

Mark Twain Quote (On Death)

Post by “Don” of December 3, 2024 at 10:39 PM

Annihilation has no terrors for me, because I have already tried it before I was born—a hundred million years—and I have suffered more in an hour, in this life, than I remember to have suffered in the whole hundred million years put together. There was a peace, a serenity, an absence of all sense of responsibility, an absence of worry, an absence of care, grief, perplexity; and the presence of a deep content and unbroken satisfaction in that hundred million years of holiday which I look back upon with a tender longing and with a grateful desire to resume, when the opportunity comes.

p. 69 of Vol. II of The Complete and Authoritative Edition, 2013, University of California Press

Post by “Cassius” of December 4, 2024 at 1:59 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

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There's definitely lots of good stuff in Mark Twain! His "Connecticut Yankee" will always be one of my favorite books, largely for its can-do and anti-religious content. But here is he saying that he was "alive" during that hundred million years? ("presence of a deep ...satisfaction?")

Post by “Don” of December 4, 2024 at 6:20 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

But here is he saying that he was "alive" during that hundred million years? ("presence of a deep ...satisfaction?")

No, I don't take it that way at all. I take it the same way as "I was not. I was. I am no longer. I care not."

Post by "Cassius" of December 4, 2024 at 7:51 AM

Like I said I am a great fan of Mark Twain, but as I look back again I read that section as even more off the mark:

....and the presence of a deep content and unbroken satisfaction in that hundred million years of holiday which I look back upon with a tender longing and with a grateful desire to resume, when the opportunity comes

You don't read that as implying both (1) some kind of awareness and contentedness while being dead, and (2) the desire to resume that experience (of death) later when he dies?

While it's clear that Epicurus doesn't hold there to be any pain in death, nor is there any kind of pleasure whatsoever in death, and death is not a thing to be welcomed, except when one faces pain for which there is no other remedy.

Do you see that differently?

I agree that there is some echoing of taking a devil-may-care attitude toward death that is consistent with Epicurus, but doesn't this cross a line and imply or in fact flatly express that death should flatly be viewed as a desirable experience?

"....when the *opportunity* comes"?

Post by "Don" of December 4, 2024 at 8:20 AM

Twain was not above using hyperbole to make a point.

I see the same sentiment as here as well as Non Fui Fui Non Sum Non Caro...

VS47. I have anticipated you, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all your secret attacks. And we will not give ourselves up as captives to you or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for us to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who here vainly cling to it, we will leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-song that we have lived well.

Twain's quote tells me there's nothing to fear in death, no care, nothing to be worried about.

Post by “TauPhi” of December 4, 2024 at 4:26 PM

On the surface, the quote may look like an attractive proposition to people who gravitate towards Epicureanism. On closer inspection, the quote is deeply anti-Epicurean, however. It reveals preference of non-existence over existence. Such a sentiment leads to philosophical pessimism where the only sensible course of action is taking Twain's hundred million years holiday prematurely. Out of nowhere, we find ourselves in the world of Arthur Schopenhauer or Philipp Mainländer.

Mark Twain had some 75 years of opportunity to resume his holiday if he so truly desired and yet he didn't take it. He died when opportunity was no longer opportunity but an unavoidable necessity.

I also don't think Twain thought through the nature of non-existence as he seems to romanticise it with the absence of undesirable feelings (worry, grief etc.) and the presence of desirable feelings (content, satisfaction etc.). Non-existence offers nothing.

That said, I also am a huge fan of Mark Twain. He was an exceptional writer.

Post by “Don” of December 4, 2024 at 11:40 PM

I don't really have a dog in this fight and I'm not quite sure why I feel so adamant about defending Mark Twain; but, in any case, I appear to be staking my flag...

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

It reveals preference of non-existence over existence.

I don't see that at all. I don't see Twain expressing a preference for non-existence (or annihilation as he wrote it). I would say he certainly doesn't express it like an Epicurean, but I don't see him wanting to die. Or as [TauPhi](#) expressed it:

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

the only sensible course of action is taking Twain's hundred million years holiday prematurely... Mark Twain had some 75 years of opportunity to resume his holiday if he so truly desired and yet he didn't take it.

Twain simply says "when the opportunity comes" as it will definitely come for all of us. This sentiment of "when the opportunity comes" speaks to me of not railing against the coming of death when it becomes inevitable. By all means, I'll do what's prudent to stay healthy, but being kept alive by any means necessary is the antithesis (in my mind) of going out with a triumph-song on my lips (or at least in my mind).

When Twain writes "I look back upon with a tender longing and with a grateful desire to resume, *when the opportunity comes*", in my mind this is exactly the kind of sentiment expressed by the more Epicurean way of saying "Death does not concern me. I did not exist before I was born and I won't exist after I die. I had no cares, anxiety, worry, grief, or pain before I was born; I see no reason to suspect that I will have any of those after I die."

While I may be able to understand where some of the trepidation about the quote comes from, I see it as a very (let's say) *Epicurean-adjacent* sentiment.

Post by "Cassius" of December 5, 2024 at 6:34 AM

It would be highly interesting to read something in depth on Twain's ultimate religious views. There's clearly very much in his viewpoint and manner of expression that is Epicurean - *adjacent*.

And yet there seems to have been a failure to take a few steps further that would have made him more consistent from an Epicurean point of view. I don't know why he failed to go a little further and it would be an interesting study to explore why. As an example maybe in the end he saw himself more as an "entertainer" than a real "social reformer" or "philosopher." I haven't read nearly enough of his overall work to have a basis for a firm opinion.

This subject came up briefly in the Wednesday Zoom last night and I could not even remember the name of the book or work by Twain that we discussed some time ago as being arguably Epicurean-adjacent, and Joshua was awol (😊) and could not remind me!

So here it is -- something that would definitely fit into a discussion of this topic -- What Is Man?

Post

[RE: Episode 210 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 17 - Self-Approval As Pleasure](#)

This episode will be released later this afternoon. In the meantime, one of the topics we discussed was the issue of "self-approval" as discussed by Mark Twain in his essay "What Is Man?"

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/70/70-h/70-h.htm>



Cassius

January 20, 2024 at 1:21 PM

Definitely questions of what is actually "Epicurean-adjacent" vs "the camel of virulent anti-Epicureanism has his nose under the tent" are always of interest.

Post by "Don" of December 5, 2024 at 7:03 AM

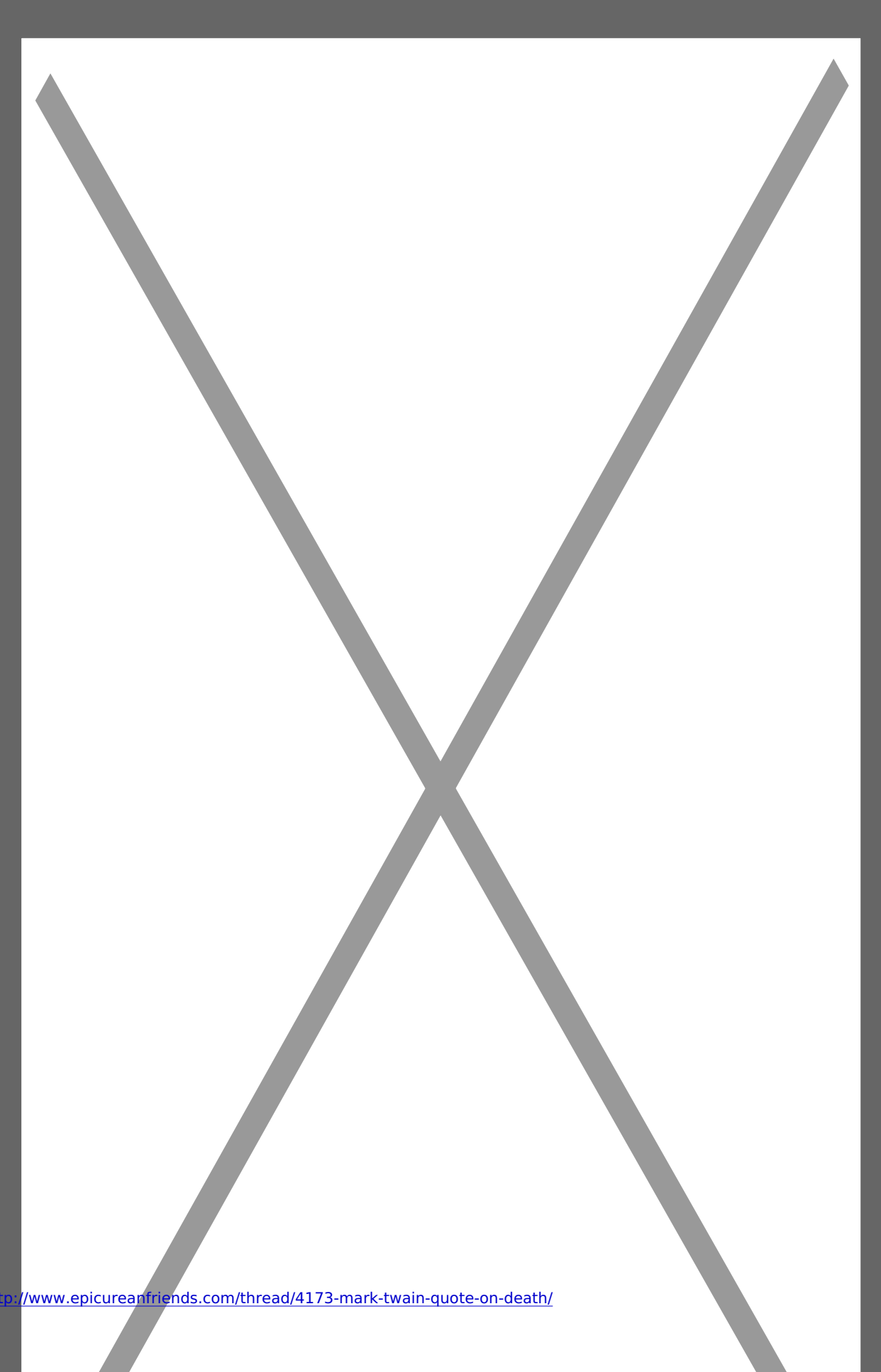
[Quote from Cassius](#)

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Same here. My intuition tells me he would think of himself as more "social commentator" than reformer.

Fwiw, one of Twain's friends and in part his inspiration for performance was Artemus Ward, the stage name and nom de plume of Charles Farrar Browne:

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[Charles Farrar Browne - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

Post by “Cassius” of December 5, 2024 at 7:17 AM

Never heard of Artemus Ward - thank you - interesting story! Challenging time to have specialized in comedy!

Post by “Don” of December 5, 2024 at 7:20 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Never heard of Artemus Ward - thank you - interesting story! Challenging time to have specialized in comedy!

Few people seem to have heard of him, but he was BIG in his day. Also arguably the first stand up comedian. His Ohio connections endear him to me. Always glad to take the opportunity to spread the word.