

Embracing Death, Pursuing Happiness

Death is inevitable. Dying is a universal thing that all beings experience. Epicurus's Letter to Meneceus stresses that death should not be something worried about, if in pursuit of a happy life. As first mentioned in the passage, Epicurus's exact words revolving around death were, "Accustom yourself to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply awareness, and death is the privation of all awareness." The introduction of his belief is centered around the idea that none of us really know what death will bring or what really will become of us when we die, and therefore, we cannot waste thoughts and energy on the concept of it. With that being said, he argues that if people are wrapped up in the idea of cheating death and chasing after God and immortality, they will be taking away from the very pleasures of mortal life. This belief was expressed on numerous accounts throughout the passage with a closing declaration that "for people lose all appearance of mortality by living in the midst of immortal blessings."

A more powerful argument used by the Epicureans against the fear of death is the "symmetry" argument which states "since we do not feel horror at our past non-existence, the time before we were born, it is irrational to feel horror at our future non-existence, the time after our death, since they are the same." (Sherefkin) If people choose to live their lives following kindred mindsets, without fearing the unknown, Epicurus believes that they will have a happier, more pleasant life.

Furthermore, Epicurus argues for human pleasure, specifically "by pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul." Troubles, of which, are due to desire and partially caused by search for immortality. Epicurus strongly believes that the quality of life is more important than the quantity of time spent living. In order to achieve this "good life", it is crucial to have a proper understanding of virtues, pleasure, and desire, as they are the building blocks to human life.

Pleasure has many different subcategories including natural and necessary desires, natural but unnecessary desires, and unnecessary/empty desires. Differentiation between these categories and the use of sound judgement, are stepping stones in the pursuit of a fulfilling life. The desire for personal happiness is a necessary desire. Continuously, food and water are natural, necessary desires, yet the desire for specific, luxurious food, is stated to be a natural yet unnecessary desire. The urge for materialistic items, such as the purchase of a new hand bag, would also fall under the category of unnecessary desires. With that being said, looking at pleasure as a general overview, it is critical to understand that Epicurus does not dismiss all pleasures as fully bad nor fully good as he specifically mentions that “while therefore all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, not all pleasure is worthy of choice, just as all pain is an evil and yet not all pain is to be shunned.” This quote in particular adds to the idea that although all pleasure might feel good, and satisfy a particular interest, it might not always be best for your long term happiness and general interest/well being.

Next, a basic comprehension of the four virtues is important when understanding Epicurus’s argument towards happiness. The four virtues are known as courage, temperance, justice, and prudence. Epicurus, throughout his *Letter to Meneoceus*, highlights the virtue of prudence in particular. By definition, prudence means “wisdom with regard to particle matters.” (Hariman) Moreover, Epicurus declares that “Prudence is a more precious thing even than the other virtues, for a life of pleasure which is not also a life of prudence, honor, and justice; nor lead a life of prudence, honor, and justice, which is not also a life of pleasure. For the virtues have grown into one with a pleasant life, and a pleasant life is inseparable from them.” In other words, Epicurus believes that by possessing a strong sense of prudence, the other three virtues will follow, hence leading to a happy life.

Work Cited

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