

# Happiness As Not Requiring Complete Absence of Pain

Post by "Cassius" of December 4, 2025 at 8:37 AM

This point is implicit in many other discussions here on the board, especially those which relate to:

- Epicurus stating that he was happy even in the midst of dying from kidney disease.
- Epicurus saying that the wise man can be happy even while on the rack.
- Torquatus explaining to Cicero that the wise man is always happy because he always has more reason for joy than for vexation.

The reason I wanted to post this is to include a section of "Tusculan Disputations" where Cicero directly addresses the point that some people want to argue that "happiness" requires "completeness" - basically that if you are 99% happy but have 1% of your experience "not happy" then you should not consider yourself to be "happy."

This also falls under discussion of "the perfect is not the enemy of the good."

But here's one place where Cicero brings this up in Tusculan Disputations Part V, and takes the absolutist position:

Quote

**VIII.1**

A. I wish that indeed myself; but I want a little information. For I allow, that in what you have stated, the one proposition is the consequence of the other; that as, if what is honourable be the only good, it must follow, that a happy life is the effect of virtue: so that if a happy life consists in virtue, nothing can be good but virtue. But your friend Brutus, on the authority of Aristo and Antiochus, does not see this: for he thinks the case would be the same, even if there were anything good besides virtue.

M. What then? do you imagine that I am going to argue against Brutus?

A. You may do what you please: for it is not for me to prescribe what you shall do.

M. How these things agree together shall be examined somewhere else: for I frequently discussed that point with Antiochus, and lately with Aristo, when, during the period of my command as general, I was lodging with him at Athens. For to me it seemed that no

one could possibly be happy under any evil: but a wise man might be afflicted with evil, if there are any things arising from body or fortune, deserving the name of evils. These things were said, which Antiochus has inserted in his books in many places: that virtue itself was sufficient to make life happy, but yet not perfectly happy: and that many things derive their names from the predominant portion of them, though they do not include everything, as strength, health, riches, honor, and glory: which qualities are determined by their kind, not their number: thus a happy life is so called from its being so in a great degree, even though it should fall short in some point. To clear this up, is not absolutely necessary at present, though it seems to be said without any great consistency: for I cannot imagine what is wanting to one that is happy, to make him happier, for if anything be wanting to him he cannot be so much as happy; and as to what they say, that everything is named and estimated from its predominant portion, that may be admitted in some things. But when they allow three kinds of evils; when any one is oppressed with every imaginable evil of two kinds, being afflicted with adverse fortune, and having at the same time his body worn out and harassed with all sorts of pains, shall we say that such a one is but little short of a happy life, to say nothing about the happiest possible life?

I would say that's it's important to recognize that Epicurus is taking the position with which Cicero disagrees, that a happy life is so called from its being so in a great degree, even though it should fall short in some point.

In other words, Epicurus did not hesitate to call his last days happy even though he very definitely felt physical pain - and therefore those days could have been "more happy" without that physical pain during that time.