

Episode 272 - TD02 - Is Death An Evil?

Post by "Cassius" of March 12, 2025 at 7:08 AM

Welcome to Episode 272 of Lucretius Today. This is a podcast dedicated to the poet Lucretius, who wrote "On The Nature of Things," the most complete presentation of Epicurean philosophy left to us from the ancient world.

Each week we walk you through the Epicurean texts, and we discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. If you find the Epicurean worldview attractive, we invite you to join us in the study of Epicurus at EpicureanFriends.com, where we discuss this and all of our podcast episodes.

This week we continue our series covering Cicero's "Tusculan Disputations" from an Epicurean viewpoint. This series addresses five of the greatest questions in philosophy, with Cicero speaking for the majority and Epicurus the main opponent:

- 1. Is Death An Evil? (Cicero says no and Epicurus says no, but for very different reasons)**
- 2. Is Pain An Evil? (Cicero says no, Epicurus says yes)**
- 3. Does the Wise Man Experience Grief and Fear? (Cicero says no, Epicurus says yes)**
- 4. Does the Wise Man Experience Joy and Desire? (Cicero says no, Epicurus says yes)**
- 5. Is Virtue Sufficient For A Happy Life? (Cicero says yes, Epicurus says no)**

As we found in Cicero's "On Ends" and "On The Nature of the Gods," Cicero treated Epicurean Philosophy as a major contender in the battle between the philosophies, and in discussing this conflict and explaining Epicurus' answers to these questions, we will deepen our understanding of Epicurus and how he compares to the other major schools.

These week we turn our attention further to "Is Death An Evil," and we will read and discuss [Sections V through IX](#) where the question is framed and the discussion begins:

In these sections, the student raises to the teacher the proposition: **"To me death seems to be an evil.**

- Cicero first argues that this means that everyone is miserable, because everyone dies.
- Cicero asks his student if he believes the stories about monsters in the underworld, and the student says of course he does not.

- Cicero then argues the Epicurean position (without crediting Epicurus for it), that when we are dead we no longer exist.
- Cicero argues that principles of logic require that a thing asserted either be true or false.
- The student retreats to the position that life is made miserable by realizing that we must die.
- Cicero tells the student that if this is so, then death delivers us from a miserable life.
- Cicero cites Epicharmus, who said that "I would not die, but even so I am not concerned that I will be dead."
- The student hears this but challenges Cicero to prove that anticipating death is not miserable. Cicero says he will prove that this is so by showing that death is not only not evil, but a good.
- Cicero goes on to explain that death is the departure of the soul from the body.

We'll be reading from the [Charles Yonge edition](#).

Here is a link to our discussion guide: [Epicurean Views Of Tusculan Disputations](#)

Our thread here at the forum specifically dedicated to [Tusculan Disputations is here](#).

For purposes of planning ahead, this series will be followed by a series on the Epicurean-relevant material in Cicero's "Academic Questions." A thread devoted to that series where you can make comments on what aspects of "Academic Questions" to include is [here](#).

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