
Pre- and Post-Mortem: An Epicurean Alternative

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No one knows—by definition, really—what happens after death. If someone did, indeed, know this, she/he would not be alive. But personally, I don't believe anything will happen upon my death other than the molecules that collectively made "me" will (dis)integrate back into the larger circuit from which my body (and my "self"—the emergent consciousness writing this article right now with a memory of almost 50 years of life so far) had originally borrowed a bunch of atoms.

We can poeticize and call it "stardust," but I don't think that a human has an immortal soul. I don't believe in reincarnation. I don't believe in an afterlife. In this sense, I am, perhaps, an atheist Protestant. I believe that we turn into dirt. And that is ok. I am not afraid of the thought that we turn into dirt. There is nothing to be afraid of, because I will not be there anymore.

Epicurus is known to have said this more accurately: "Death is nothing to us. When we exist, death is not; and when death exists, we are not. All sensation and consciousness end with death; and, therefore, in death there is neither pleasure nor pain. The fear of death arises from the belief that, in death, there is awareness."

So, fear of death is irrational, because life and death are never present simultaneously for any

individual person. In the moment death is there, I am gone.

This is my Epicurean addition: Also, before we were born, there was nothing—exactly as when we die. So why fear death? After all, I don't think back on the time before my birth with fear and horror.

Fear of death might come from loss aversion: fear of lost life, fear of looking back from the deathbed and realizing that we didn't do what was necessary, what was good, what was virtuous.

I regard myself as the only one in my group of close family and friends who definitely will *not* experience my own death. Those that are still living when I die will experience my death, but I will not. I might experience the moment just before my death, and there sure may be a lot of feelings attached to that, depending on how that process will turn out (cancer, stroke, ...).

Reflecting on my own death affects my decisions as they concern other human beings instead of myself. After all, it will be my entourage who will be left behind (my children, wife, friends, colleagues). In short, my death is something that concerns other people rather than myself. **Ω**