

# PD02 - Best Translation To Feature At EpicureanFriends?

Post by “Cassius” of July 12, 2023 at 12:02 PM

The following post is one of a series so that we can get our collection of [the main list of Principal Doctrines under the "Texts" section](#) in better shape. Although this thread will include a "poll" in the next post, what we are really looking for is the "best" combination of faithfulness to the original combined with clarity in modern English. I will get with a collection of the Level 3 participants here to work on editing the final list, but the full discussion should be open to everyone to consider, so that's what we will do here. The results of the poll won't control what is featured on the text page but will definitely influence in and probably at least result in a footnote to this thread.

The English translation of [PD02](#) currently featured here in our Texts section is that of Cyril Bailey from his [Extant Remains](#):

[PD02](#). [Death is nothing to us](#), for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us.

We have access ([thanks to Nate's full collection](#)) to many different variations including:

Ο ΘΑΝΑΤΟΣ ΟΥΔΕΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΗΜΑΣ· ΤΟ ΓΑΡ ΔΙΑΛΥΘΕΝ ΑΝΑΙΣΘΗΤΕΙ ΤΟ Δ' ΑΝΑΙΣΘΗΤΟΥΝ ΟΥΔΕΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΗΜΑΣ.

“[Death is nothing to us](#); for that which is dissolved is devoid of sensation, and that which is devoid of sensation is nothing to us.” Yonge (1853)

“[Death is nothing to us](#). That into which dissolution brings us has no feeling or consciousness, and what has no consciousness is nothing to us.” Wallace, Epicureanism 110 (1880)

“[Death is nothing to us](#); for the body, when it has been resolved into its elements, has no feeling, and that which has no feeling is nothing to us.” Hicks (1910)

“[Death is nothing to us](#); for that which is dissolved is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us.” Bailey (1926)

“[Death is nothing to us](#), because dissolution means unconsciousness and unconsciousness is nothing to us.” De Witt, St. Paul and Epicurus 187 (1954)

“[Death is nothing to us](#); for what has been dissolved has no sensation, and what has no sensation is nothing to us.” Geer (1964)

["Death is nothing to us."](#) For what has been dispersed has no sensation. And what has no sensation is nothing to us." O'Connor (1993)

["Death is nothing to us."](#) For what has been dissolved has no sense-experience, and what has no sense-experience is nothing to us." Inwood & Gerson (1994)

["Death is nothing to us,"](#) because a body that has been dispersed into elements experiences no sensations, and the absence of sensation is nothing to us." Anderson (2004)

["Death is nothing to us."](#) Because, what has been dissolved has no sense perception; and, according to us, what has no sense perception is nothing to worry about." Makridis (2005)

["Death is nothing to us;"](#) for what has disintegrated lacks awareness, and what lacks awareness is nothing to us." Saint-Andre (2008)

"Death means nothing to us, because that which has been broken down into atoms has no sensation and that which has no sensation is no concern of ours." Strodach (2012)

["Death is nothing to us."](#) For what has been dissolved has no feeling; and what has no feeling is nothing to us." Mensch (2018)

["Death is nothing to us;"](#) for what has been dissolved has no perception, and what has no perception is nothing to us." White (2021)

2 Ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· τὸ γὰρ διαλυθὲν ἀναισθητεῖ· τὸ δ' ἀναισθητοῦν οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς.

Which of the above, or which with changes you would suggest, should be featured here in the main list? In the interest of space the poll will not include every option, so please add a comment in the thread if you would suggest a variation not listed.

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2023 at 12:02 PM**

Poll Post (to be edited)

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### **Post by "Eikadistes" of July 12, 2023 at 12:17 PM**

I really think that "Death" to modern English-speakers needs to be replaced with "Afterlife".

This is how I read it:

"The afterlife in no way exists for us; for, the sense faculties disintegrate; but the afterlife that is insensible in no way exists for us."

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### **Post by "Cassius" of July 12, 2023 at 12:39 PM**

#### [Quote from Nate](#)

I really think that "Death" to modern English-speakers needs to be replaced with "Afterlife".

Or "the state of being dead" or something that somehow makes clear that was is being referred to is the status of the soul after the body dies.

And again there is the issue with the definite article implying that "afterlife" does exist.

However it does seem that he wanted to be confrontational and use "death" so this maybe is another area where there is just no substitute for explanation, just like gods and virtue.....

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### **Post by "Don" of July 12, 2023 at 2:32 PM**

Oh, I wouldn't introduce "afterlife."

Death is the way to translate that. If you want "the state of 'being' dead" but we have no "being" after we die .

Death IS literally nothing for us.

We do not exist.

We are not.

There is nothing for us.

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### **Post by "Bryan" of July 12, 2023 at 2:51 PM**

Don I agree with you fully but then I also question myself. Rendering ὁ θάνατος as anything other than "death" does seem to be a stretch - but death does exist. The afterlife does not. It may be worth bending the English a bit?

Same problem in Latin:

nīl igitur Mors est ad nos neque pertinet hīlum

in no way does Death exist to us and does not concern at all

Lucretius · De Rerum Natura III 830

But death does exist. So it cannot be correct to translate Lucretius in such a way. It is the afterlife, I would think, that is the topic. The afterlife does not exist.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 12, 2023 at 2:56 PM**

Dying exists as something we can experience.

We cannot experience death... Or Death, if you will.

We can't "be" dead. Only in the sense that "Epicurus \*is\* dead."

No one who has died has experienced or is experiencing or will experience "death."

Death is a convenient shorthand for something that we can talk about.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 12, 2023 at 3:54 PM**

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Death IS literally nothing for us.

We do not exist.

We are not.

There is nothing for us.

And yet our bodies and our bones exist for a while, and our atoms never go away.

We can see "dead bodies" in front of us for quite a while. The body that was a few minutes ago animated and alive is still mostly there, it's the consciousness that is gone.

We can't modify the text to suit our liking, but explanations are helpful. Even if we end up just talking about explanations, is the issue under discussion "the state that our individual personalities are in after our bodies die"? Is it the definition of "us" that needs to be made clear?

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### **Post by “Godfrey” of July 12, 2023 at 4:21 PM**

On a more prosaic note: is "dissolved" the most accurate English word? It's in most of the translations, but I keep associating it with dissolving something in water. Resolved into its elements, dispersed, dispersed into elements, broken down into atoms seem to work. Especially "dispersed into elements".

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### **Post by “Eikadistes” of July 12, 2023 at 4:36 PM**

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

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I like "disintegrated" personally.

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### **Post by “TauPhi” of July 12, 2023 at 5:00 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

And yet our bodies and our bones exist for a while, and our atoms never go away.

I strongly disagree with this statement. It's not our bodies, our bones nor our atoms. 'Our' ceases to exist the moment we die. Our [death is nothing to us](#) because we can't experience it.

When you say:

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

We can see "dead bodies" in front of us for quite a while. The body that was a few minutes ago animated and alive is still mostly there, it's the consciousness that is gone.

you're talking about death of somebody/something else. We can experience death this way because we're not dead ourselves. [PD02](#) is clearly about OUR death not the concept of death in general. Maybe it would be a good idea to leave a footnote for [PD02](#) making it clear that it's about OUR death.

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Oh, I wouldn't introduce "afterlife."

Death is the way to translate that. If you want "the state of 'being' dead" but we have no "being" after we die .

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We are not.

There is nothing for us.

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I'm 100% percent with [Don](#) on this one.

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### **Post by “Eikadistes” of July 12, 2023 at 5:16 PM**

While "death" is appropriate for translation, to modern English ears, it is painfully insensitive and inadequate.

I signed a living will two months ago as my wife lay dying in a hospital. I have to go with the Existentialists on this one. Death is not only the most important thing in life, it is the only thing by which we derive meaning, because, regardless of the possibility of our own cessation, death is constantly happening around us, and it is constantly heart-wrenching. The notion that death is nothing only works if we **omit** the definition of Death that includes us experiencing tragedy.

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of July 12, 2023 at 5:25 PM

Bigger question:

Does Epicurus distinguish in writing between "My Death (which does not exist)" versus "Your Death (which is suicidally heart-wrenching and so impactful it literally changes every value you have and your entire sense of identity)"?

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### Post by “Cassius” of July 12, 2023 at 5:40 PM

#### [Quote from TauPhi](#)

I strongly disagree with this statement. It's not our bodies, our bones nor our atoms. 'Our' ceases to exist the moment we die. Our [death is nothing to us](#) because we can't experience it.

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

We can't modify the text to suit our liking, but explanations are helpful. Even if we end up just talking about explanations, is the issue under discussion "the state that our individual personalities are in after our bodies die"? Is it the definition of "us" that needs to be made clear?

I think we are in agreement that the definition of "us" or "our" is where the issue lies. But on the other hand that is not the angle from which this statement appears to be written, as if Epicurus had chosen to the sentence could easily have made that point itself.

We don't know the context of how this list or document was assembled, and it seems very possible that the form we have it in is not a final draft from the pen of Epicurus himself.

The considerations that Nate is mentioning are very true and Epicurus was certainly aware of them as we all are. We don't know the context or the target audience for this particular form, so we're left to guess about that.

So as usual it is good for us both to flesh out these considerations, while at the same time do the best we can to make sure that the translation is primarily literal but also uses word choices (where more than one can be justified) that seems most likely to match the intent.

All of these posts are very good points.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of July 12, 2023 at 5:49 PM**

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

On a more prosaic note: is "dissolved" the most accurate English word? It's in most of the translations, but I keep associating it with dissolving something in water. Resolved into its elements, dispersed, dispersed into elements, broken down into atoms seem to work. Especially "dispersed into elements".

I think I will second Godfrey's comment here. It might be best choice, but it does seem to introduce a detail (implication of water) that really is not a part of the thought being expressed. DeWitt's "dissolution" might even be a little better.

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### **Post by “Don” of July 12, 2023 at 5:57 PM**

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

#### [Quote from Godfrey](#)

On a more prosaic note: is "dissolved" the most accurate English word? It's in most of the translations, but I keep associating it with dissolving something in water. Resolved into its elements, dispersed, dispersed into elements, broken down into atoms seem to work. Especially "dispersed into elements".

I think I will second Godfrey's comment here. It might be best choice, but it does seem to introduce a detail (implication of water) that really is not a part of the thought being expressed. DeWitt's "dissolution" might even be a little better.

"to loose one from another, to part asunder, undo, dissolve"

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, διαλύω](#)

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### **Post by "Joshua" of July 12, 2023 at 6:00 PM**

Quote

On a more prosaic note: is "dissolved" the most accurate English word? It's in most of the translations, but I keep associating it with dissolving something in water. Resolved into its elements, dispersed, dispersed into elements, broken down into atoms seem to work. Especially "dispersed into elements".

*"Who ever saw his old clothes--his old coat, actually worn out, resolved into its primitive elements, so that it was not a deed of charity to bestow it on some poor boy, by him perchance to be bestowed on some poorer still, or shall we say richer, who could do with less?" -Thoreau, Walden*

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### **Post by "Don" of July 12, 2023 at 6:23 PM**

I agree dissolve doesn't have the same power as disintegrated or dispersed. Disperse conveys to me the dispersal of seeds... Which is a word Lucretius uses for atoms.

Edit:

Other options from LSJ

Break up

Destroy

Part asunder

Untwining (that's a word!)

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of July 12, 2023 at 8:27 PM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

Oh, I wouldn't introduce "afterlife."

Death is the way to translate that. If you want "the state of 'being' dead" but we have no "being" after we die .

Death IS literally nothing for us.

We do not exist.

We are not.

There is nothing for us.

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My concern is that "death" could mean (to English ears) either (1) the "state of not being alive", (2) the process of dying, or (3) the existential condition of dealing with someone having died. For sure, (1) is what Epicurus was talking about, because we will **most definitely** experience (2) the process of dying, and (3) managing grief. So, we run a risk in employing the word "death" of someone mistaking the subject of our proposition to be either (2) illness or (3) grief.

But, at that, it seems redundant to express that "the state of not existing does not exist for us." Rather, it seems crucial to say (especially when this point about death follows a proposition regarding the nature of a divine being): "the descriptions of 'the experience of Death' imagined by our philosophical opponents is incoherent." In **modern** terms, I am imagining that "Hell is not a real place and it is an absolute waste of time trying to avoid getting an assigned seat in it."

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### Post by “Don” of July 12, 2023 at 11:10 PM

Ο ΘΑΝΑΤΟΣ ΟΥΔΕΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΗΜΑΣ·

ΤΟ ΓΑΡ ΔΙΑΛΥΘΕΝ ΑΝΑΙΣΘΗΤΕΙ ΤΟ Δ' ΑΝΑΙΣΘΗΤΟΥΝ ΟΥΔΕΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΗΜΑΣ.

A strictly very literal translation would be something like:

Death (is) nothing to us,

Because "that which is disintegrated, unwound, and scattered" lacks perception, and that which lacks perception is nothing to us.

ΤΟ ΔΙΑΛΥΘΕΝ that which is disintegrated, unwound, and scattered (Note: the definite article)

ΤΟ ΑΝΑΙΣΘΗΤΟΥΝ that which lacks perception

Note that the preposition ΠΡΟΣ used with the accusative case broadly expresses motion or direction towards an object. Here it can be thought of answering what impact does Death have in relation to us: Nothing! Death cannot have any impact or we cannot have any regard for Death after we die. We do not exist. If something cannot perceive or sense the world, it is not alive... it does not exist. To speak of something that does not exist is the same as speaking of nothing.

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### Post by “Don” of July 17, 2023 at 12:27 PM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

ΤΟ ΔΙΑΛΥΘΕΝ that which is disintegrated, unwound, and scattered (Note: the definite article)

ΤΟ ΑΝΑΙΣΘΗΤΟΥΝ that which lacks perception

I want to point out that I prefer "that" here rather than "one who" or any similar words. Once one dies, the body is an "it" since it is officially an inanimate object.

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of July 17, 2023 at 2:41 PM

#### [Quote from Don](#)

### [Quote from Don](#)

ΤΟ ΔΙΑΛΥΘΕΝ that which is disintegrated, unwound, and scattered (Note: the definite article)

ΤΟ ΑΝΑΙΣΘΗΤΟΥΝ that which lacks perception

I want to point out that I prefer "that" here rather than "one who" or any similar words. Once one dies, the body is an "it" since it is officially an inanimate object.

I also think "that" is to be preferred because I am reading the disintegrated body as having been a soul, but not necessarily the human form, which is still intact many weeks after the disintegration of the fragile, material soul.

I picture an atomic body that has been reduced to its constituent atoms, so, for me, words like "disintegrate" or "scattered" are robust descriptions of a dying soul that disperses from the body like a fart dissipating into the air, but when I imagine an entire human form, one of the first things that come to mind is a skeleton that can be perfectly preserved in a geometrically complete form for hundreds of millions of years, the same being true of teeth, and, if anthropologists and archaeologists get lucky, very, very tight, very dry skin. We also observe cultures (I believe I am thinking of a group in Indonesia) who mummify their relatives and unearths them for yearly celebrations. "*Disintegrating*" or "*Scattering*" are definitely correct translations (I like *disintegrate*, myself), particularly because of their implication of a breakdown of a compound into uncuttables, but, in my mind, at least, a sizable % of the mass of a body not only does *not* disintegrate, but it maintains its recognizable form for, *potentially*, hundreds of millions of years.

Additionally, since the *death* that Epicurus observes is a description of an animal that perishes (including non-human animal)s, and since we rarely use the word "who" when identifying individual, non-human animals, employing "that" provides a biological consistency (especially if there are struggling humanoids on other planets).

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## Post by "Don" of July 17, 2023 at 2:45 PM

### [Quote from Nate](#)

a dying soul that disperses from the body like a fart dissipating into the air,



I don't know if I'd come up with that metaphor, but, yeah, like that.

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## Post by “Cassius” of November 13, 2024 at 9:17 AM

I haven't had time to go through these yet but I will. Thanks for the work Eikadistes!

In the meantime I glanced at the page and here's a general comment:

2 Death in no way exists for us; for that which has dissolved lacks perception; and that which lacks perception in no way exists for us. [see: [Key Doctrine 2](#)]

Some people are going to argue that what Epicurus is saying here is more either:

A Death in no way exists for us; for that which has dissolved is imperceptible; and that which is imperceptible in no way exists for us. [see: [Key Doctrine 2](#)]

or at least:

B Death in no way exists for us; for that which has dissolved lacks perception; and that which lacks perception in no way exists for us. [see: [Key Doctrine 2](#)]

Apparently the original Greek must indicate it the way everyone wants to translate it, but what would you say to someone who says that version A or B of phrase would be more consistent with Epicurus' views on the canon of truth (which is based on perception)? The "that which lacks perception in now way exists for us" seems to be the most difficult to follow as worded.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of November 13, 2024 at 10:47 AM

There is a thread on the discussion of the translation of Principle Doctrine 2 over here: 

Thread

### [PD02 - Best Translation To Feature At EpicureanFriends?](#)

The following post is one of a series so that we can get our collection of [the main list of Principal Doctrines under the "Texts" section](#) in better shape. Although this thread will include a "poll" in the next post, what we are really looking for is the "best" combination of faithfulness to the original combined with clarity in modern English. I will get with a collection of the Level 3 participants here to work on editing the final list, but the full discussion should be open to everyone to...



Cassius

July 12, 2023 at 12:02 PM

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### Post by “Cassius” of November 13, 2024 at 9:54 PM

Following up on my comment in post 16 above, I see that there are a couple of translations in the list that Kalosyni cited that seem to me to make more sense (especially in the last portion) than the dominant version that we usually see. These two (especially Anderson) strike me as better conveying what would appear to be the intended meaning:

“[Death is nothing to us](#), because dissolution means unconsciousness and unconsciousness is nothing to us.” De Witt, St. Paul and Epicurus 187 (1954)

““[Death is nothing to us](#), because a body that has been dispersed into elements experiences no sensations, and the absence of sensation is nothing to us.” Anderson (2004)

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### Post by “Eikadistes” of November 14, 2024 at 12:17 PM

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

A Death in no way exists for us; for that which has dissolved **is imperceptible**; and that which is imperceptible in no way exists for us. [see: [Key Doctrine 2](#)]

or at least:

B Death in no way exists for us; for that which has dissolved **lacks perception**; and that which lacks perception in no way exists for us. [see: [Key Doctrine 2](#)]

It comes down to how we want to read το διαλυθέν αναισθηται

- το - (*art. sing. acc.*) **a**, **the**, and occasionally **that which** or **what [is]**

- **διαλυθέν** -(v. aor. pass. nom. sing.) **to loosen, dissolve, divorce, discharge, break off, weaken**
- **αναισθητει** - a declension of **ἀναίσθητος** from **ἀν-** (*an-*, "not") + **αἴσθησις** (*aísthēsis*, "sensation") meaning **without sense or feeling, without perception, not perceptible by sense.**

I take the subject of the sentence to be "that which has dissolved", which is the atomized soul, so we're not talking about (as I read it) the experience of our friends dying, and what that means to us, we're exploring what it would mean for myself to be dead, or what death excludes.

So, I don't like the first translation (personally), because it seems redundant to say "Those who survive will no longer visually witness those who have died". It would be more prudent to express the idea that "Those who have died are definitely not experiencing an afterlife."

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## Post by "Cassius" of November 14, 2024 at 12:28 PM

### [Quote from Eikadistes](#)

It would be more prudent to express the idea that "Those who have died are definitely not experiencing an afterlife."

Yes I definitely think that's the primary take-home point of the whole thing, as per what is said in the letter to Menoeceus:

Become accustomed to the belief that [death is nothing to us](#). For all good and evil consists in sensation, but [death is deprivation of sensation](#). And therefore a right understanding that [death is nothing to us](#) makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality.

The tricky part to me is that [PD02](#) seems to be focusing on deprivation of sensation in a somewhat different way than the letter - making a deeper point about the relationship between sensation and being alive.

I don't think we've addressed the question, sort of like the sorites question, of "How many faculties can you subtract from a human and still have something that is alive? I tend to think that "sensation" is sometimes being used not only to refer to the five senses but also to pain

and pleasure and prolepsis.

Can you still have pain or pleasure or prolepsis without having any of the five bodily senses? I think it makes a considerable difference whether the answer is (A) once the five senses are gone you are dead or (B) once the five senses AND pain and pleasure AND prolepsis is gone you are dead.

The implication of the standard translation of that last clause as "and that which lacks perception in no way exists for us" may tend to make some people think that any absence of all of the five senses equals death, but I am not sure at all that that is correct unless we also specify that feeling (pain and pleasure) and prolepsis are also gone. Being "unconscious" might suspend the five senses, but would not equal a state that is "nothingness" in the same way that death would. Or would it?

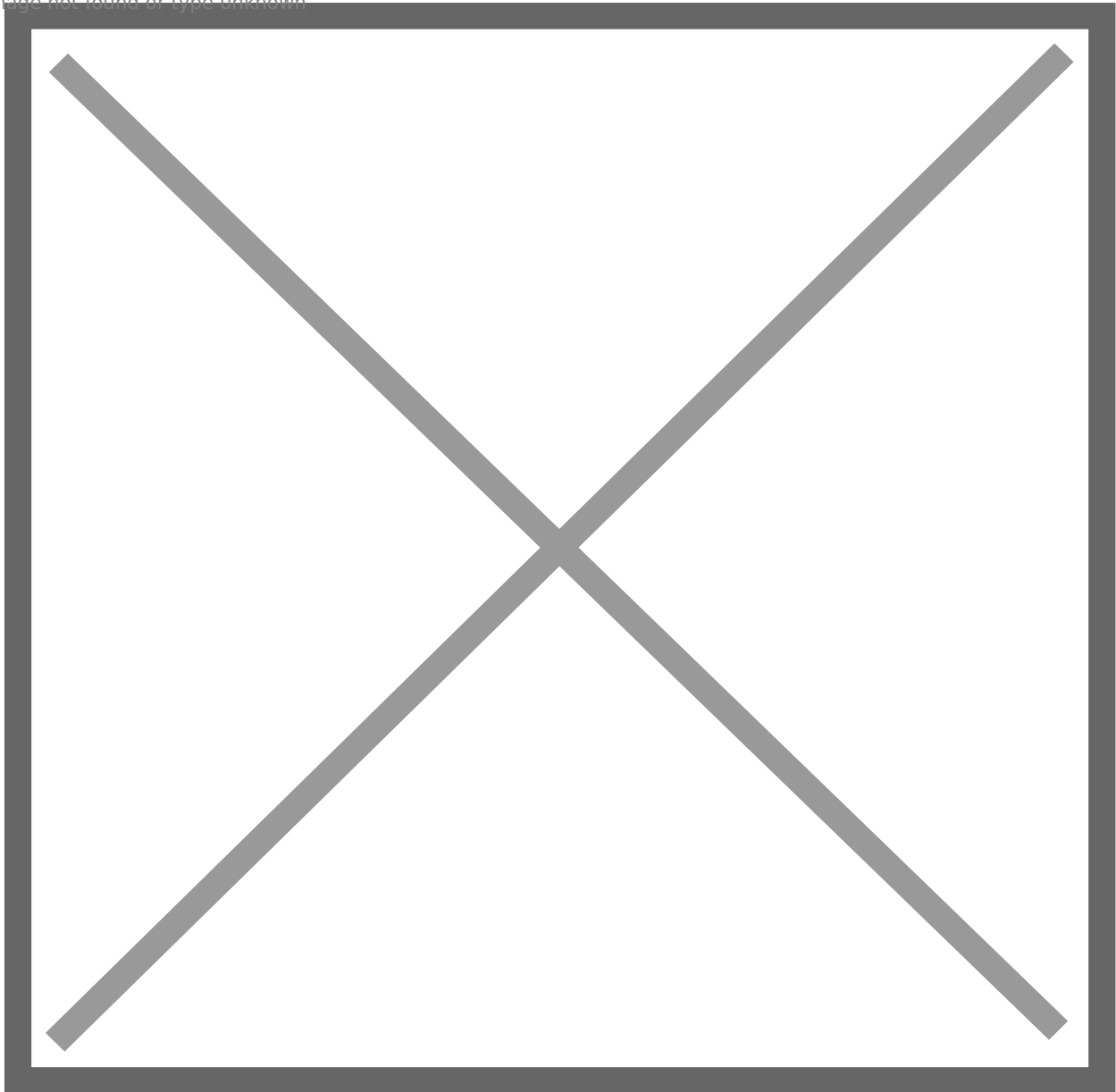
Opinions on any of that?

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**Post by “Kalosyni” of November 14, 2024 at 1:06 PM**

Here is an interesting article, and there may be others with more science details:

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[After death, you're aware that you've died, say scientists](#)

In recent decades, scientists have been studying near-death experiences (NDEs) to try to gain insights into how death overcomes the brain.

bigthink.com

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**Post by "Joshua" of November 14, 2024 at 1:28 PM**

"Clinically dead".

So, not dead then. It still surprises me that our use of language concerning something as important as death is so reckless.

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## **Post by “Cassius” of November 14, 2024 at 1:33 PM**

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

....more science details:

While I certainly am interested in the latest science, I wouldn't want us to go in that direction primarily. We need to understand where Epicurus was going because his view of death is going to relate to his view of life and how to spend it, as well as his views on reductionism/skepticism. The issue is not how long it takes our bodies to irreversibly decompose, the issue is whether after that period of time (no matter how long it is) we have "souls" which continue to live on in perpetuity.

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## **Post by “Kalosyni” of November 14, 2024 at 2:35 PM**

Yes, there is a certain point at which you are dead, and the neurons stop firing.

Regarding the word "death" - first of all we see death in movies but often times it isn't depicted realistically --sometimes the person either dies peacefully or suddenly or the pain is minimized.

Also, some people may cognize "death" as a verb and a process - for example "he had a painful death".

And it is important to think about how Epicurus was talking about the state of being dead - so to rephrase it: "once we are dead, that state of being is nothing to us,..."

And here is something to consider: I think there could be a parallel between the experience of birth compared to the experience of death. Often when a person dies they have knowledge and sentient awareness which is different than when a baby is born, and yet there is a process that must occur which takes time and is passage into death.

Another article, here is an excerpt:

## Quote

Although death has historically been medically defined as the moment when the heart irreversibly stops beating, recent studies have suggested brain activity in many animals and humans can continue for seconds to hours. In 2013, for instance, University of Michigan neurologist Jimo Borjigin and team [found](#) that rats' brains showed signs of consciousness up to 30 seconds after their hearts had stopped beating. "We have this binary concept of life and death that is ancient and outdated," Parnia says.

<https://www.science.org/content/article/burst-brain-activity-during-dying-could-explain-life-passing-your-eyes>

My belief, and after reading the article -- if you've lived a wise and pleasant life, there isn't anything to fear about the 30 seconds (or however long it takes) for consciousness to fully dissipate.