

Death Is Nothing To Us

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1. Explanation

- Given that the universe is entirely natural, contains nothing that is supernatural, we know that no gods have endowed us with immortal souls that can survive death. Epicurus therefore concluded that consciousness is an attribute of the body, and cannot survive outside the body, so *our lives end forever at death*. This obviously means also that there can be no punishment to fear, or reward to hope for, after death. This knowledge, rather than being cause for despair, frees us to pursue happiness. We are motivated by this, rather than depressed, because the realization that death is *nothingness* to us means that the reverse is also true: life is *everything* to us, and we should pursue it with all the vigor we can muster.
- The confidence that had no existence for the eternity that passed before we were born, and that we will have no existence for the eternity that will pass after we die, spurs us to focus on making the best use of the time that *is* available to us. As Epicurus wrote in Principal Doctrine 2, "[Death is nothing to us](#) , for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us." Not only does Epicurean doctrine provide motivation to live in the here and now, it gives us strength to face the many painful challenges of life. Epicurus taught that pain is manageable if it continues for very long, and that pain is short if it is intense, but in no case does pain have the power to hold us in its grip indefinitely, because we always have the power to escape pain through death, where no punishment can reach us.
- But be clear: life is our most valuable possession, and this is not a sanction for suicide except in the most extreme of circumstances. Epicurus taught that it is a small man indeed who has many reasons for ending his own life. Instead, it is a call to bravery in facing adversity, because as Epicurus wrote to Menoeceus, "There is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living."

2. Citations:

1. Epicurus' Principal Doctrine 2
 1. Bailey: "[Death is nothing to us](#), for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us."
2. Epicurus to Menoeceus Line 125
 1. Bailey: "For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living. So that the man speaks but idly who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when it comes, but because it is painful in anticipation. For that which gives no trouble when it comes is but an empty pain in anticipation. So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more."
3. Lucretius 3:912
 1. Bailey: [912] This too men often do, when they are lying at the board, and hold their cups in their hands, and shade their faces with garlands: they say from the heart, 'Brief is this enjoyment for us puny men: soon it will be past, nor ever thereafter will it be ours to call it back.'

As though in death this were to be foremost among their ills, that thirst would burn the poor wretches and parch them with its drought, or that there would abide with them a yearning for any other thing. For never does any man long for himself and life, when mind and body alike rest in slumber. For all we care sleep may then be never-ending, nor does any yearning for ourselves then beset us. And yet at that time those first-beginnings stray not at all far through our frame away from the motions that bring sense, when a man springs up from sleep and gathers himself together. Much less then should we think that death is to us, if there can be less than what we see to be nothing; for at our dying there follows a greater turmoil and scattering abroad of matter, nor does any one wake and rise again, whom the chill breach of life has once overtaken.

4. Lucretius Book Three [560]

1. *Munro*: "Therefore, again and again I say, when the enveloping body has been all broken up and the vital airs have been forced out, you must admit that the senses of the mind and the soul are dissolved, since the cause of destruction is one and inseparable for both body and soul."

5. Lucretius Book Three [679]

1. *Munro*: "Wherefore, again and again I say, we must believe souls to be neither without a birth nor exempted from the law of death; for we must not believe that they could have been so completely united with our bodies, if they found their way into them from without, nor since they are so closely interwoven with them, does it appear that they can get out unharmed and unloose themselves unscathed from all the sinews and bones and joints."

3. Notes:

1. There is no existence after death. There is one life to live, and, afterwards, we no longer exist except in the memories of friends and loved ones.
2. Major Implications:
 1. Consciousness ends forever at death.
 2. There is no life after death.
 3. There is no punishment or reward after death.
 4. The manner of our death in terms of whether the steps leading up to it are painful, and the timing of our death, in terms of how long we live, are significant to us. This doctrine focuses on what happens (nothing) to the individual after death.
 5. The reverse is also true: Given that for an eternity before birth and for an eternity after death we have no life at all, our life while we have it is extremely important to us.
3. *Find out more in our [Physics Forum](#)*
4. [Discussion Forum](#)