

Meditare mortem & Mindfulness of Death

Post by “Joshua” of March 5, 2020 at 1:35 PM

Hello, all 😊

It's been a time, but I still have an eye here—and a voice that I don't use enough!

Some may recall that I came to the Epicurean way through Buddhism. Indeed, I have used the Meditation on Death myself. Here's what I have to say;

To hear modern Buddhists speak of the Meditation on Death is generally to hear them mischaracterize it. I confess to not having listened to the linked podcast, Eugenios, but I want to clarify the point. What a Buddhist meditates on is precisely the death of the body. It's good so far as that goes—but before you get very far into it, you arrive at the problem.

The problem is that the deep, underlying structure of Buddhism *precludes* the possibility of genuine death. In fact, that's rather the whole point. They meditate on death in order to **dismiss the claims of the body** (which really does die) and focus all their earthly energy on the mind or spirit. How do I know this? Because; if Buddhists genuinely believed that death meant extinction, then death would encompass their definition of nibbana. And are we to believe that the shortest road thither is to kill one's self? Obviously not. And so we may discern that when the early buddhists spoke of rebirth, they meant it literally. The idea that rebirth is metaphorical, or poetic, or only by analogy, is a modern fiction.

What Thomas Jefferson said of the trinity is equally true of rebirth; An idea must be distinct before reason can act upon it, and no one ever had a distinct idea of rebirth, or of nirvana.

As an Epicurean, what do I think of all this?

First: that the claims of the body are not to be dismissed or denied, but are wholly justified, in and of themselves. I believe this because pleasure is the self-evident good.

Second: there *is* a sense of urgency in the shortness of human life, but it's source is altogether different from an Epicurean viewpoint. The Pali Canon teaches that nirvana is only possible in a human rebirth, and that a human rebirth is as rare as a sea turtle surfacing inside a golden ring in the middle of the ocean. A buddhist better get it right in this life or they'll surf through the six realms of existence waiting for another chance. The urgency for an Epicurean, by contrast, is that one will squander his only life in pain and suffering because he hasn't learned how to optimize for pleasure effectively.

Third: that there *is* certainly value in reflecting on death. Specifically; we should do as Epicurus instructed, and reflect on how [Death is Nothing to us!](#)

Well, I have to go back to work...it's an excellent topic though!

Josh