

The Reality of Sisyphus

Post by "Eikadistes" of January 7, 2025 at 10:09 AM

What would you do if you were Sisyphus?

(For the purposes of Epicurean theology, let's say that Sisyphus was being punished, **not** by a supernatural being, but by ... *Oh, I don't know ... just thinking something random off the top of my head ... crippling economic debt*).

Camus said he'd quit pushing the rock. That *might* work in the case of a petty deity. (You're already in Hell, right?)

Epicurus provides some pointers. Lucretius even speaks to this precise myth:

"In life, too, we have a Sisyphus before our eyes who is bent on asking from the people the rods and cruel axes, and always retires defeated and disappointed." (De Rerum Natura 3.995)

"But even if the wise were tortured on a rack, they would be happy, and only the wise will have gratitude for friends both present and absent alike through both word and through deed. However, when tortured on the rack, at some point they both moan and wail." (Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 10.118)

"We must simultaneously laugh and philosophize and manage a household and administrate the economic affairs and never let go of the language of the true philosophies." (Vatican Saying 41)

Then again...

"Great stresses draw [life] short, and such times [provide] no great abundance. For the stress that is hyperbolic will bring on to death." (Bailey's Fragments 64 and 65)

I think maybe Dr. Seuss summed it up, best:

"So be sure when you **step, Step** with **care** and **great** tact.
And remember **that life's A Great Balancing Act.**"

Post by "Cassius" of January 7, 2025 at 12:06 PM

This is a good topic to discuss. But I need to remind myself of the specifics of using Sisyphus as the example. This is the person who repeatedly pursued political power, right? Which is the reason for the title of the article "Not all politicians are Sisyphus...."

But do we have a good fix on "why" the person in the political example wants power? And that's where I am forgetting why Sisyphus was pushing the rock too.

So where I am going is that I would see the decision as to whether to "stop pushing" is very closely tied to the reason for the pushing in the first place. And so it might be good to comment more specifically on Sisyphus to help unravel that.

Post by "Joshua" of January 7, 2025 at 12:46 PM

He repeatedly cheated Death (Thanatos, one of the psychompoms who escorted souls to the afterlife.)

Post by "Cassius" of January 7, 2025 at 4:44 PM

Ultimately not significant probably, but it's interesting to me that one of the things Sisyphus did was to halt death on earth. Aside from the comment here about no relief for the sick and dying, I would have thought that this would have made him a positive figure to be admired, almost like a Prometheus. I do see the other references to him killing visitors and so forth, but most if not all of the bad things he did would pale in comparison to him putting a stop to death (and wars) even temporarily. From Wikipedia

Cheating death

Sisyphus betrayed one of Zeus's secrets by revealing the whereabouts of the [Asopid Aegina](#) to her father, the river god [Asopus](#), in return for causing a spring to flow on the Corinthian [acropolis](#).^[8]

Zeus ordered [Thanatos](#) to chain Sisyphus in [Tartarus](#). Sisyphus was curious as to why [Charon](#), whose job it was to guide souls to the underworld, had not appeared on this occasion. Sisyphus slyly asked Thanatos to demonstrate how the chains worked. As Thanatos was granting him his wish, Sisyphus seized the opportunity and trapped Thanatos in the chains instead. Once Thanatos was bound by the strong chains, no one died on Earth, causing an uproar. [Ares](#), the

god of war, became annoyed that his battles had lost their fun because his opponents would not die. The exasperated Ares intervened, freeing Thanatos, enabling deaths to happen again and turned Sisyphus over to him. [\[13\]](#)

In some versions, [Hades](#) was sent to chain Sisyphus and was chained himself. As long as Hades was trapped, nobody could die. Consequently, sacrifices could not be made to the gods, and those that were old and sick were suffering. The gods finally threatened to make life so miserable for Sisyphus that he would wish he were dead. He then had no choice but to release Hades. [\[14\]](#)