

Practical exercises: PD2

Post by “Godfrey” of July 4, 2021 at 1:49 PM

Quote

PD2: [Death is nothing to us](#); for what has disintegrated lacks awareness, and what lacks awareness is nothing to us. (Peter Saint-Andre translation)

Exercise: visualize your death in detail: physical feelings, surroundings, smells, sounds, mental state, thoughts. Make it personal, not abstract.

Notes: Two ways of doing this are:

- to visualize dying well
- to visualize random ways in which you might die.

Either way, be aware of the feelings this stimulates in you as to how you should live your life and how you define pleasure for yourself in this context.

NB: Do NOT do this exercise if you are feeling any symptoms of depression.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 4, 2021 at 1:49 PM

This may belong in another thread, but it's also pertinent here:

[The evolutionary origin of near-death experiences](#)

Post by “Don” of July 4, 2021 at 5:14 PM

These are great ideas, [Godfrey](#) ! I'm reminded of [our conversation from a ways back on the forum on related topics](#).

Post by “Godfrey” of July 4, 2021 at 6:03 PM

[Don](#) thanks for adding that link! It's nice to have related discussions close at hand.

After some further thought I think that the first version of this exercise, visualizing dying well, is both the most useful and the most Epicurean (as is often the case). At least for me, it reinforces the understanding that if we can find pleasure even in death, we can certainly find pleasure in each moment of living.

Post by “Don” of July 5, 2021 at 11:18 AM

Here's my *very* literal translation of section 126 of the Letter to Menoikeus that seems to talk about what you're proposing:

Then the wise one neither begs/craves for living nor fears not living; Neither to set oneself against living, nor to think/suppose/imagine that it is evil to not live. Just as, on the one hand, the most food is not chosen but that which brings the greatest pleasure; as well as, on the other hand, not the longest time but that in which one enjoys the fruits of that which brings the greatest pleasure. Then, the one who exhorts (on the one hand) for the one who is young to live nobly, and, on the other hand, the one who is old to come to an end (die) nobly is a good-hearted simpleton not only because life is to be welcomed, but also because the practice of living well/nobly/beautifully (καλῶς) and (the practice of) dying well/nobly/beautifully (καλῶς) are the same. And also far worse (is) the one who says, on the one hand, it is good/kalōn (καλός) not to be born, or "*failing this, to pass through the gates of Hades as soon as possible.*"

(Last part is a quote from Theognis. [See the full poem in his Wikipedia article.](#))

Post by “Cassius” of July 5, 2021 at 12:17 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

At least for me, it reinforces the understanding that if we can find pleasure even in death, we can certainly find pleasure in each moment of living.

Correct me if I am wrong, but I think you probably mean "if we can find pleasure even in THINKING ABOUT death....."??

I would draw a very bright line and never get close to implying anything that indicates that we can find pleasure in actually being dead. I gather that there are in fact people (and Don's translation includes that part) who argue that it is better never to be born, or to go to death quickly if we are alive, and they have apparently some elaborate rationalization why that is generally to be preferred.

I think Epicurus stands for the exact opposite - that pleasure is the focus of life; that only the living experience pleasure or pain; that life is the only opportunity that we have for pleasure, and that we would never give up live voluntarily expect in those circumstances where we have confidence that to live on would bring much more pain than pleasure.

It sounds to me like some versions of Eastern thought (including some forms of judaism) take the position that death and or nothingness are superior to life, and I would strongly advocate never coming near any attempt to reconcile or make peace with those views, as they seem to be exactly what Epicurus is arguing strongly against.

Post by “Don” of July 5, 2021 at 3:52 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Correct me if I am wrong, but I think you probably mean "if we can find pleasure even in THINKING ABOUT death....."??

That was how I interpreted [Godfrey](#) 's post.

For me, "[death is nothing to us](#)," means there really is no "state of being dead" - we longer exist and therefore "we" can't be said to exist in a certain "state." We can certainly be "dying" but we can't really be said to "be dead." After we die, we can't be said "to be" anything. We have ceased to exist.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 5, 2021 at 5:18 PM

[Cassius](#) I was thinking of the PROCESS of dying, a la Epicurus. Absolutely there's nothing to enjoy once we're dead! As far as thinking about death goes, to me that would only apply to thinking about a good death... I can't imagine finding pleasure in visualizing being eaten by a tiger. That's why I clarified that I think the first version of the exercise that I proposed is more appropriate than the second version.

[Quote from Don](#)

the practice of living well/nobly/beautifully (καλώς) and (the practice of) dying well/nobly/beautifully (καλώς) are the same.

Yes [Don](#) this is exactly what I had in mind; good cite!

Post by “Don” of July 6, 2021 at 10:10 AM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

As far as thinking about death goes, to me that would only apply to thinking about a good death... I can't imagine finding pleasure in visualizing being eaten by a tiger.

Ah, but even that death should be mitigated by the knowledge that pain is either chronic and endurable or short and fatal... At least theoretically according to PD4

Post by “Don” of July 6, 2021 at 7:00 PM

The manner of our death seems to be one of those things not under our control:

Quote

Letter to Menoikeus, DL, X: 127: Remember that what will be is not completely within our control nor completely outside our control, so that we will not completely expect it to happen nor be completely disappointed if it does not happen.

That being said, we can exercise which may lead to a longer life. We can eat properly and drink alcohol moderately who may lead to a longer life. But there are no guarantees. However, if we

live wisely, justly, and nobly, we will at least have a better chance of living a longer healthy life before we die.

Post by "Don" of July 7, 2021 at 10:57 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Quote

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If I may expand on [Godfrey](#) 's excellent idea and incorporate some of the "control" features I mentioned earlier:

Visualize your death in various scenarios, some quick and unexpected: a car accident, a fatal heart attack, etc. What would be your final thoughts? Could you make your last thought pleasurable? Would you be able to recollect your life with joy? Could you "leave life crying aloud in a glorious triumph-song that [you] have lived well."

One interesting Buddhist saying I remember is:

If you were to fall to your death from a great height, it would be a shame to not enjoy the view on the way down.

That strikes me as almost Epicurean in the sense of taking pleasure in each moment of life... Right up until the end.

Visualize your death in various scenarios, others long and debilitating. What could you recollect to bring joy? Are you creating pleasurable memories now to recollect in the future? This seems to me to be the more difficult scenario. I sometimes have a hard time accepting PD4. Theoretically, yes. Practically? I reach for Tylenol when I have a headache! A chronic, painful condition? That's going to be hard... But maybe PD4 gives us a goal?

Post by "Godfrey" of July 8, 2021 at 1:14 AM

PD4 is a challenge considering the modern ability to prolong life in painful circumstances. It would be good to start an exercise thread for that; if nobody else does, I'll give it a shot in a week or two.

Post by "Cassius" of July 8, 2021 at 6:58 AM

The whole topic of "end-of-life" decisions is a hugely important one that we have covered only rarely if at all. Now is a good time to get started on that and I will definitely help. Do we need one or more new subforums under Ethics or are the current ones sufficient?

Currently: [Death and Dying](#)