

Things that happen after we die

Post by “SimonC” of February 4, 2022 at 6:29 AM

To what extent should we take responsibility for things that happen after we die? Epicurus himself made arrangements for the school and his parents memory in the event of his death so the answer is not "not at all". I think the Epicurean perspective suggest that we should only do so as far as is required to live up to commitments made during our life. We can also take actions that will benefit people we like, such as our friends and children. But do we owe unborn great-grandchildren anything?

The clearest example is perhaps climate change, which I understand will keep having worse effects as time goes on. I have children and will likely get grandchildren during my lifetime. This makes me want to support at least some green initiatives. But where does the responsibility end?

Post by “Don” of February 4, 2022 at 7:27 AM

Here are some of my thoughts off the top of my head:

Planning for the future of his school and the security of the children of his friends (and the contemplation of that future) gave pleasure to Epicurus in his here and now. I have no doubt that he knew some of his plans wouldn't go as planned; however, he did what he reasonably could to assure, as best he could, that those plans would come to fruition. This alleviated some or all of the pain he might have felt in thinking about what might happen after he died. He knew he wouldn't see future events, would have no control of them, and so did what he could to affect them... And took pleasure now in the planning and in imagining those plans coming to fruition.

I think "responsibility" isn't the right word. The saying goes that some indigenous peoples think seven generations ahead in their stewardship of the land and resources. But that thinking also has ramifications in how the land and resources are managed now, making the present more sustainable and livable. We can really only affect change here and now. Epicurus wrote his will and made plans in his present. We can "reduce, reuse, recycle" in the present. We can hope for future benefits, but our actions take place now.

I have the same anxieties and may one day have descendants. But we have to keep perspective. As individuals, our individual actions will have a negligible effect on climate change. It's the same for many global problems. That doesn't mean I shouldn't do what I can. And, for some people, making their life's work living among the poor, taking direct action, etc. must give them pleasure (whether they'd say it that way or not) or they wouldn't do it. We've had similar threads on this before. If our pain at thinking about future events or of large scale crises gives us pain, we need to ask ourselves: What will alleviate this pain? We can ourselves become despondent at our helplessness or insignificance in combating these issues. And I've intentionally worded it that way, because I don't think *that* is an Epicurean perspective. We have to be clear-eye and practical and honest about "What can I *really* do, here and now in my life, to alleviate my mental pain about these huge issues?" Epicurus doesn't give us easy answers or cookie cutter solutions. That can be unfortunate, scary, or liberating, depending on one's perspective... and maybe a little bit of all three?

Thanks for starting this thread. It could lead to some good discussion.

Post by “Eikadistes” of February 4, 2022 at 8:21 AM

"The wise man will take care of his property, and provide for the future." (Epicurus, Wise Man Saying 21)

Post by “Don” of February 4, 2022 at 9:06 AM

Good catch, Nate.

[Quote from Nate](#)

"The wise man will take care of his property, and provide for the future." (Epicurus, Wise Man Saying 21)

καὶ κτήσεως προνοήσεσθαι καὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος.

That καὶ...καὶ... should be something like "both x and also y"

κτήσεως is "property, possessions"

That προνοησεθαι seems particularly relevant to these discussions:
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l...r=1&i=1#lexicon>

think of or plan beforehand, provide for

be on one's guard, take precautions

μέλλοντος had some interesting connotations:

[Greek Word Study Tool](#)

Strong's gives translations of the specific phrase here: του μέλλοντος:

[Greek Concordance: μέλλοντος \(mellontos\) -- 6 Occurrences](#)

so it does appear this saying about the wise of both present and future directed. But [SimonC](#) might ask "How far into the future?"

Post by "Cassius" of February 4, 2022 at 9:23 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

I think "responsibility" isn't the right word.

I agree that this word is a problem, though it can be defined so that it is not. And "responsibility" is pretty close to "duty" which is a word the Stoics like even better. Cicero's "On Duties" impressed me at the time before I started reading Epicurus. There may still be good parts of it, and I do recall good hypothetical questions (such as what should the ship captain bearing corn to a starving town due when he knows that there are more ships right behind him on the way to the town. Tell them that more ships are on the way and the price will fall, or charge all he can get?)

But all of these questions have Epicurean answers based on calculations of pleasure and pain widely understood to include all types and considerations of what we will experience as a result of our actions, so "duty" and "responsibility" have to be carefully defined not to imply "duty to god" or "duty to ideals" of any kind.

Post by "SimonC" of February 4, 2022 at 9:35 AM

[Quote from Nate](#)

"The wise man will take care of his property, and provide for the future."
(Epicurus, Wise Man Saying 21)

Does this not mean your own future? Ie save some beans for when the famine comes.

I probably went wrong in thinking about this relationship in terms of duty.

Post by "Cassius" of February 4, 2022 at 9:42 AM

I would say it means your own future and the future of those who are relevant to you.

If that's your friends and family through which you derive the most pleasure, then that's the focus.

If for some reason you are wired that your most intense pain and pleasure comes from being concerned about humanity at large, then that's your focus.

The really essential insight I think through Epicurus is that you must understand yourself and what is important to you, and go with that, because there is no supernatural god, or idealist structure of the universe, that establishes which focus is "right" for everyone to follow. Whichever focus we choose is our own choice, and we're responsible for the consequences of that decision.

Post by "Don" of February 4, 2022 at 9:54 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

καὶ κτήσεως προνοήσασθαι καὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος

This could potentially/arguably be translated as something like:

[The wise one] takes precautions for their property for the benefit of himself and he who is to come.

That's clunky, but something like that.

The question remains "how far into the future?"

Is the one who comes future generations or the future self of the wise one during their life?

Epicurus was doing this both for himself and his friends after he died.

As for "duty" like anything else, I think it should be understood as instrumental to a pleasurable life and not an absolute end in itself.