

# How Would Epicurus Analyze The Slogan "Live Free Or Die" As An Ethical Guide?

Post by "Don" of December 4, 2024 at 11:28 PM

My first question is "How do you define someone who is 'living free'?"

Or even "What do you mean by 'free'?"

Do you mean living "free" politically? Should I imagine Mel Gibson's William Wallace yelling "Freedom!"

Do you mean living free from fear and anxiety?

I'm assuming New Hampshireites would mean living free from the rule of a king. So, context is important so we don't impose meaning on top of theirs (for the moment!): [3:8 State Motto](#). – *The words "Live Free or Die," written by General John Stark, July 31, 1809, shall be the official motto of the state. Source. 1945, 152:1, eff. May 10, 1945.* So it became their motto in 1945 in the context, no doubt, of World War II.

The General John Stark in question penned what would become the motto as the postscript to a letter:

I shall remember, gentlemen, the respect you, and "the inhabitants of Bennington and its neighborhood" have shewn me, till I go to the country from which no traveller returns. I must soon receive marching orders.

JOHN STARK.

P. S. I will give you my volunteer toast.  
**LIVE FREE OR DIE.—DEATH IS  
NOT THE GREATEST OF EVILS.**

*Hon. Gideon Olin, Jonathan  
Robinson, and David Fay.*

*Green-Mountain Farmer*, Bennington, Vermont, August 21, 1809

1809

**Caption:**

In 1809, John Stark was invited to an anniversary celebration for the Battle of Bennington. Unfortunately, he was too old and sick to travel. Instead he sent a letter to be read out loud at the celebration. He wrote about his great respect for the soldiers who fought with him for liberty and independence. At the end of the letter, Stark wrote, "Live free or die, death is not the greatest of evils." These words became an important symbol of New Hampshire and later, the state motto. Stark's original letter does not seem to have survived, but it was reprinted in this newspaper.

I find it very interesting that Stark included "death is not the greatest of evils." As we know, [death is nothing to us](#). I'll consider the Epicurean implications of this later. For now, that seems to me a fascinating little context for a deceptively simple motto.