

Is Death Nothing To Us?

Post by "Cassius" of January 25, 2020 at 4:07 AM

Good to hear from you Michael.

My personal take on this is that there are at least a couple of very important points that need to be considered separately:

(1) We know from pretty reliable sources that the Epicureans advised people to "think about death," so the meaning of the phrase is not "death is totally irrelevant to us so don't even think about it." Given how much of Epicurean advice is about dealing with reality and overcoming fear that is unjustified, it would not be consistent for the Epicureans to hold that the subject is totally irrelevant, and in fact Lucretius (and thus Epicurus in *On Nature*) devoted a lot of time to exploring the subject.

(2) To me personally, the heart of the issue has always been better stated in English as something like "the state of being dead is nothingness." The starting point is that all good and evil is experienced through sensation, and there is no sensation after we die, so there is no way to experience anything good or evil, or to experience anything at all, after we are dead. I think that is the main point of the doctrine, and as a result it emphasizes not only the absence of any reason to fear being dead, it also emphasizes the importance of using our time wisely so as to experience the most pleasurable life that we can while we are alive.

(3) We know that Epicurus had a will and that he planned for what would happen after he died. This was not a contradiction of PD2 but shows us how to apply it reasonably and in full context of the rest of the philosophy. By planning for his inevitable death he minimized the kind of present worry and concern that you mention in your question.