

"Serenely Quitting Life's Theater When The Play Has Ceased To Please Us" -- Issues Surrounding Suicide And End-Of-Life Decisions

Post by "Cassius" of July 7, 2019 at 12:11 PM

I don't have time for a long post but I wanted to start a discussion. First and foremost however let's repeat the reliable major text references as to the general desirability of life, and the general undesirability of death:

Life Is Desirable - From The Letter to Menoecus:

But in the world, at one time men shun death as the greatest of all evils, and at another time choose it as a respite from the evils in life. The wise man does not deprecate life nor does he fear the cessation of life. The thought of life is no offense to him, nor is the cessation of life regarded as an evil. And even as men choose of food not merely and simply the larger portion, but the more pleasant, so the wise seek to enjoy the time which is most pleasant and not merely that which is longest. And he who admonishes the young to live well and the old to make a good end speaks foolishly, not merely because of the desirability of life, but because the same exercise at once teaches to live well and to die well. Much worse is he who says that it were good not to be born, but when once one is born to pass quickly through the gates of Hades. For if he truly believes this, why does he not depart from life? It would be easy for him to do so once he were firmly convinced. If he speaks only in jest, his words are foolishness as those who hear him do not believe.

Vatican Saying 38:

"He is of very small account for whom there are many good reasons for ending his life."

And We Know That Epicurus Enjoyed His Life Until He Died Naturally (From the Letter to Idomeneus):

"On this blissful day, which is also the last of my life, I write this to you. My continual sufferings from strangury and dysentery are so great that nothing could increase them; but I set above them all the gladness of mind at the memory of our past conversations. But I would have you, as becomes your lifelong attitude to me and to philosophy, watch over the children of Metrodorus."

On The Other Hand, We Know This From Torquatus in On Ends:

"So on the other hand a strong and lofty spirit is entirely free from anxiety and sorrow. It makes light of death, for the dead are only as they were before they were born. It is schooled to encounter pain by recollecting that pains of great severity are ended by death, and slight ones have frequent intervals of respite; while those of medium intensity lie within our own control: we can bear them if they are endurable, or if they are not, *we may serenely quit life's theater, when the play has ceased to please us.*" (Emphasis Added)

With that as background:

Let's discuss end of life issues, specifically including under what circumstances an Epicurean would choose suicide. Is it safe to say that those times when we are diagnosed with a painful and inevitably fatal disease that Epicurus would advise that we explore the option of terminating our own lives rather than endure prolonged pain from which no relief is reasonably to be expected and which overwhelms any available pleasure? Should we remain alive so long as **any** pleasure remains available, no matter the cost in pain?