

Meditare mortem & Mindfulness of Death

Post by “Don” of March 6, 2020 at 4:03 PM

Powerful posts, [Joshua](#) . Thank you very much for those insights, especially the Auden quote.

One of my incentives for posting this thread was to get a conversation going on what it means for an Epicurean to "meditare mortem" as Epicurus urged us (via Seneca at least), and I've been pleased with everyone's passion and insights.

I fully agree that Buddhists and Epicureans come at this from two diametrically opposed sides, and you did an excellent job in summarizing that difference. Your brief notes on the Buddhist view of a human existence was spot on! It's merely the best vehicle for getting out of the cycle of rebirth. That isn't even in the same realm as Epicurus!

And an Epicurean meditation, reflection, or practice (choose your translation of meditatio or μελετά) of death would not necessarily include the visualizations of dead bodies, one's own or others, but it could. That's nature! There's nothing intrinsically morbid about it - only culturally. I would recommend anyone look into the "death positive" and "green burial" movement especially [Caitlin Doughty's work](#). I've found it fascinating and eye-opening recently.

From my perspective then, what should I get from engaging in "Meditare mortem" as an Epicurean?

- By meditating on my own death, I should come to an unshakeable understanding of the briefness of my life and the necessity of pursuing pleasure now and remembering past pleasures while I can.
- By meditating on the death and eventual decomposition of my body, I should come to a visceral understanding that I am not separate from these arrangements of atoms and, when I die, that arrangement goes away. I no longer exist and therefore death is nothing to me.
- By meditating on the death of friends and loved ones, I should firmly grasp the reality that everyone's life is brief and we get only one chance to show those closest to us how we love and appreciate them. We have no assurance that when we part from someone (as in going to work or leaving the house) we will see them again, we should be mindful of leaving pleasantly.

That last one contrasts starkly with the Stoic reflection on death which has the potential to engender a detachment... Although it doesn't need to. I've seen Stoic articles reflect similar sentiments to the one above, but I didn't really but it entirely from them.

None of this is necessarily easy and in some respects may be painful at first. But, from my perspective, it falls into the "experiencing a pain now for long-term pleasure in the future" practice.