

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

Post by "Cassius" of June 20, 2025 at 1:53 PM

Excellent contribution Bryan! So given that Epicurus was likely aware of this statement by Aristotle, which tracks the reasoning of Cosma Raimondi, by the way, what do we make of Diogenes Laertius' and Cicero's statements which seem to stake Epicurus out on the opposite position?

At the moment i am still of the opinion that Epicurus DID say something about the wise man still being happy while under extreme pain, given the statements of Diogenes Laertius and Cicero to that same effect.

I personally then am inclined to conclude that this is going to be more evidence that Epicurus was using words in non-standard ways, and that he did the same to happiness as he did to pleasure and virtue and gods. Clearly if Epicurus held himself to be happy in the midst of last-phase kidney disease, then he is working with a definition of happiness that does not exclude extreme pain. Aristotle and Cosma Raimondi may think that makes no sense, if they are focusing solely on the "stimulative pleasure" side of happiness, but given that Epicurus was expanding the scope of the word "pleasure" I think it's entirely possible that he in fact considered himself to be "happy" and expected his students to understand why.

And that's where I am on "crying out" too. Yes it makes total sense that Epicurus or anyone else would "cry out" when under extreme pain. But on the other hand I do not think it would make sense for Epicurus to compose a book of "Lamentations" to devote his mind to wailing or waxing at length on how much pain he was in.

Leading me to conclude that the best interpretations are probably:

(1) Epicurean happiness does not totally exclude the experience of great pain (mental and bodily). We'll certainly do what is possible to avoid that, but we will bear it by deeming our pleasure to outweigh that pain up until the moment we deem it time to "exit the stage" (because we have rationally concluded that the future will be unavoidably worse);

(2) An Epicurean like any other person going to "cry out" when under torture, but as long as his actions are within his control, an Epicurean won't wail and gnash teeth and compose length lamentations about the pain of life. And in fact an Epicurean will plan ahead to the extent possible to make sure that he does not degenerate into an out-of-control condition before taking events into his own hands.