

# Mental Disorder as an Impediment to Pleasure

## Cicero

One of the great statesmen of the late Roman Empire, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) was also a notable transmitter of Greek philosophy to Roman society. In his work *On the Ends of Good and Evil*, Cicero offers a critique of Epicureanism that essentially argues that pleasure is too fleeting a good to be the supreme object of human activity.

**F**or a state torn apart by civil unrest cannot prosper, nor a house whose masters are at strife; much less then can a mind divided against itself and filled with inward discord taste any particle of pure and liberal pleasure. But one who is perpetually swayed by conflicting and incompatible counsels and desires can know no peace or calm.

Why, if the pleasantness of life is diminished by the more serious bodily diseases, how much more must it be diminished by the diseases of the mind! But extravagant and imaginary desires, for riches, fame, power, and also for sensual pleasures, are nothing but mental diseases. Then, too, there are grief, trouble and sorrow, which gnaw the heart and consume it with anxiety, if men fail to realize that the mind need feel no pain unconnected with some pain of body, present or to come. Yet there is no foolish man but is afflicted by some one of these diseases; therefore there is no foolish man that is not unhappy.

Moreover, there is death—the [ultimate threat] always hanging over men's heads—and superstition that poisons and destroys all peace of mind. Besides, they do not recollect their past nor enjoy their present blessings; they merely look forward to those of the future, and as these are of necessity uncertain, they are consumed with agony and terror; and the climax of their torment is when they perceive too late that all their dreams of wealth or station, power or fame, have come to nothing. For they never attain any of the pleasures, the hope of which inspired them to undergo all their arduous toils. Or look again at others, petty, narrow-minded men, or confirmed pessimists, or spiteful, envious, ill-tempered creatures, unsociable, abusive, brutal; others again enslaved to the follies of love, impudent or reckless, wanton, headstrong and yet irresolute, always changing their minds. Such failings render their lives one unbroken round of misery . . .