

If Death Is Nothing To Us, Then Life Is Everything to Us

Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 12:06 AM

Don and several of us have been discussing the implications of [PD02](#) and we should open this to everyone. Don has pointed out that we should consider the wording:

[Death is nothing to us](#); for what has disintegrated lacks awareness (ἀναισθητεῖ), and what lacks awareness (ἀναισθητεῖ) is nothing to us.

ἀναισθητεῖ is simply a negated form of αἴσθησις which means:

1. Perception from the senses, feeling, hearing, seeing
2. Perception by the intellect as well as the senses
3. That which is perceived: scent
4. Ability to perceive: discernment

We have discussed many times that hypotheticals can be dangerous, but to go down a rabbit hole, the mirror universe positive version of PD2 may be something like:

"Life is everything to us, for what perceives the senses, feelings, and perceptions of the intellect is everything to us."

Let's consider that "mirror universe positive version" of [PD02](#) and discuss whether we think this would be true statement of Epicurean doctrine.

In this case I will go forward and state my own opinion. As it now appears to me to be justified to hold that it is core Epicurean doctrine that all experiences in life which are not painful are pleasurable, then Epicurus would indeed support this mirror image. Epicurus is identifying the normal state of life as pleasurable unless pain intervenes, and given that Epicurus has explicitly stated that pleasure is the alpha and omega of the blessed life, viewing life itself in its normal state to be a pleasure would justify holding that "life is everything to us."

So to repeat I would say that I think Epicurus embraced this view on these grounds:

If [death is nothing to us](#) then life is everything to us because we identify all non-painful experiences as pleasurable. Life is desirable, and the default Epicurean position is that to be alive is understood to be pleasurable unless some specific pain intervenes. "Quod dolore caret id in voluptate est." (Torquatus / Cicero - On Ends - Book One XI - 39) [T]hat which is free from pain is in a state of pleasure. (Parker)

I also think this is a clear meaning of On Ends 1:56: "We refuse to believe, however, that when pleasure is removed grief immediately ensues, excepting when perchance pain has taken the place of pleasure...."

i think it is fair to interpret that as meaning that the presumption is that life is a series of pleasures, both stimulating and normal, and that the norm of life is (or can be for a person living prudently) a succession of pleasures unless specifically interrupted by some non-normal pain. "Effort" - such as the effort of breathing - is not painful in and of itself but is instead normal and pleasurable. The hand in its normal state of existence may not be being stimulated at a particular moment, but unless it is for some specific reason experiencing a pain it is experiencing pleasure.

Further from the letter to Menoecus; "And therefore a right understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality."

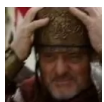
That is a statement that because the wise man understands and views life as desirable and pleasurable, the "normal" state is itself desirable and pleasurable.

And given that nothing is desirable in and of itself unless it is pleasurable, this following wording too supports the same conclusion:

"And he who counsels the young man to live well, but the old man to make a good end, is foolish, not merely because of [the desirability of life](#), but also because it is the same training which teaches to live well and to die well."

Let's discuss. I think it is time (for those of us who haven't already) to endorse the view that "life is everything to us" is in fact the corollary that [death is nothing to us](#). Whereas in the past we may have drawn back from doing so because we would have preferred to say "[Pleasure](#) is everything to us," the identification of the normal state of life as pleasurable supports the conclusion that "[Life](#) is everything to us." This may not be wording that we find normal and familiar, but it is up to an Epicurean to be able to explain the proper relationship of "pleasure" and "life" just as an Epicurean explains a proper view of "gods" and of "virtue."

Reference Note: A search of the forum here for "life is everything" indicates this issue previously came up in at least two places:



[**Discussion of Article: "On Pleasure, Pain and Happiness"**](#)

- [Cassius](#)
- Jul 13th 2019

- [The Feelings / Passions / Internal Sensations: Pleasure and Pain](#)

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...y I think it is conveying that we have no concerns after we are dead because there is no sensation that would drive a concern. And one of the most important results of "[death is nothing to us](#)" properly understood is something very close to "life is everything to us." As I remember DeWitt saying somewhere, pain and pleasure "have meaning only to the living." Does that explanation help bridge our issue, or make my viewpoint more confusing? (Quote from Elaine) On this issue I am attempting to consi...



[Doubt is Unpleasant, But It's Not Your Worst Enemy](#)

- [Cassius](#)
- Dec 20th 2015
- [General Discussion And Navigation](#)

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...in, this summary obscures the deeper issues. Of course there's no need to fear anything about the state of being dead, because we feel nothing after we cease to live. But just as it is true that "[death is nothing to us](#)" it is also true that life is everything to us because only while we are living are we able to experience pleasure. And it is quite legitimate - in fact the height of wisdom - to be careful about the way you live your life so that your happiness can extend as long as possible. If ...