

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

Post by "Cassius" of October 7, 2023 at 5:43 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

How do we square these considerations with VS47? "47. 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."

Joshua:

I would square it this way:

"When it is time for us to go" means (1) when we have no other choice or possibility, or (2) when our pain is truly so much that we can no longer outweigh it by pleasure, and a life of unremitting intolerable pain is certain.

When we have no other choice or possibility would be that we see that we are caught in some situation that is going to kill us and we have no way to stop it.

When we are facing unremitting overwhelming pain for either bodily reasons or mental reasons (and this is where we would give our life for a friend if failing to do so would cause us such pain afterwards that we could not live with ourselves).

Thus "...spitting contempt on life and on those who here vainly cling to it..." refers to those situations listed above, and when we have exhausted our options we spit contempt on those who fail to be willing to die, because they do not understand that [death is nothing to us](#) and that there is nothing to fear in death. And in a way that is one of our last acts of pleasure for ourselves, because we are as in Lucretius Book 2 taking pleasure in not being subject to the fear and anxiety that others suffer from when they fail to understand the nature of things.

So from these perspectives I don't think squaring is too difficult. So long as we have the strength of mind to balance mental pleasure against physical pain we will hold out because the balance is still pleasurable. Once the pain is so great and no remedy is possible it would then be appropriate to "exit the theatre when the play has ceased to please us." But we would certainly not want to be a "small man" and give in to the suffering and exit until we were certain that the balance had irredeemably shifted.

This would be why it is so important to see these issues in terms of constant balancing of discrete pleasurable experiences and discrete painful experiences as we have been doing in recent discussions. Some people (Buddhists?) tend to want to think that "being in pain" is all you need to know, but the real issue is "What is the duration, intensity, and location of your pain, and is it manageable and offsetable by pleasures of greater duration, intensity, and location?"

You train yourself not to be a snowflake and give in to pain at its first emergence, you work as hard as you can to achieve a balance of pleasure over pain. Some people are going to say "That sounds like a Stoic attitude!" and I would say to them in reply that I am a proud Epicurean who takes his life extremely seriously, and that they need not insult me as being a Stoic because:

I have anticipated you, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all your secret attacks. And I will not give myself up as captive to you or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for me to go because I can no longer find enough pleasure to remain in life, I will spit contempt on the idea of staying longer, and on those who vainly cling to life under such circumstances, and because I have no fear of death I will leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well.