

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

Post by “Eikadistes” of July 1, 2025 at 8:04 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I see that I started a thread on this six years ago but it did not get developed. This is a question that we discussed in the podcast recorded on 6/15, so if anyone has any comment on whether Yonge could be correct, let me know and I will record some new commentary before the podcast is released.

It appears that the translators other than Yonge seem to take the position that Epicurus said that the wise man WILL cry out under torture, but it's not 100% clear to me that it's beyond doubt that that's what Epicurus would have said.

It seems to me that there is a strong analogy between being under torture and being under the extreme pain of kidney disease, and we know that Epicurus took the time to say that he was still happy while in that condition. But there's nothing recorded as to Epicurus himself groaning or crying out from pain.

Now Cicero himself says that there are times when you are exerting yourself that you will groan/cry out, much in the way that athletes do, so I can see that one angle on this is that it makes sense to groan or cry out when that accomplishes something. But on the other hand if it accomplishes nothing but giving vent to pain/fear/frustration, then I could see it having negative effects on yourself and your friends around you.

I can see as a general rule that it makes sense to say that a truly happy man does not lose his happiness just because he is experiencing severe pain for a time. But it seems to me much harder to state a general rule of "no" or "yes" as to whether or not to groan cry out.

Should we consider the possibility that Yonge has it right and the others have it wrong?

I'd especially appreciate the help of our usual Greek researchers such as [Bryan](#) and [Don](#) and [Eikadistes](#) on this question.

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Here's how I read it:

"But even if the wise were tortured on a rack, they would be happy,⁴ and only the wise will have gratitude for friends both present and absent alike through both word and through

deed.⁵ **However, when tortured on the rack, at some point they both moan and wail.**"

I take the **μέντοι** ("however") at the beginning of the second sentence to create a thematic opposition against the first proposition that *a wise person maintains happiness while undergoing physical pain*. In this case, I think, it conveys something like, *though an emotionally healthy person will maintain a good attitude, they're still only human, and they will exhibit normative physical responses to stimuli, such as your knee popping when you knock it, or yelping when getting burned or stabbed*.

This might be a sort of marker about the limits of un-disturbedness. Perhaps both mortals and immortals can achieve a state of robust, mental tranquility, but while immortals are removed from experiencing any painful sensations, mortals are still defined by pain that will eventually kill us.