

# Discussion of Article: "On Pleasure, Pain and Happiness"

Post by "Cassius" of May 19, 2020 at 2:19 PM

On May 19, 2020, new user [Jon M](#) posted:

## Feelings and Kinds of Feelings

Hello, I am new here and am not quite sure how to use this Forum. Never mind.

I will introduce myself by making a comment on Elayne's excellent article 'On Pain, Pleasure, and Happiness'. I notice no one has commented on it for a while.

I have a suggestion for a tweak in her terminology.

Elayne, you quote Diogenes Laertius X.34 saying "the feelings are two, pleasure and pain" which is a literal translation, but Hicks translates "They [Epicureans] affirm that there are two states of feeling, pleasure and pain".

My guess is that he says there are two 'states' of feeling because to say there are two feelings (only) is counter to normal usage. In everyday speech we have lots of feelings: I feel warm, I feel angry, I feel flu-like, and so on.

Diogenes Laertius was a racy kind of tabloid-newspaper writer, and perhaps did not pick his words like a careful scholar. Also he is not saying Epicurus said this, only 'they' ie the Epicureans. So I feel happy, like Hicks, to tweak him.

If you say that pleasure and pain are two *kinds* of feelings, then this gets you out of lots of issues.

First it is more in keeping with normal English: I feel warm and it is pleasurable, ie pleasure is the kind of feeling it is. I feel angry and it is a painful kind of feeling.

More importantly, it allows you to talk about neutral feelings, which you and Cassius had some discussion about.

What I think you are saying, using my language, is that there is no third *kind* of feeling, often called 'neutral', neither pleasure nor pain.

I can agree that there is no third kind of feeling, while accepting the neutrality of my having no particular feelings about something. Certainly I will have no conscious feelings attached to the large number of inputs to my senses every second that I am not conscious of. And surely there are lots of things in the periphery of my consciousness that I am neutral about. I don't care one

way or the other about that cup that my eyes have just glanced over.

But if my brain decides that any experience is salient enough to be picked out and focused on, then I will have one or more feelings about it, and of all the feelings I might have about that thing they will be divided into two kinds: pleasurable and painful.

I agree completely then that it is not productive to focus on the neutral or to try and be neutral. To blank out all feelings and remain conscious is impossible, and to attempt to find a third *kind* of feeling that is neutral, (*adukkham-asukhā*, as the Buddhists say, neither painful nor pleasurable), is what you call a 'fancy pleasure', a dead-end street leading to pain and quite counter to Epicurus.

This has become a long first post, but thanks to you and Cassius for maintaining a splendid website. It is good to see such high-quality writing about Epicurus all in one place.

-- Jon M