

Fear and/or grief concerning the death of others

Post by “Cassius” of July 28, 2025 at 7:35 AM

This passage from Seneca very much echoes Cicero's attack on pleasure in Tusculan Disputations. It also shows the importance of seeing Epicurus's wider definition of pleasure.

The ancient Stoics knew their Epicurus better than most Epicureans today, and certainly better than do modern Stoics. The ancient Stoics knew how critical it is to Stoicism (and to all enemies of Epicurus) to obfuscate and reject Epicurus' wider view of pleasure.

Everything in Epicurean ethics turns on recognizing that all feeling which is not painful is pleasurable. Yes it is painful to lose a friend, but as Metrodorus says even in that circumstance there are non-painful pleasurable feelings that come with the remembrance of the dead friend. And Epicurus says that even the worst pains are to be dealt with by turning back to pleasure (properly understood), and focusing on the recognition that that which has been done cannot be undone.

Quote

VS55. We must heal our misfortunes by the grateful recollection of what has been, and by the recognition that it is impossible to undo that which has been done.

This is something I haven't focused on hard enough, and going through Tusculan Disputations is raising its importance in my mind. Epicurus teaches focusing instead on pleasure rather than constantly focusing on the pain and suffering as the Stoics (or at least the Cyreniacs) advise.

Thanks Adrastus for posting this because it is a good reminder of the point.

Quote

“Even at the moment when your son's body is on the pyre, or your friend breathing his last, will you not suffer your pleasure to cease, rather than tickle your very grief with pleasure? Which is the more honourable—to remove grief from your soul, or to admit pleasure even into the company of grief? Did I say ‘admit’? Nay, I mean ‘chase after,’ and from the hands, too, of grief itself. ²⁸. Metrodorus says: ‘There is a certain pleasure which is related to sadness.’ We Stoics may say that, but you may not. The only Good which you^[11] recognize, is pleasure, and the only Evil, pain; and what relationship can there be between a Good and an Evil? But suppose that such a relationship does exist; now, of all times, is it to be rooted out?^[12] Shall we examine grief also, and see with what elements of delight and pleasure it is surrounded? ²⁹. Certain remedies, which

are beneficial for some parts of the body, cannot be applied to other parts because these are, in a way, revolting and unfit; and that which in certain cases would work to a good purpose without any loss to one's self-respect, may become unseemly because of the situation of the wound. Are you not, similarly, ashamed to cure sorrow by pleasure? No, this sore spot must be treated in a more drastic way. This is what you (METRODORUS?) should preferably advise: that no sensation of evil can reach one who is dead; for if it can reach him, he is not dead. ³⁰. And I say that nothing can hurt him who is as naught; for if a man can be hurt, he is alive. Do you think him to be badly off because he is no more, or because he still exists as somebody? And yet no torment can come to him from the fact that he is no more—for what feeling can belong to one who does not exist?—nor from the fact that he exists; for he has escaped the greatest disadvantage that death has in it—namely, non-existence.