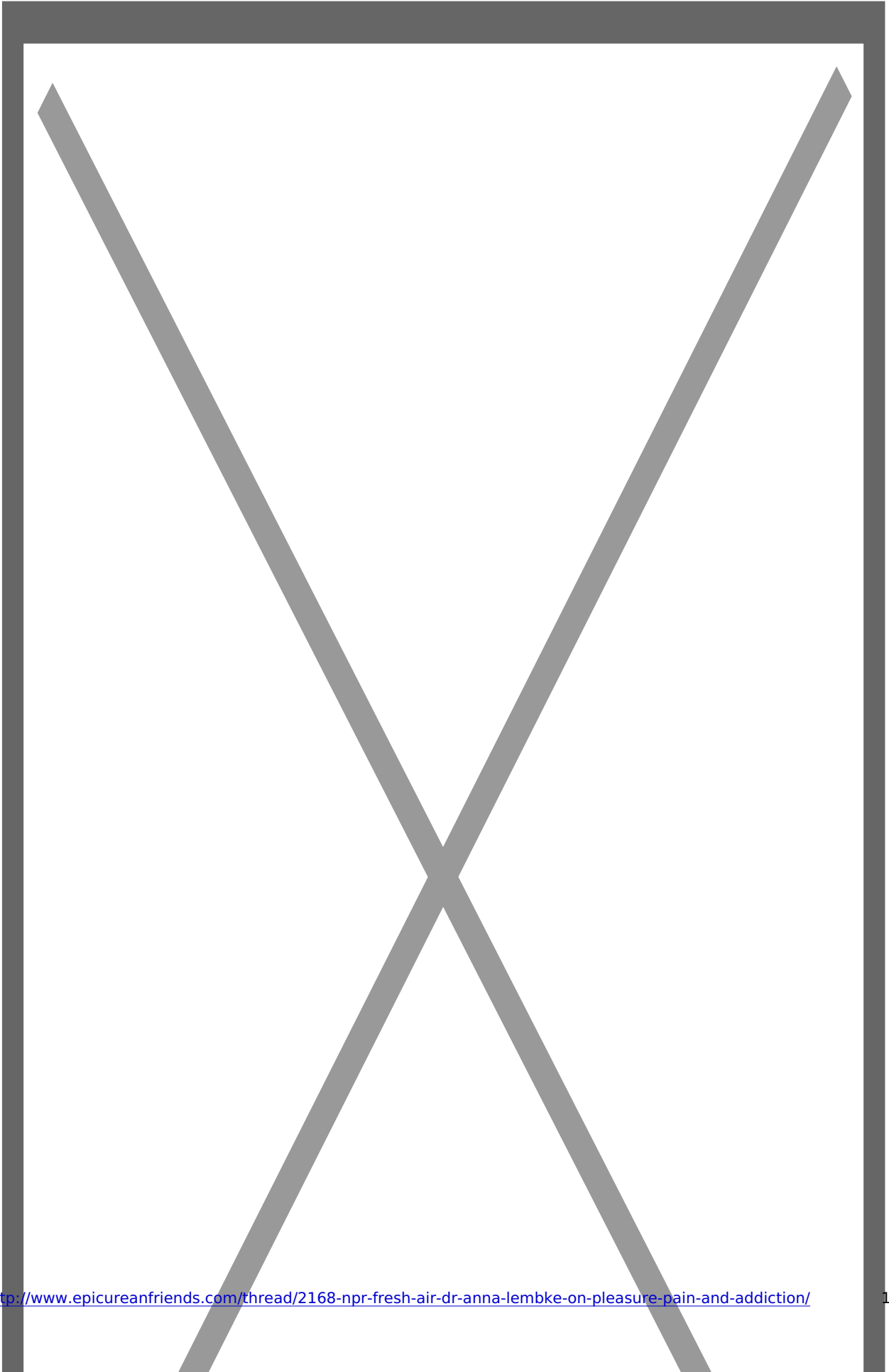
Personally, I doubt that the denial of a neutral state is of as much practical significance as it is of "logical" significance in debating with Plato on the nature of pleasure as the greatest good.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 28, 2021 at 8:59 PM**

Since we're (that is I ) seem to have taken us down a modern science research track on this thread, here's an interesting article after skimming it. Putting it here for future reference:

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[\(PDF\) Sensory Pleasure and Homeostasis](#)

PDF | Since the origin of life, animals have behaved so as to seek environments favorable for their physiology and survival. All basic physiological... | Find,...  
www.researchgate.net

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**Post by “Don” of August 28, 2021 at 9:44 PM**

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Personally, I doubt that the denial of a neutral state is of as much practical significance as it is of "logical" significance in debating with Plato on the nature of pleasure as the greatest good.

I'm not sure about that. It could have been (and I admittedly need to return to the texts) connected with his observation in PD2 that all feeling is based on consciousness and if you were neutral that might imply not having any sensation. If you're alive you're either feeling pleasure or pain

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**Post by “Godfrey” of August 29, 2021 at 2:18 AM**

Quote from Don

Is it me or do the "two coexistent aspects" sound somewhat like the arousal axis on the circumplex?

[Don](#) I think I need some translations 😊 but to my way of thinking regarding [Nikolsky's](#) quote in #28, tranquility and painlessness correspond to places on the the arousal axis and the valence axis, respectively. And as you say it seems like the passive aspect and the active aspect could correspond to the arousal axis. I'm not sure about that though; the circumplex and kinetic/katastematic are two completely different models and it's probably a stretch to equate them too closely.

As to the lack of a neutral state, I think that it has practical significance in visualizing and understanding pleasure in addition to logical arguments. Understanding the interaction of degrees of pleasure and arousal is useful in finding guidance from your feelings. As LFB

explains, our feelings are often influenced by things we don't expect. The more we understand and notice about our feelings, including whether or not we have a neutral state, the better we can use them for guidance.

Getting back to the original post in this thread, I believe the Dopamine Nation author stated that there is a neutral state of dopamine (arousal, production, reaction?). I may be way off base, but I *think* that this corresponds to one axis in the circumplex model. Regardless, it seems to be another contemporary neuroscientific approach to pleasure and it might be interesting to compare this to the circumplex 🤔

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## Post by “Don” of August 29, 2021 at 4:02 AM

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

I'm not sure about that though; the circumplex and kinetic/katastematic are two completely different models and it's probably a stretch to equate them too closely.

See, that's where I'm not so sure anymore. We've been so conditioned to read that as "moving"/"static" and I'm not sure that is the way Epicurus intended. It seems to me that he did use the words, but [Nikolsky](#) makes a good case that they're not hard and fast categories or divisions. Especially katastematic as "static", I'm needing to delve deeper into the original texts where that and its derivations are used. I'm beginning to think that's a mischaracterisation. I should also do a search for what papers cite [Nikolsky](#) to see if we can expand on his ideas with other (of any) authors.\*\*\*

### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Understanding the interaction of degrees of pleasure and arousal is useful in finding guidance from your feelings. As LFB explains, our feelings are often influenced by things we don't expect. The more we understand and notice about our feelings, including whether or not we have a neutral state, the better we can use them for guidance.



### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

Getting back to the original post in this thread, I believe the Dopamine Nation author stated that there is a neutral state of dopamine (arousal, production, reaction?). I may

be way off base, but I think that this corresponds to one axis in the circumplex model.

Agreed. Even in listening to the podcast, it struck me that she wasn't really describing a "neutral" state as much as a state of balance. To muddy the waters even more, mayhaps a state of eudaimonia? 🤔 Neutral to me has connotations of numb. Balance has a connotation of pleasure.

\*\*\*PS: I don't know why I didn't do this before posting 😞 Here are the papers that cite [Nikolsky](#) per Google Scholar. Looks like some interesting ones at first glance:

<https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=related:v5L1bDhex1Y:scholar.google.com/&scioq=Nikolsky+on+pleas>

\*\*\*This one was interesting:

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://wiki.gonzaga.edu/alfino/images/e/e8/SplavQQFnoECB4QAQ&usg=AOvVaw3HpCa\\_CMvrYxD5iUtdxDpz](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://wiki.gonzaga.edu/alfino/images/e/e8/SplavQQFnoECB4QAQ&usg=AOvVaw3HpCa_CMvrYxD5iUtdxDpz)

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### Post by “Don” of August 29, 2021 at 4:55 AM

My bad! I clicked Related articles, not Cited for [Nikolsky](#). Here's the correct link:

[https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=6253070204066435775&as\\_sdt=5,36&scioldt=0,36&hl=en](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=6253070204066435775&as_sdt=5,36&scioldt=0,36&hl=en)

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### Post by “Cassius” of August 29, 2021 at 7:42 AM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

If you're alive you're either feeling pleasure or pain

I agree that that's an important point.

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Especially katastematic as "static", I'm needing to delve deeper into the original texts where that and its derivations are used.

I think if you eventually find the time you will find what you're looking for in Gosling & Taylor's "Greeks on Pleasure." It's stated there (somewhere) that the whole issue doesn't seem to derive from motion, because everything is always in motion, and if I recall correctly you'll find documentation there that the Greeks considered even thinking to be a form of motion. So the whole issue is clear as mud (which is why I find it so unhelpful).

#### [Quote from Don](#)

I should also do a search for what papers cite [Nikolsky](#) to see if we can expand on his ideas with other (of any) authors.\*\*\*

Good idea, but like I said, I think [Nikolsky](#) himself cites Gosling and Taylor as HIS inspiration (or else he told Elli and me that in a skype call we had several years ago). So the key analysis started with G&T and what [Nikolsky](#) added (if I recall) was basically to track it down to the "division of Carneades" as the likely reason that Laertius picked it up (since Laertius was telling his readers how several philosophers/issues fit under Carneades' categories).

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### Post by "Cassius" of August 29, 2021 at 8:25 AM

40 minutes ago New

 [Quote from Don](#)

If you're alive you're either feeling pleasure or pain

I agree that that's an important point.

Don I think our issue here, and the main difficulty in articulating this, is that there is an ambiguity / mismatch between English "Feeling" and Greek "pathe" --- It sounds like Epicurus said there are only two pathe / passions, but in English we have many "feelings" which are neither pleasurable nor painful.

I touch a piece of wood and it's "hard" but the feeling is neither necessarily painful nor pleasurable. Now we can attempt to deal with that by referring perhaps to other experiences at the same time (we're taking pleasure in simply being alive) but we have a communication mismatch to deal with between English "feeling" of which there are many, and Greek "Pathe" of which there are only two.

So if we could triangulate on a better word for "pathe" that is not the same as "feeling" we'd probably be better off. Apparently the translators prefer "passions" but the bad guys have loaded that word so negatively that it may not be usable for this purpose.

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### **Post by “Don” of August 29, 2021 at 8:57 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

but we have a communication mismatch to deal with between English "feeling" of which there are many, and Greek "Pathe" of which there are only two.

Well, the famous declaration about the "pathē are two, pleasure and pain" is clear; however, of I remember correctly, Epicurus and Philodemus use pathē and its derivatives in their extant writings to refer to things other than pleasure and pain. So, I think "The Declaration of The Two" (yes, I just coined that 😊 ) is extremely important, there's more going on with the word pathē. It could very well be as problematic as the word feelings in English.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of August 29, 2021 at 1:49 PM**

What do you see as the preferred translation of "pathe"?

Passion? Or what?

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### **Post by “Don” of August 29, 2021 at 2:08 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

What do you see as the preferred translation of "pathe"?

Passion? Or what?

LOL. You have a couple hours? 😊

The problem is that the literal meaning, and one that some translators grapple with, is "that which happens to someone" (as opposed to that which someone does, an activity).

It's related to the verb πάσχω <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...57:entry=pa/sxw>

so if you read that definition, you'll get an idea of the connotations and complications behind that word.

Feeling isn't a bad translation. But you get that ambiguous English connotation. I know I've advocated for "reaction" before. I'd avoid passion since it gets tied up with sex and love. I'm not sure I have a better one than "feeling" but I'm searching.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 29, 2021 at 4:20 PM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

I'm not sure I have a better one than "feeling" but I'm searching.

As important as this "of the \_\_\_\_\_ there are two" is, it's probably worth putting some real effort into finding a way to convey this more clearly, or at least a way to explain why whatever term is used should not carry all the connotations that we place on it in modern English.

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### **Post by "Don" of August 29, 2021 at 4:47 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

#### [Quote from Don](#)

I'm not sure I have a better one than "feeling" but I'm searching.

As important as this "of the \_\_\_\_\_ there are two" is, it's probably worth putting some real effort into finding a way to convey this more clearly, or at least a way to explain why whatever term is used should not carry all the connotations that we place on it in modern English.

What about something like "Epicurus taught that we can only react to things in two ways: with pleasure or with pain. There is no neutral reaction. Some pleasure and pain will be intense, some not so much. But there is no such thing as a neutral reaction to that which happens to us. We use those feelings of pleasure and pain to determine what path to follow in our choices and what actions to avoid or flee from."

That is all just off the top on my head btw... Not attached to any of it.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of August 29, 2021 at 7:53 PM**

That might be better but I doubt it will suit us as a final position. This is something that is going to take some long thought and discussion probably.

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### **Post by "Don" of August 30, 2021 at 7:13 AM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

That might be better but I doubt it will suit us as a final position. This is something that is going to take some long thought and discussion probably.

As my high school English teacher told me:

"You can't revise something until you have something to revise." 😊 Consider this the VERY rough first draft.

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### **Post by "Don" of September 7, 2021 at 9:17 AM**

#### [Circumplex diagram](#)

It hit me recently that, in looking at the circumplex diagram, the "maximum" pleasure one can experience is at the intersection of the circle and the x axis to the right. Oddly enough, that's where one would be neutral on the arousal y axis. I'm not sure of all the implications of that but does that coincide with homeostasis, eudaimonia, equilibrium...? I \*think\* it's significant but I'm

not sure what that significance is. So, I'm putting my thoughts here for other ideas.

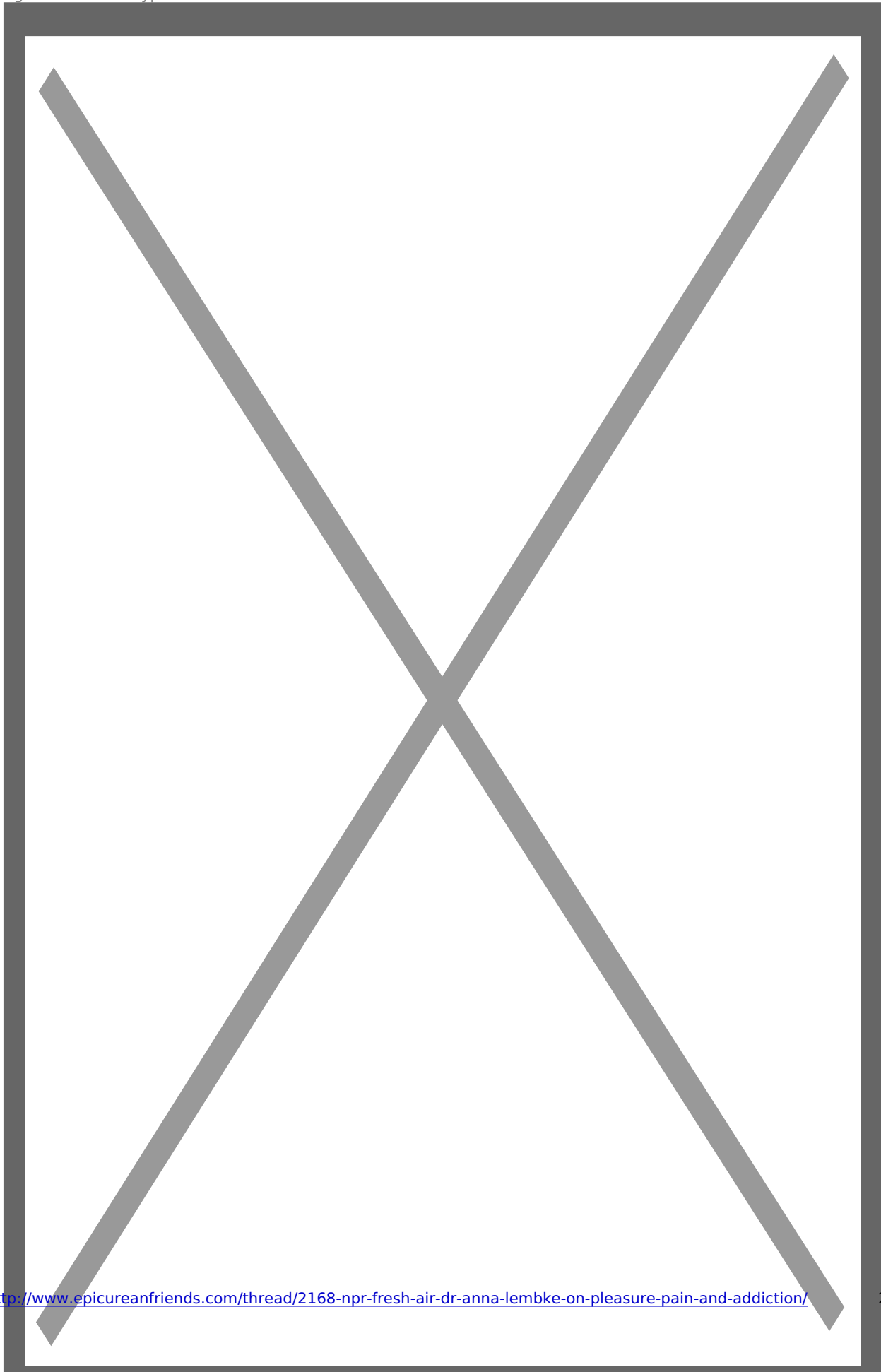
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### **Post by “Godfrey” of September 7, 2021 at 6:42 PM**

My only exposure to the circumplex has been in LFB's book, so I can't say that I fully understand how it's meant to be read. Every time I look it up, I get a different understanding.

With that in mind, the History section of this Wikipedia entry credits it to Timothy Leary and describes it as I originally understood it: the circle being the limit and the intersection of the axes being neutral. However there are entire books written about circumplexes and it could be that there are various interpretations. The quote that I posted earlier in this thread came from an online excerpt of an out of print book on circumplexes and gave me the impression that all relevant data occurs on the circle itself and not inside of it. So the whole circumplex model is, to me, more of a mystery the more that I get in to it, which is compromising it's usefulness. (Insert Timothy Leary joke here.)

Image not found or type unknown



[Interpersonal circumplex - Wikipedia](#)

en.m.wikipedia.org

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### **Post by “Don” of September 7, 2021 at 6:52 PM**

Well that is interesting. I got the impression that all the action happened on the circle, too.

Even so, I think my original idea on #45 would hold true-ish. Maximum "limit" of  $x$  to the right is the maximum possible pleasure to experience according to this model.