

# Does The Wise Man Groan and Cry Out When On The Rack / Under Torture / In Extreme Pain?

Post by “Cassius” of June 17, 2025 at 10:49 AM

Here's the section of Part 2 of Tusculan Disputations to which I am referring. Cicero says that making certain sounds can be helpful at times, but his criticism seems to be against extended "lamentation." Of course the part of the claim he that we avoid lamentation because it is "noble" to do so is largely inadmissible in Epicurean terms, but there are practical implications as well that are more acceptable. At any rate, this context might help explain what the issue is all about.

The key part: *For as the engines you throw stones or darts with, throw them out with the greater force the more they are strained and drawn back; so it is in speaking, running, or boxing, the more people strain themselves, the greater their force. Since, therefore, this exertion has so much influence—if in a moment of pain groans help to strengthen the mind, let us use them; but if they be groans of lamentation, if they be the expression of weakness or abjectness, or unmanly weeping, then I should scarcely call him a man who yielded to them.*

More context:

## Quote

For the body has a certain resemblance to the soul: as burdens are more easily borne the more the body is exerted, while they crush us if we give way; so the soul by exerting itself resists the whole weight that would oppress it; but if it yields, it is so pressed, that it cannot support itself. And if we consider things truly, the soul should exert itself in every pursuit, for that is the only security for its doing its duty. But this should be principally regarded in pain, that we must not do anything timidly, or dastardly, or basely, or slavishly, or effeminately, and above all things we must dismiss and avoid that Philoctetean sort of outcry. A man is allowed sometimes to groan, but yet seldom; but it is not permissible even in a woman to howl; for such a noise as this is forbidden, by the twelve tables, to be used even at funerals. Nor does a wise or brave man ever groan, unless when he exerts himself to give his resolution greater force, as they who run in the stadium make as much noise as they can. The wrestlers, too, do the same when they are training; and the boxers, when they aim a blow with the cestus at their adversary, give a groan, not because they are in pain, or from a sinking of their spirits, but because their whole body is put upon the stretch by the throwing out of these groans, and the blow comes the stronger.

## II-XXIV.¶

What! they who would speak louder than ordinary, are they satisfied with working their jaws, sides, or tongue, or stretching the common organs of speech and utterance? the whole body and every muscle is at full stretch, if I may be allowed the expression, every nerve is exerted to assist their voice. I have actually seen the knees of Marcus Antonius touch the ground when he was speaking with vehemence for himself, with relation to the Varian law. For as the engines you throw stones or darts with, throw them out with the greater force the more they are strained and drawn back; so it is in speaking, running, or boxing, the more people strain themselves, the greater their force. Since, therefore, this exertion has so much influence—if in a moment of pain groans help to strengthen the mind, let us use them; but if they be groans of lamentation, if they be the expression of weakness or abjectness, or unmanly weeping, then I should scarcely call him a man who yielded to them. For even supposing that such groaning could give any ease, it still should be considered, whether it were consistent with a brave and resolute man. But, if it does not ease our pain, why should we debase ourselves to no purpose? for what is more unbecoming in a man than to cry like a woman? But this precept which is laid down with respect to pain is not confined to it; we should apply this exertion of the soul to everything else. Is anger inflamed? is lust excited? we must have recourse to the same citadel, and apply to the same arms; but since it is pain which we are at present discussing, we will let the other subjects alone. To bear pain, then, sedately and calmly, it is of great use to consider with all our soul, as the saying is, how noble it is to do so, for we are naturally desirous (as I said before, but it cannot be too often repeated) and very much inclined to what is honourable, of which, if we discover but the least glimpse, there is nothing which we are not prepared to undergo and suffer to attain it. From this impulse of our minds, this desire for genuine glory and honourable conduct, it is that such dangers are supported in war, and that brave men are not sensible of their wounds in action, or if they are sensible of them, prefer death to the departing but the least step from their honour. The Decii saw the shining swords of their enemies when they were rushing into the battle. But the honourable character and the glory of the death which they were seeking, made all fear of death of little weight. Do you imagine that Epaminondas groaned when he perceived that his life was flowing out with his blood? No; for he left his country triumphing over the Lacedæmonians, whereas he had found it in subjection to them. These are the comforts, these are the things that assuage the greatest pain.