

# Episode 307 - TD35 - How The Wise Epicurean Is Always Happy

Post by “Cassius” of November 13, 2025 at 5:55 AM

In this episode we mentioned but did not explore Cicero's unjust accusation that Epicurus held it to be sweet to be roasted in the bull of Phalaris.

I see that the Bernier/Gassendi "Three Discourses addresses this directly on pages 6 and 7 (pdf pages 10 and 11). He doesn't call out Cicero directly, but the last paragraph here indicates that he may well have had Cicero's accusation against Epicurus directly in mind. I included the opening paragraph here because it shows that Bernier/Gassendi sees exactly what we are talking about in the podcast that it's essential to define Happiness in practical terms and not in abstract absolute terms such as the Stoics want to do in seeing it as 100 percent good unmixed with absolutely any evil:

## Quote

The Second is, That by this Natural Felicity that we here Treat of, is not to be understood such a state of Life as we can't imagine a better, a more pleasant, and more desirable; in the which we cannot apprehend any evil, nor think of any good thing which we shall not possess; nor of any thing that we have a desire to do, but we shall be able to accomplish it, and that it shall remain fixed and unchangeable. But we understand such a certain state of Life, in which we may be as happy as is possible; in which there are abundance of good things, and very few of any sort of evil; and in which consequently we may lead as easy, quiet and undisturbed a Life as the Condition of the Country, the Society we converse with, the Constitution of our Bodies, the manner of our Life, our Age and other Circumstances will permit: For to propose to ourselves more than this, or to affect during the Course of our Natural Life the highest Felicity, is not to acknowledge, but rather forget our selves to be Men; that is to say, weak and feeble Animals, who by the Laws of Nature are subject to an infinite number of Mischiefs and Evils.

And in this sense it is that we usually say, a Wise Man, tho' tormented with exquisite Pains, may nevertheless be happy; not in a perfect and complete sense, but he may attain to that degree that we call Human Happiness, which the Wise Man always enjoys in that measure that the Circumstances will permit, because he doesn't increase his Misery, either by Impatience, or Despair, but rather abates it by his Constancy. And by this means he is happier, or to speak more properly, he is less miserable than if he suffered himself to be dejected, as others in like cases, who bear not their Misfortunes with the same patience and constancy of Mind, and who besides are not supplied with

the same Encouragements from Wisdom as he hath; such I mean as an innocent Life, and a good Conscience void of offence, which always afford great quiet and satisfaction to the Mind.

Wherefore 'tis improper to use this kind of Expression; That it is the same thing for a Wise Man to be burning in Phalaris's Bull, as to be solacing himself upon a Bed of Roses; for it is of such things as Fire and Torments that he desires to be exempt, and wishes much rather that they were not, or that he might not suffer by them; but when they come upon him, he considers them as unavoidable Evils, and suffers them with Courage; so that he may say, Uror, sed invictus; I burn, it is true, and suffer, and sometimes I sigh and weep, but for all this I am not vanquished, nor overcome, nor do I suffer my self to be transported with Despair, which would render my Condition much more miserable.