

Article By Dr. Emily Austin - "Epicurus And The Politics Of The Fear Of Death"

Post by "Cassius" of December 11, 2025 at 7:29 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I need to re-read Austin's paper and refresh my memory. I vaguely remember seeing it several years ago (I think)? Or maybe I bookmarked it in Academia.edu and didn't get back to it.

Tau Phi's point on "fear of death" is correct and I think all of us (even Warren and the people holding the viewpoint that is the target of the article) are all agreed on that.

The reason I don't recall discussing this previously, and the reason I think the article needs more discussion now, is that the main point of the article is not necessarily to make the point which we all agree. The point of the article is to point out that there is a specific position taken by major writers on Epicurus (including Warren) with which Emily Austin disagrees.

We discussed this a little on Wednesday night but haven't fleshed it out in writing. The key section revolves around whether Epicurus held all "fear of death" or "fear of dying" to be "eliminable" through philosophy.

It's going to be necessary to be precise about the implications of both "fear" and "death vs dying" but it seems clear that Austin's reason for writing the article was her intent to state a disagreement with a "mainstream" position, and it's in areas like that where I think her work is most valuable.

We won't even begin to discuss her point til are able to see clearly what she states is her intent in writing the article and what (and who) she thinks she is writing against. The article covers lots of topics so it takes some effort to get to that point.

The general consensus is that Epicurus believed the fear of death to be wholly irrational and eliminable. I intend to argue otherwise. An important background commitment of the standard interpretation is that Epicurus was an 'intellectualist' (or 'cognitivist') about emotions. For the intellectualist, a fear simply is a belief or a set of beliefs. Thus, a person who irrationally fears death suffers from false beliefs, and eliminating her fear is a process of altering those beliefs in response to sound arguments. A ra-

I would say that Austin's level of analysis and willingness to depart from the mainstream here is a good example of why "Living For Pleasure" is by far the best recent book on Epicurus.