

"For Life Has No Terrors . . . "

Post by "Cassius" of November 11, 2021 at 8:52 AM

Sometimes I wonder why this is not the most famous saying of Epicurus of all, and it's right from his own pen, in his letter to Menoeceus:

"For life has no terrors for him who has thoroughly apprehended that there are no terrors for him in ceasing to live." (Hicks)

"For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living." (Bailey)

"For there is nothing terrible in living to a man who rightly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in ceasing to live." (Yonge)

"For there is nothing to be feared while living by the man who genuinely grasped the idea that there is nothing to be feared when not living." (DeWitt)

Post by "Don" of November 11, 2021 at 9:42 AM

LOL! I was literally working on that section of my Annotated Letter to Menoikeus when I took a break and brought up the forum. Here's my literal translation:

οὐθὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ζῆν δεινὸν τῷ κατειληφῶτι γνησίως τὸ μηθὲν ὑπάρχειν ἐν τῷ μὴ ζῆν δεινόν.

"For there is nothing terrible in living for the one who truly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in not living."

Language Trivia: Terrible is the translation of Greek δεινόν **which is the source for dinosaur "terrible lizard."**

Post by "Cassius" of November 11, 2021 at 10:51 AM

I suppose some people may shy away from this one because there is implicitly the premise that if things get bad enough for you, you can "exit the stage when the play ceases to please you."

Probably that's not one of the things we like to dwell on the most, but serious problems are an inevitable part of life for most of us, and I do think it is "liberating" if you take the saying to heart in exactly the way that the statement says (by truly comprehending the implications).

It's always important to make sure not to talk too casually about this, given that some people can be apt to apply it too readily and to forget the other clear statements to the effect that the wise man is going to find very few situations where it is appropriate to consider "exiting the stage."

But taken seriously, and thoroughly, and all together, I think that the implications here are some of the most practical and important for many of us to consider.

Maybe we'll be "lucky" enough to drop dead of an unexpected heart attack when we are 95, but if we aren't so "lucky" then most of us are going to face decisions relevant to this saying.

And the whole point of it, I think, is that if we truly comprehend what it means, it's an example of "knowledge is power" and it's by no means something to stick in a drawer and forget about.

Post by "Don" of November 11, 2021 at 11:23 AM

One grammatical note:

ζῆν is the present active infinitive of ζάω "to live", so I like translating it as a verbal form (living) rather than a noun (life), making it more active.

Post by "Joshua" of November 11, 2021 at 4:57 PM

I suspect that it was precisely this realization that so disturbed Dante in the writing of his *Inferno*; hence the punishment for Epicurus and his school, as they burn in unclosed tombs but are unaware of their torment. On the day of judgment, the tombs will close, and the soul trapped within will be reunited with the rotting corpse it left above on Earth.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 12, 2021 at 12:18 AM

I see this as a way to quiet ones fears and deal with uncertainty in life. It could pragmatically be applied to future unknowns such as climate change.

Post by “Cassius” of November 12, 2021 at 7:45 AM

[Quote from JJElbert](#)

I suspect that it was precisely this realization that so disturbed Dante

I've never read the full work, but the realization of how "freeing" this insight is should in fact strike fear in the heart of every proponent of religion who seeks to keep people oppressed in fear of punishment after death.

Post by “Cassius” of November 12, 2021 at 11:00 AM

Humphries Book 1 of Lucretius:

1.07 You may,

Yourself, some time or other, feel like turning

Away from my instruction, terrified

By priestly rant. How many fantasies

They can invent to overturn your sense

Of logic, muddle your estates by fear!

And rightly so, for if we ever saw

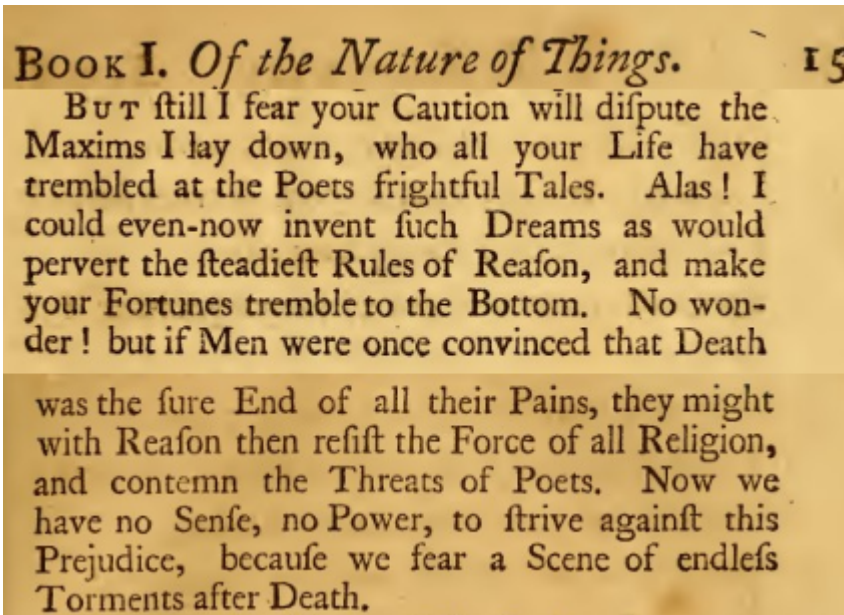
A limit to our troubles, we'd be strong,

Resisters of religion, rant and cant,

But as things are, we have no chance at all

With all their everlasting punishments

Waiting us after death.



Post by "Kalosyni" of November 12, 2021 at 12:26 PM

"For there is nothing terrible in living for the one who truly comprehends that there is nothing terrible in not living"

So then, this is mostly in regard to the fear of a mythical religious afterlife? Not so much as simple fear of non-existence(?) since atheism is only a limited modern movement.

Fears of death:

- 1) fear of an imagined afterlife (hell or a purgatory)
- 2) fear of the end of one's existence (an innate grasping desire for self-existence)
- 3) fear of the painful experience of dying (will it be excruciatingly painful?)

4) fear of living through long moments when it is uncertain if one will live or die (during severe sickness, war, political unrest, famine).

Post by “Cassius” of November 12, 2021 at 6:52 PM

I think so Kalosyni. The issue of length of life and worries about whether someone is missing something is probably more dealt with in other doctrines (fascinating in itself) such as those that talk about there being no need for unlimited time.

Post by “Godfrey” of November 12, 2021 at 7:12 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

So then, this is mostly in regard to the fear of a mythical religious afterlife? Not so much as simple fear of non-existence(?) since atheism is only a limited modern movement.

To my understanding it is in regard to both religion/superstition *and* the fear of non-existence. Also the fear of being a rotting, worm infested corpse, buried in a claustrophobic box. Or of anything that may happen to our body after we're dead. Even worries such as what will happen to loved ones or some project that one might feel is of great importance. Do our best to live life now; once we're gone, we're gone.

[PD04](#) seems to address 3), and I'm curious if it touches on 4) as well.... And the unlimited time issues are probably worth at least one thread of their own.

Post by “Cassius” of November 13, 2021 at 3:10 AM

Yes primarily [PD19](#) and [PD20](#) on unlimited time.

Kalosyni could you start a thread on those?

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 14, 2021 at 12:00 AM

[Cassius](#), I see [PD19](#) and [PD20](#) as addressing the nature of pleasure, and not helpful on how to alleviate fear of death.

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2021 at 12:48 AM

Well they are mainly addressed to the aspect of fear of nonexistence from the aspect of the feeling of pain from "missing out" on something after we are dead. The fear of any aspect of the experience of being dead in itself is dealt with fully as being impossible based in [PD02](#).

Post by “Don” of November 14, 2021 at 3:46 AM

[PD18](#), [PD19](#), and [PD20](#) are a prime example of PDs that should be read as one passage in my opinion. Those breaks are not in the original text, but I wish I could find when they first show up. They certainly aren't in the [Arundel MS 531 manuscript at the British Library \(from 1450-1500\)](#). Just scroll to the final pages, Book 10 is at the end. Even if you don't read Greek, you'll see there's no list. Just paragraphs of text.

[This Latin translation from before 1439](#) also has no breaks in the PDs (for those who read Latin).

Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2021 at 5:46 AM

Wow it is interesting that they may have been added as late as that. I had presumed that the date was much earlier. Great research!