

# Episode Forty-Seven - Death is Nothing To Us

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## Welcome to Episode Forty-Seven of Lucretius Today.

I am your host Cassius, and together with my panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. Be aware that none of us are professional philosophers, and everyone here is a self-taught Epicurean. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book, "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

For anyone who is not familiar with our podcast, please check back to [Episode One](#) for a discussion of our goals and our ground rules. If you have any question about that, please be sure to contact us at Epicureanfriends.com for more information.

In today's episode, we will cover roughly lines 830- 930 from Book 3 of the Latin Text. The topic will be that [death is nothing to us](#), as we complete the chapter with a series of arguments that explain how we can reconcile ourselves to the fact of death.

Podcast 47 - [Death is nothing to us](#)

Latin Text Location 830 -930

## Munro Notes:

830-869: thus the soul being proved to be mortal, [death is nothing to us](#); for as we felt no discomfort, when Rome and Carthage were warring for the empire of the world, we shall feel none after the dissolution of body and soul, though heaven and earth go to ruin: if our soul even do exist after death, that is nothing to us, whose identity consists in the union of soul and body: or if infinite time to come collects again and gives life to the very same atoms of which we consist, that is nothing to us, when this identity has once been broken; even as we know and remember nothing of our former selves, if as is probable infinite time past arranged the atoms just as they now are in us: death will prevent us from existing in that future time and feeling the ills that may befall that repetition of ourselves : death then will at once make us for evermore as if we never had been.

870-893: when a man laments that after death he will rot or be the prey of beasts, be sure there is something wrong with him: he does not separate his dead carcass from his present self ; and cannot see that after death there will be no other self to stand by and mourn the self thus mangled, or else burnt on the pyre; for if it is an evil after death to be torn by wild beasts, it is

surely as much one to burn in flames or the like.

894-911: they say, you will see no more wife home and children; but they do not add, you care not now for these; else they would not thus grieve for you: another adds, you sleep the sleep of death, freed for ever from all ills; but we remain to mourn evermore: you might ask this man, if the dead only sleeps, why mourn for him evermore?

912-930: men say glass in hand enjoy the moment, it cannot be recalled'; as if after death one felt the want of wine or aught else: in sleep we have no thought for life; how much less then in death if there can be a less than nothing! for death is a more complete dispersion of our matter, a sleep that knows no waking.

Browne 1743:

Death therefore is nothing, nor is it of the consequence of a rush to us, since the nature of the soul is certainly mortal; and as we were no way concerned at what formerly happened when the Carthaginians mustered their armies on all sides against us, and all the world trembled and shook with the dreadful alarms of war, and it was undecided under the power of which empire the land and the sea, and all things here below should be subjected; so, when we shall be no more, when the separation happens between the soul and the body, which together make up our being, nothing shall befall us when that shall nowhere be, nor affect our sense; not tho' the earth be swallowed up by the sea, and the sea confounded with the heavens above. But if the nature of the soul, and the powers of it, when divided from the body, had the faculty to think, this would signify nothing to us, who are formed and compounded by a strict and inseparable union of soul and body together. Nay, if time could collect together our scattered particles after death, and reduce them into the same frame they are now in, and the light of life were again bestowed upon us, can all this, if it were done, relate anything to us, when all the memory of past life were interrupted and gone? And now we give ourselves no trouble over what we were formerly, nor are we under any anxiety what persons the time to come will raise from our matter, when it is moulded up again; for when you look back upon that infinite space of time that is past, and consider how various are the agitations of matter, you will easily believe those seeds of ours have been often arranged in the same order they are now in, tho' we can recollect nothing of what was then transacted; for a pause of life is thrown in between, and the seeds, so variously tossed about, took such motions as were averse and opposite to all sense. For whoever is to become wretched and miserable must exist at that very time when such misfortunes are to fall upon him; but since death puts an end to his being, and hinders the man from feeling those misfortunes which we the living endure, it is plain that we have nothing to fear in death, and none can be unhappy who are not in being; nor is it of the consequence of this whether such a one had ever been born, whose mortal life immortal death had once put an end to.

And then, when you see a man lament himself, because his rotten body shall after death putrefy in the earth, or be consumed by fire, or by the jaws of wild beasts, this man you must observe does not speak out, but has some secret sting concealed at his heart within, tho' he

pretends to say that the whole of him is deprived of life when he dies, but, like a fool, that something of himself remains still. When a man alive torments himself that birds or beasts will tear his body to pieces after death, he bemoans the misery of his fate, but does not fully distinguish, nor set himself at a proper distance from his dead carcass; he believes himself to be that, and rots with all his senses about him. Hence it is he grieves that he was born mortal, nor sees that in death there can be no other self that can survive, and mourn over him after he is dead, that can stand by him as he lies along, or suffer pain or affliction for him. For if it be an evil to be crushed after death by the teeth and jaws of wild beasts, I do not see why his fate is not equally wretched to be laid upon a burning pile, and consumed to ashes, or to be suffocated with honey, or to be stiff with cold, as he lies upon the top of a bleak rock, or pressed with a heavy weight of earth on him.

But now no more will your glad family welcome you home, nor your best of wives, nor sweet children run to meet you, and strive who shall have the first kiss, and make your heart leap with silent delight; no more shall you be a defense to yourself and your friends by your brave exploits: Ah wretch, thou criest, Ah miserable me! One woeful day has robbed me of so many blessings of my life. But in this case, he never goes on and says that the desire of these things is gone likewise. If men would well consider and accordingly express their complaints, their minds would be free from much anxiety and imaginary fear; for thou, sleeping in the arms of death, shalt lie forever discharged from all sorrow and pain, but we shall never cease to lament thee, reduced to ashes, near thy sad urn, and no time shall remove our never-ending grief from our minds. Now I would gladly know, if the matter be no more than sleeping and going to rest, what there is so exceeding bitter in death, that any one should upon that account pine his life away in eternal lamentation?

And yet this the gayest part of mankind do, even when they sit down at their carousells, with bumpers in their hands, and their heads crowned with flowers; they turn serious and cry, "Short is the pleasure of us poor creatures, we can just say it was, and once gone, it will never return more. As if the greatest evil in death to them was that a parching thirst should scorch the wretches, and burn them up, or an insatiable desire of any thing they love should follow them beyond the grave. No man gives himself any concern about himself or his life when the soul and body are sleeping at rest together (tho we were to sleep so eternally); no appetite for any thing we love best would then affect us; and yet when the principles of the soul are alive, and are moved almost with a sensible motion within us, the man roused from his sleep soon recollects and recovers himself; death, therefore, we should imagine, would give us much less anxiety than sleep, if there can be less than what seems nothing at all; for there is in death a wider separation of the seeds, nor does the man every awake, when one the cold pause of life comes upon him.

**Munro:**

Death therefore to us is nothing, concerns us not a jot, since the nature of the mind is proved to be mortal; and as in time gone by we felt no distress when the Poeni from all sides came together to do battle, and all things shaken by war's troublous uproar shuddered and quaked

beneath high heaven, and mortal men were in doubt which of the two peoples it should be to whose empire all must fall by sea and land alike, thus when we shall be no more, when there shall have been a separation of body and soul, out of both of which we are each formed into a single being, to us, you may be sure, who then shall be no more, nothing whatever can happen to excite sensation, not if earth shall be mingled with sea and sea with heaven. And even supposing the nature of the mind and power of the soul do feel, after they have been severed from our body, yet that is nothing to us who by the binding tie of marriage between body and soul are formed each into one single being. And if time should gather up our matter after our death and put it once more into the position in which it now is, and the light of life be given to us again, this result even would concern us not at all, when the chain of our self-consciousness has once been snapped asunder. So now we give ourselves no concern about any self which we have been before, nor do we feel any distress on the score of that self. For when you look back on the whole past course of immeasurable time and think how manifold are the shapes which the motions of matter take, you may easily credit this too, that these very same seeds of which we now are formed, have often before been placed in the same order in which they now are; and yet we cannot recover this in memory: a break in our existence has been interposed, and all the motions have wandered to and fro far astray from the sensations they produced. For he whom evil is to befall must in his own person exist at the very time it comes, if the misery and suffering are haply to have any place at all; but since death precludes this, and forbids him to be, upon whom the ills can be brought, you may be sure that we have nothing to fear after death, and that he who exists not, cannot become miserable, and that it matters not a whit whether he has been born into life at any other time, when immortal death has taken away his mortal life.

Therefore when you see a man bemoaning his hard case, that after death he shall either rot with his body laid in the grave or be devoured by flames or the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that his ring betrays a flaw and that there lurks in his heart a secret goad, though he himself declare that he does not believe that any sense will remain to him after death. He does not methinks really grant the conclusion which he professes to grant nor the principle on which he so professes, nor does he take and force himself root and branch out of life, but all unconsciously imagines something of self to survive. For when any one in life suggests to himself that birds and beasts will rend his body after death, he makes moan for himself: he does not separate himself from that self, nor withdraw himself fully from the body so thrown out, and fancies himself that other self and stands by and impregnates it with his own sense. Hence he makes much moan that he has been born mortal, and sees not that after real death there will be no other self to remain in life and lament to self that his own self has met death, and there to stand and grieve that his own self there lying is mangled or burnt. For if it is an evil after death to be pulled about by the devouring jaws of wild beasts, I cannot see why it should not be a cruel pain to be laid on fires and burn in hot flames, or to be placed in honey and stifled, or to stiffen with cold, stretched on the smooth surface of an icy slab of stone, or to be pressed down and crushed by a load of earth above.

“Now no more shall thy house admit thee with glad welcome, nor a most virtuous wife and sweet children run to be the first to snatch kisses and touch thy heart with a silent joy. No more may thou be prosperous in thy doings, a safeguard to thine own. One disastrous day has taken from thee luckless man luckless wise all the many prizes of life.” This do men say, but add not thereto “and now no longer does any craving for these things beset thee withal.” For if they could rightly perceive this in thought and follow up the thought in words, they would release themselves from great distress and apprehension of mind. “Thou, even as now thou art, sunk in the sleep of death, shalt continue so to be all time to come, freed from all distressful pains; but we with a sorrow that would not be sated wept for thee, when close by thou didst turn to an ashen hue on thy appalling funeral pile, and no length of days shall pluck from our hearts our ever-during grief?” This question therefore should be asked of this speaker, what there is in it so passing bitter, if it come in the end to sleep and rest, that any one should pine in never-ending sorrow.

This too men often, when they have reclined at table, cup in hand and shade their brows with crowns, love to say from the heart, “Short is this enjoyment for poor weak men; presently it will have been and never after may it be called back!” As if after their death it is to be one of their chiefest afflictions that thirst and parching drought is to burn them up, hapless wretches, or a craving for any thing else is to beset them. What folly! No one feels the want of himself and life at the time when mind and body are together sunk in sleep; for all we care this sleep might be everlasting, no craving whatever for ourselves then moves us. And yet by no means do those first-beginnings throughout our frame wander at that time far away from their sense-producing motions, at the moment when a man starts up from sleep and collects himself. Death therefore must be thought to concern us much less, if less there can be than what we see to be nothing; for a greater dispersion of the mass of matter follows after death, and no one wakes up, upon whom the chill cessation of life has once come.

### **Bailey:**

Death, then, is naught to us, nor does it concern us a whit, inasmuch as the nature of the mind is but a mortal possession. And even as in the time gone by we felt no ill, when the Poeni came from all sides to the shock of battle, when all the world, shaken by the hurrying turmoil of war, shuddered and reeled beneath the high coasts of heaven, in doubt to which people’s sway must fall all human power by land and sea; so, when we shall be no more, when there shall have come the parting of body and soul, by whose union we are made one, you may know that nothing at all will be able to happen to us, who then will be no more, or stir our feeling; no, not if earth shall be mingled with sea, and sea with sky. And even if the nature of mind and the power of soul has feeling, after it has been rent asunder from our body, yet it is naught to us, who are made one by the mating and marriage of body and soul. Nor, if time should gather together our substance after our decease and bring it back again as it is now placed, if once more the light of life should be vouchsafed to us, yet, even were that done, it would not concern us at all, when once the remembrance of our former selves were snapped in twain. And even now we care not at all for the selves that we once were, not at all are we touched by any torturing pain for them. For when you look back over all the lapse of immeasurable time that

now is gone, and think how manifold are the motions of matter, you could easily believe this too, that these same seeds, whereof we now are made, have often been placed in the same order as they are now; and yet we cannot recall that in our mind's memory; for in between lies a break in life, and all the motions have wandered everywhere far astray from sense. For, if by chance there is to be grief and pain for a man, he must needs himself too exist at that time, that ill may befall him. Since death forestalls this, and prevents the being of him, on whom these misfortunes might crowd, we may know that we have naught to fear in death, and that he who is no more cannot be wretched, and that it were no whit different if he had never at any time been born, when once immortal death hath stolen away mortal life.

And so, when you see a man chafing at his lot, that after death he will either rot away with his body laid in earth, or be destroyed by flames, or the jaws of wild beasts, you may be sure that his words do not ring true, and that deep in his heart lies some secret pang, however much he deny himself that he believes that he will have any feeling in death. For he does not, I trow, grant what he professes, nor the grounds of his profession, nor does he remove and cast himself root and branch out of life, but all unwitting supposes something of himself to live on. For when in life each man pictures to himself that it will come to pass that birds and wild beasts will mangle his body in death, he pities himself; for neither does he separate himself from the corpse, nor withdraw himself enough from the outcast body, but thinks that it is he, and, as he stands watching, taints it with his own feeling. Hence he chafes that he was born mortal, and sees not that in real death there will be no second self, to live and mourn to himself his own loss, or to stand there and be pained that he lies mangled or burning. For if it is an evil in death to be mauled by the jaws and teeth of wild beasts, I cannot see how it is not sharp pain to be laid upon hot flames and cremated, or to be placed in honey and stifled, and to grow stiff with cold, lying on the surface on the top of an icy rock, or to be crushed and ground by a weight of earth above.

'Now no more shall thy glad home welcome thee, nor thy good wife and sweet children run up to snatch the first kisses, and touch thy heart with a silent thrill of joy. No more shalt thou have power to prosper in thy ways, or to be a sure defence to thine own. Pitiful thou art,' men say, 'and pitifully has one malignant day taken from thee all the many prizes of life.' Yet to this they add not: 'nor does there abide with thee any longer any yearning for these things.' But if they saw this clearly in mind, and followed it out in their words, they would free themselves from great anguish and fear of mind. 'Thou, indeed, even as thou art now fallen asleep in death, shalt so be for all time to come, released from every pain and sorrow. But 'tis we who have wept with tears unquenchable for thee, as thou wert turned to ashes hard by us on the awesome place of burning, and that unending grief no day shall take from our hearts.' But of him who speaks thus we should ask, what there is so exceeding bitter, if it comes at the last to sleep and rest, that any one should waste away in never-ending lamentation.

This too men often do, when they are lying at the board, and hold their cups in their hands, and shade their faces with garlands: they say from the heart, 'Brief is this enjoyment for us puny men: soon it will be past, nor ever thereafter will it be ours to call it back.' As though in death this were to be foremost among their ills, that thirst would burn the poor wretches and parch

them with its drought, or that there would abide with them a yearning for any other thing. For never does any man long for himself and life, when mind and body alike rest in slumber. For all we care sleep may then be never-ending, nor does any yearning for ourselves then beset us. And yet at that time those first-beginnings stray not at all far through our frame away from the motions that bring sense, when a man springs up from sleep and gathers himself together. Much less then should we think that death is to us, if there can be less than what we see to be nothing; for at our dying there follows a greater turmoil and scattering abroad of matter, nor does any one wake and rise again, whom the chill breach of life has once overtaken.