

# Confusion: "The feelings are only two"

Post by "Rolf" of May 26, 2025 at 2:10 PM

Hey everyone!

I've hit a bit of a road block again with the concept of "the feelings are only two". I've read up on this before and asked questions about it, but I'm still not entirely confident in my understanding. Specifically, I'm wondering:

- How are "neutral" feelings explained? (ie. When one does not feel particularly good or bad.) If I have a stomach ache, then I am experiencing pain in my stomach. But when my stomach is not aching, I wouldn't say I'm experiencing pleasure in my stomach. It just doesn't hurt. Additionally, my mental state quite often feels neither pleasurable or painful. I just feel okay.
- How are "bittersweet" feelings explained? (ie. Experiences that are both pleasant and painful, such as the remembrance of a lost loved one.)
- If the feelings are only two and pleasure is the absence of pain - illustrated by the vessel analogy - does this mean that every pleasure corresponds to the removal of some pain? I can see how natural pleasures like eating, sleeping, or friendship relieve hunger, fatigue, or loneliness. But how do we account for unnecessary or extravagant pleasures, like eating ice cream or reading poetry? What pain is being removed?
- Speaking of the vessel analogy and the general idea of pleasure reaching its limit at the absence of pain - does intensity of the pleasure/pain play any role in the "fullness of the vessel"?

I already have an idea of the "Epicurean response" to some of these questions, but I find it helpful to twist and bend ideas as much as possible to ensure that I understand them properly and that they hold up to scrutiny. Thanks in advance!