

# 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.

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 4, 2025 at 11:30 AM

Also from section 14 of the same chapter:

Quote

**XIV.¶**

To me such are the only men who appear completely happy; for what can he want to a complete happy life who relies on his own good qualities, or how can he be happy who does not rely on them? But he who makes a threefold division of goods must necessarily be diffident, for how can he depend on having a sound body, or that his

fortune shall continue? but no one can be happy without an immovable, fixed, and permanent good. What, then, is this opinion of theirs? So that I think that saying of the Spartan may be applied to them, who, on some merchant's boasting before him, that he had despatched ships to every maritime coast, replied, that a fortune which depended on ropes was not very desirable. Can there be any doubt that whatever may be lost, cannot be properly classed in the number of those things which complete a happy life? for of all that constitutes a happy life, nothing will admit of withering, or growing old, or wearing out, or decaying; for whoever is apprehensive of any loss of these things cannot be happy; the happy man should be safe, well fenced, well fortified, out of the reach of all annoyance, not like a man under trifling apprehensions, but free from all such. As he is not called innocent who but slightly offends, but he who offends not at all; so it is he alone who is to be considered without fear who is free from all fear, not he who is but in little fear. For what else is courage but an affection of mind, that is ready to undergo perils, and patient in the endurance of pain and labour without any alloy of fear? Now this certainly could not be the case, if there were anything else good but what depended on honesty alone. But how can any one be in possession of that desirable and much-coveted security (for I now call a freedom from anxiety a security, on which freedom a happy life depends) who has, or may have, a multitude of evils attending him? How can he be brave and undaunted, and hold everything as trifles which can befall a man, for so a wise man should do, unless he be one who thinks that everything depends on himself? Could the Lacedæmonians without this, when Philip threatened to prevent all their attempts, have asked him, if he could prevent their killing themselves? Is it not easier, then, to find one man of such a spirit as we are inquiring after, than to meet with a whole city of such men? Now, if to this courage I am speaking of we add temperance, that it may govern all our feelings and agitations, what can be wanting to complete his happiness who is secured by his courage from uneasiness and fear; and is prevented from immoderate desires and immoderate insolence of joy, by temperance? I could easily show that virtue is able to produce these effects, but that I have explained on the foregoing days.