

Gosling & Taylor, The Greeks on Pleasure.

Post by "Don" of June 28, 2020 at 8:58 AM

Quote

"Perceptions" and "sensations" are closely related terms describing different aspects of the mechanisms of experience that generate what we call "feeling." There are only two feelings, pleasure and pain, which means that everything we experience is either pleasurable or painful. All of the discussion about highest and best pleasures and their duration and evaluation revolve around the basic observation that all experience is either one or the other, which means that the presence of one means the absence of the other, and thus that the purest/most intense form of experiencing either one is when the other is totally absent. Life is all about feeling, and the state of being without feeling is nothing to us (death).

I think this is a good start at a concise summary; however, It is important to remember what words Epicurus used so we're not going in a circle. The problem is that English words don't always convey the same or full meaning of Epicurus's language.

I like your statement "everything we experience is either pleasurable or painful." Pathē πάθη was the word Epicurus used to describe pleasure and pain and this word literally at its most basic means "[that which happens to a person, that which one had experienced.](#)" So, Epicurus was saying that ALL that we experience can ONLY be experienced as either pleasure or pain which goes back to his assertion that there is no neutral state between these two. So, your sentence I quoted is spot on, but I think saying there are only two feelings can confuse people because English "feelings" cover such a wide range of... Feelings: I feel happy, I feel sad, I feel sick, I feel sorry, etc.

And then I'm with you up until your last sentence: "Life is all about feeling, and the state of being without feeling is nothing to us (death)." Again, using that English word, makes it sound like it is all about "feeling" happy, sad, sick, tired, etc. But [death is nothing to us](#) because we can't experience anything any longer after we die. The word Epicurus uses in PD2 is ἀναίσθητος "[lacking perception; unconscious, insensate.](#)" When we die, we lose the ability to "experience" pleasure or pain and so [death is nothing to us](#), literally in a manner of speaking.