

Episode 273 - TD03 - Is The Soul Immortal And Death Actually A Good/

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Welcome to Episode 273 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 beginning in [Section XII](#) where the discussion continues.

Quote

XII.¶

A. Explain, therefore, if it is not troublesome to you, first, if you can, that souls do exist after death; secondly, should you fail in that, (and it is a very difficult thing to establish,) that death is free from all evil; for I am not without my fears that this itself is an evil; I do not mean the immediate deprivation of sense, but the fact that we shall hereafter suffer deprivation.

M. I have the best authority in support of the opinion you desire to have established, which ought, and generally has, great weight in all cases. And first, I have all antiquity on that side, which the more near it is to its origin and divine descent, the more clearly, perhaps, on that account did it discern the truth in these matters. This very doctrine, then, was adopted by all those ancients, whom Ennius calls in the Sabine tongue, Casci, namely, that in death there was a sensation, and that, when men departed this life, they were not so entirely destroyed as to perish absolutely. And this may appear from many other circumstances, and especially from the pontifical rites and funeral obsequies, which men of the greatest genius would not have been so solicitous about, and would not have guarded from any injury by such severe laws, but from a firm persuasion that death was not so entire a destruction as wholly to abolish and destroy everything, but rather a kind of transmigration, as it were, and change of life, which was, in the case of illustrious men and women, usually a guide to heaven, while in that of others, it was still confined to the earth, but in such a manner as still to exist. From this, and the sentiments of the Romans,

In heaven Romulus with Gods now lives;

as Ennius saith, agreeing with the common belief; hence, too Hercules is considered so great and propitious a god amongst the Greeks, and from them he was introduced among us, and his worship has extended even to the very ocean itself. This is how it was that Bacchus was deified, the offspring of Semele; and from the same illustrious fame we receive Castor and Pollux as gods, who are reported not only to have helped the Romans to victory in their battles, but to have been the messengers of their success. What shall we say of Ino, the daughter of Cadmus? is she not called Leucothea by the Greeks, and Matuta by us? Nay more; is not the whole of heaven (not to dwell on particulars) almost filled with the offspring of men?

Should I attempt to search into antiquity, and produce from thence what the Greek writers have asserted, it would appear that even those who are called their principal gods, were taken from among men up into heaven.

XIII.¶

Examine the sepulchres of those which are shown in Greece; recollect, for you have been initiated, what lessons are taught in the mysteries; then will you perceive how extensive this doctrine is. But they who were not acquainted with natural philosophy,

(for it did not begin to be in vogue till many years later,) had no higher belief than what natural reason could give them; they were not acquainted with the principles and causes of things; they were often induced by certain visions, and those generally in the night, to think that those men, who had departed from this life, were still alive. And this may further be brought as an irrefragable argument for us to believe that there are gods,—that there never was any nation so barbarous, nor any people in the world so savage, as to be without some notion of gods: many have wrong notions of the gods, for that is the nature and ordinary consequence of bad customs, yet all allow that there is a certain divine nature and energy. Nor does this proceed from the conversation of men, or the agreement of philosophers; it is not an opinion established by institutions or by laws; but, no doubt, in every case the consent of all nations is to be looked on as a law of nature. Who is there, then, that does not lament the loss of his friends, principally from imagining them deprived of the conveniences of life? Take away this opinion, and you remove with it all grief; for no one is afflicted merely on account of a loss sustained by himself. Perhaps we may be sorry, and grieve a little; but that bitter lamentation, and those mournful tears, have their origin in our apprehensions that he whom we loved is deprived of all the advantages of life, and is sensible of his loss. And we are led to this opinion by nature, without any arguments or any instruction.

XIV.¶

But the greatest proof of all is, that nature herself gives a silent judgment in favour of the immortality of the soul, inasmuch as all are anxious, and that to a great degree, about the things which concern futurity;—

One plants what future ages shall enjoy,

as Statius saith in his Synephebi. What is his object in doing so, except that he is interested in posterity? Shall the industrious husbandman, then, plant trees the fruit of which he shall never see? and shall not the great man found laws, institutions, and a republic? What does the procreation of children imply—and our care to continue our names—and our adoptions—and our scrupulous exactness in drawing up wills—and the inscriptions on monuments, and panegyrics, but that our thoughts run on futurity? There is no doubt but a judgment may be formed of nature in general, from looking at each nature in its most perfect specimens; and what is a more perfect specimen of a man, than those are who look on themselves as born for the assistance, the protection, and the preservation of others? Hercules has gone to heaven; he never would have gone thither, had he not, whilst amongst men, made that road for himself. These things are of old date, and have, besides, the sanction of universal religion.

XV.¶

What will you say? what do you imagine that so many and such great men of our republic, who have sacrificed their lives for its good, expected? Do you believe that they thought that their names should not continue beyond their lives? None ever encountered death for their country, but under a firm persuasion of immortality! Themistocles might have lived at his ease; so might Epaminondas; and, not to look abroad and amongst the ancients for instances, so might I myself. But, somehow or other, there clings to our minds a certain presage of future ages; and this both exists most firmly and appears most clearly, in men of the loftiest genius and greatest souls. Take away this, and who would be so mad as to spend his life amidst toils and dangers? I speak of those in power. What are the poet's views but to be ennobled after death? What else is the object of these lines—

Behold old Ennius here, who erst

Thy fathers' great exploits rehearsed?

He is challenging the reward of glory from those men whose ancestors he himself had ennobled by his poetry. And in the same spirit he says in another passage—

Let none with tears my funeral grace, for I

Claim from my works an immortality.

Why do I mention poets? the very mechanics are desirous of fame after death. Why did Phidias include a likeness of himself in the shield of Minerva, when he was not allowed to inscribe his name on it? What do our philosophers think on the subject? do not they put their names to those very books which they write on the contempt of glory? If, then, universal consent is the voice of nature, and if it is the general opinion everywhere, that those who have quitted this life are still interested in something; we also must subscribe to that opinion. And if we think that men of the greatest abilities and virtue see most clearly into the power of nature, because they themselves are her most perfect work; it is very probable that, as every great man is especially anxious to benefit posterity, there is something of which he himself will be sensible after death.

Display More

(We will likely go further depending on the time we have.)

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

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

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

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4344-episode-273-td03-is-the-soul-immortal-and-death-actually-a-good/?postID=34472#post34472>

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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