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ATTACHMENT TO LIFE, UNDERSTANDING DEATH: NIETZSCHE AND D.H. LAWRENCE

Keith Ansell-Pearson

It is not the courage of the man smiling contemptuously in the face of death that will save us all from death. It is the courage which yields itself to the perfect suggestion from within. When a man yields himself implicitly to the suggestion which transcends him, when he accepts gently and honourably his own creative fate, he is beautiful…
D. H. Lawrence, "The Reality of Peace"

Still is the bottom of my sea: who could guess that it hides sportive monsters!
Imperturbable is my depth: but it glitters with swimming riddles and laughter.
Today I saw a sublime man, a solemn man, a penitent of the spirit: oh, how my soul laughed at his ugliness!...
Hung with ugly truths, the booty of his hunt, and rich in torn clothes; many thorns too, hung on him—but I saw no rose.
As yet he has not learned of laughter and beauty. This huntsman returned gloomily from the forest of knowledge.
He returned home from the fight with wild beasts: but a wild beast still gazes out of his seriousness—a beast that has not been overcome!...
He must unlearn his heroic will, too: he should be an exalted man and not only a sublime one—the ether itself should raise him up, the will-less one!...
It is precisely to the hero that beauty is the most difficult of all things. Beauty is unattainable to all violent wills…
When power grows gracious and descends into the visible: I call such descending beauty…
Nietzsche, "Of the Sublime Men", *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of his life, and facing the certainty of his imminent end, Derrida said, in a moment of genuine frankness, he had not yet learned how to reconcile himself to death, in particular, to his own death. This is a remarkable confession coming from a philosopher and a great one at that. But surely it is true that it is virtually impossible to prepare for death in the sense that all those things that enable us to plan for the future, such as departure schedules, maps, guides, dictionaries, manuals, lose all meaning when we face the prospect of our death.[1] Death is surely that which reveals life's difficult and uncomfortable side. In this essay I want to examine Nietzsche and Lawrence on matters of life and death. In particular I want to show the importance of the need to reconcile ourselves to our inevitable fate, that is, to the fact of our death. Since its beginnings it has been philosophy's dream to either comprehend death or to conquer the fear of death. However, what matters is the kind of comprehension of death we develop and cultivate. We don't wish to be like Plato and seek in death true life, or eternal life, and in which an immortal soul is our access to the real truth about life.

According to one commentator, from beginning to end Nietzsche's work is a reflection on the passing of human life and how it gives rise to new things, in short, a reflection on time.[2] And, of course we know that death is an essential dimension of this passing of life and the passage of time. In fact, death is a radical interruption of the continuity or flow of life and our confrontation with death is one that puts us before a wall of incomprehension and, for some, even a mystery. I appeal to Lawrence as the thinker who powerfully shows us not only how it is possible to dissolve this mystery but why it is necessary to do so. Lawrence's position is that we cannot enslave ourselves to a mystery. His exploration of death is, ultimately, as we shall see, of a Spinozist inspiration. I bring Nietzsche and Lawrence into rapport because I think both are in search of beauty, including the beauty of knowledge and of understanding. Did Nietzsche not speak of the need to make of knowledge the most powerful affect and did he not write out of the passion of knowledge? Perhaps nowhere is the light of this knowledge needed more than with regard to the matter of death.

NIETZSCHE'S EPICUREAN ATTACHMENT TO LIFE

One thing is for certain in life: we form a brotherhood of death if not a brotherhood of anything else. Death is certainly the end of life but far from being its goal. Death is a stupid fact of life, and yet it is possible to die proudly in the name of the love of life. We should encourage human beings to think much more about life than they do about death, and so as to deprive life of much of its morbidity. We ought to practise the "rational" and "voluntary" death. We need to learn how to transform a stupid physiological fact into a moral necessity, to learn to know to die at the right time and to say "No" when the conditions of life are such that it's no longer right or meaningful to say "Yes". If death is taught by some, perhaps as a slow suicide of the body and the will, then there are those to whom departure from life should be preached! As concerns these consumptives of the soul, who are hardly born before they begin to die and who long for teachings of weariness and renunciation, we should approve of their wish to be dead, guarding against awakening these dead souls and damaging their living coffins.

These are *some* of the thoughts Nietzsche has about death in his writings. However, Nietzsche would not have us dwell unnecessarily on death. For Schopenhauer philosophy is motivated by wonder and astonishment at the world, quickly followed by dismay: wonder at the world that it is and at its contingency, and then recognition of its dreadful character. Philosophy, he says, "starts with a minor chord."[3] Philosophical astonishment is qualified by the recognition of wickedness, evil, and death as essential features of the world: "Not merely that the world exists, but still more that it is such a miserable and melancholy world…"[4] By contrast, Nietzsche tells that he would rather have human beings think about life than death: "It makes me happy that human beings do not want at all to think the thought of death! I should like very much to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing to them."[5] Indeed, it is a striking feature of Nietzsche's texts how little there is in them on the subject of death. There are key moments in a text where the topic is deliberately not even mentioned or referred to. For Nietzsche, there is among human beings no greater banality than death, with

birth second in line and then followed by marriage.[6] Of course, he recognizes that these are little tragi-comedies that in each of their performances are played by ever new actors, and with regards to the arts of living, including dying, everything depends on the new actors and little on the play.

In her *Therapy of Desire* Martha Nussbaum explains well the nature of Epicurus's intervention in a society "that values money and luxury above the health of the soul", and in which "every enterprise is poisoned by the fear of death, a fear that will not let any of its members taste any stable joy, but turns them into the grovelling slaves of corrupt religious teachers."[7] As Lucretius has it:

> …fear of death
> Induces hate of life and light, and men
> Are so depressed that they destroy themselves
> Having forgotten that this very fear
> Was the first cause and source of all their woe.[8]

In his middle period Nietzsche picks up the Epicurean doctrine on death and puts it to critical effect. For Nietzsche our religions and moralities do not wed us to the earth as a site of dwelling and thinking; rather, we consider ourselves "too good and too significant for the earth", as if we were paying it only a passing visit. The "proud sufferer" has thus become in the course of human development the highest type of human being that is revered.[9] Nietzsche clearly wishes to see much, if not all of this, overturned, but in the name of what and for what ends? Aphorism 501 from *Dawn*, entitled "Mortal souls", in which Nietzsche suggests that it is a question of relearning both knowledge and the human, including human time as mortal time, offers a partial clarification. In fact, several aphorisms in the book consider humanity's misguided dream of an immortal existence. *Dawn* 211 is an especially witty aphorism in which Nietzsche considers the impertinence of the dream. He notes that the actual existence of a single immortal human being would be enough to drive everyone else on earth into a rampage of death and suicide out of being sick and tired of it! He adds:

> And you earth inhabitants with your mini-notions of a few thousand mini-minutes of time want to be an eternal nuisance to eternal, universal existence! Is there anything more impertinent![10]

The wiser strategy is for us to take more seriously the creature that lives typically for seventy years and give it back the actual time it has hitherto denied itself. Nietzsche is inviting us to replace the sublime dream of immortality with a new sobriety toward existence, as this aphorism makes clear:

> With regard to knowledge (*Erkenntniss*) the most useful accomplishment is perhaps: that the belief in the immortality of the soul has been abandoned. Now humanity is allowed to wait; now it no longer needs to rush headlong into things and choke down half-examined ideas as formerly it was forced to do. For in those days the salvation of poor 'eternal souls' depended on the extent of their knowledge acquired during a short lifetime; they had to *make a decision* overnight—"knowledge" took on a dreadful importance.[11]

Nietzsche argues that we are now in a new situation with regard to knowledge and as a result we can conquer anew our courage for making mistakes, for experimentation, and for accepting things provisionally. Without the sanction of the old moralities and religions individuals and entire generations "can now fix their eyes on tasks of a vastness that would to earlier ages have seemed madness."[12]

Nietzsche wants two things: the first is for the certain prospect of death to introduce into every life a precious and sweet-smelling drop of levity, as opposed to an ill-tasting drop of poison that makes all life appear repulsive;[13] and, second, what he radically calls the "wise regulation and disposal of death", and as something which belongs to the morality of the future, a morality that at present is ungraspable and immoral sounding but which can provide humanity with a new dawn of which, he writes, "it must be an indescribable joy to gaze."[14]

Nietzsche does, however, appreciate that there will be times when we need to think about death and the moment will come when we may even be able to prepare for our own death. The task is to die proudly, Nietzsche provocatively puts it, where one can no longer live proudly. For Nietzsche, it is for "love of *life*" that one should want death to be "different, free, conscious, no accident, no ambush…."[15] Here one elects to die "brightly and joyfully", and, moreover, "among children and witnesses: so that a true leave-taking is still possible, when the one who is taking his leave *is still there*."[16] Here there can take place a true assessment of life's achievements and aspirations, offering "a *summation* of life". All this can take place, Nietzsche holds, "in contrast to the pitiful and ghastly comedy which Christianity has made of the hour of death."[17] He notes that whilst today we have a new sensibility with respect to torments of the body—we cry with indignation and rage whenever something inflicts torment on another's body, be it a person or an animal—we have not yet extended such a sensibility to torments of the soul. This is another reason for his objection to Christianity, which is the supreme religion when it comes to such torments. Christianity, he claims, has put these torments to use to an unprecedented and shocking degree. The Christian religion has succeeded in making of the earth a wretched place, merely by erecting the crucifix everywhere, thereby branding the earth as the place "where the righteous are *tortured* to death!"[18] It is Christianity that has turned the deathbed into a bed of torment, and against which Nietzsche espouses the virtue of the rational or free death: "Natural death", he writes, "is the suicide of nature, that is to say the annihilation of the rational being by the irrational to which it is tied."[19]

Nietzsche champions Epicurus as a figure who has sought to show mankind how it can conquer its fears of death. Identifying the goal of a good life with the removal of mental and physical pain, Epicureans place "the eradication of the fears of death at the very heart of their ethical project."[20] As a "therapy of anguish" Epicureanism is a philosophy that aims to procure peace of mind, and an essential task here is to liberate the mind from its irrational fear of death. It seeks to do this by showing that the soul does not survive the body and that death is not and cannot be an event within life. For Nietzsche the teaching of Epicurus triumphs anew in the guise of modern science which has rejected "any other representation of death and any life beyond it."[21] Nietzsche writes contra the yearning for immortality. In *Dawn* 72 he writes that we are in the process of renouncing our concern with the "after-death"—this is where the teaching of Epicurus triumphs anew—and in *Dawn* 501 he writes that the most useful accomplishment with regard to the advancement of knowledge resides in the giving up of the belief in the immortality of the soul. The renunciation of this belief prepares the way for a new era of human experimentation through the passionate pursuit of knowledge (Nietzsche writes of this "passion of knowledge" in *Dawn* 429). Nietzsche, then, wishes us to give up on the desire for an immortal existence. He does not present his case against immortality in typical terms of standard philosophical argument but, as with almost all the topics he covers, he expresses his "opinions" on things (as in '"assorted opinions and maxims") and uses wit and insight to support his viewpoints and opinions.

Nietzsche's thinking on death is informed by a number of Epicurean commitments and rests on an Epicurean-inspired affirmation of life. For Nietzsche, Epicurus is the inventor of what he calls "heroic-idyllic philosophizing"[22] and, along with the Stoic Epictetus, he is a philosopher in whom wisdom assumes bodily form.[23] It is heroic because conquering the fear of death is involved and the human being has the potential to walk on the earth as a god, living a blessed life, and idyllic obviously because Epicurus philosophised, calmly and serenely, and away from the crowd, in a garden. In *Human, all too Human* Nietzsche writes of a "*refined heroism*" "which disdains to offer itself to the veneration of the great masses…and goes silently through the world and out of the world."[24] This is deeply Epicurean in inspiration: as noted, Epicurus taught that one should die as if one had never lived.

Writing in 1878 the French philosopher, Jean-Marie Guyau, hailed at the time as the "Spinoza of France," portrayed Epicurus as the original free spirit: "Still today it is the spirit of old Epicurus who, combined with new doctrines, works away at and undermines Christianity."[25] In Germany Friedrich Albert Lange's *History of Materialism* of 1866, a text that deeply impressed the young Nietzsche, was largely responsible for the revival of interest in Epicurus. Lange devoted a chapter to Epicurus and a separate chapter to Lucretius's poem, *On the Nature of the Universe* (*De Rerum Natura*).[26] The aim of the explanation of nature sought by Epicurus "is

to free us from fear and anxiety."[27] As Lange notes, in Epicurus physics is placed in the service of ethics: "The mere historical knowledge of natural events, without a knowledge of causes, is valueless; for it does not free us from fear nor lift us upon superstition. The more causes of change we have discovered, the more we shall attain the calmness of contemplation; and it cannot be supposed that this inquiry can be without result upon our happiness."[28] If events can be explained in accordance with universal laws, with effects attributable to natural causes, an important goal of philosophy can be attained and secured, chiefly liberation from fear and anxiety. Moreover, if peace of soul and freedom from pain are the only enduring pleasures, then these constitute the true aim of existence, including the philosophical endeavour.

As one commentator puts it, Epicurus "distilled the major theses of his ethical teaching into a simple fourfold remedy" known as the *tetrapharmakos*: (a) God should not concern us; (b) death is not to be feared; (c) what is good is easy to obtain; (d) what is bad is easily avoided.[29] We can secure the goal or *telos* of a human life by incorporating these four views and altering our view of the world accordingly. And, removing "the fear of death…is an essential step towards the goal." For Epicureans it is vitally important we think about death correctly or adequately, since it is an integral part of what it is to live a good life: "Our conceptions of the value of life and the nature of death are inseparable. In that case, we learn not to stop focusing on death, but to stop thinking about it in the wrong way."[30] Implicit in this conception is the idea that one can stop fearing death by thinking clearly and adequately. For Epicurus the fear of death emanates from false opinions and false value judgments, and the therapeutic task of improvement is an intellectualist one. According to Pierre Hadot, overcoming our fear of death is also a "spiritual exercise."[31]

The key goal for Epicurus is to liberate the body from pain and remove disturbances from the soul. Central to his counsel is the thought that we need to accustom ourselves to believing that death is nothing to us; our longing for immortality needs to be removed: "…there is nothing fearful in life for one who has grasped that there is nothing fearful in the absence of life."[32] What appears to be the most frightening of bad things should be nothing to us, "since when we exist, death is not yet present, and when death is present, then we do not exist."[33] The wise human being "neither rejects life nor fears death. For living does not offend him, nor does he believe not living to be something bad."[34] If, as Epicurus supposes, everything good and bad consists in sense-experience, then death is simply the privation of sense-experience. The goal of philosophical training, then, is freedom from disturbance and anxiety in which we reach a state of *ataraxia* or psychic tranquillity.[35]

If, as Hadot has suggested, philosophical therapeutics is centred on a concern with the healing of our own lives so as to return us to the joy of existing,[36] then, at least in the texts of his middle period (1878-82), Nietzsche can be seen to be an heir to this ancient tradition. Indeed, if there is one crucial component to Nietzsche's philosophical therapeutics in the texts of his middle period that he keeps returning to again and again it is the need for spiritual joyfulness and the task of cultivating in ourselves, after centuries of training by morality and religion, the joy in existing. In the final aphorism of *The Wanderer and his Shadow* Nietzsche writes, for example:

> Only the *ennobled human being may be given freedom of spirit;* to him alone does *alleviation of life* draw near and salve his wounds; only he may say that he lives for the sake of *joy* (*Freudigkeit*) and for the sake of no further goal…[37]

Nietzsche recognizes in Epicurus what he calls in one note a "refined heroism," and here the thought seems to centre on conquering the fear of death, of which Nietzsche says he has little.[38] For Epicurus the study of nature should make human beings modest and self-sufficient, taking pride in the good that lies in themselves, not in their estate, and as opposed to the display of learning coveted by the rabble.[39]

In his middle period, then, Epicurus is an attractive figure for Nietzsche because of the emphasis on a modest lifestyle, the attention given to the care of self, and also because he conceives philosophy not as a theoretical discourse but one that, first and foremost, is a kind of practical activity aimed at the attainment of eudemonia

or the flourishing life.[40] Nietzsche wants free spirits to take pleasure in existence, involving taking pleasure in themselves and in friendship, and in simple, modest living.

Nietzsche is keen, then, to encourage human beings to cultivate an attitude towards existence in which they accept their mortality and attain a new serenity about their dwelling on the earth, to conquer unjustified fears, and to reinstitute the role played by chance and chance events in the world and in human existence.[41] As Hadot notes, for the Epicurean sage the world is the product of chance, not divine intervention, and this brings with it pleasure and peace of mind, freeing him from an unreasonable fear of the gods and allowing him to consider each moment as an unexpected miracle. Each moment of existence can be greeted with immense gratitude.[42] Indeed, as Graham Parkes has noted, Nietzsche expresses in his writings, especially *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a kind of gratitude with respect to life that is "reminiscent of Epicurus," with meditation cultivating "a keen appreciation of the 'once-only' character of existence in a radically contingent universe."[43] Parkes cites from section 5 of "Old and New Law-Tablets" in *Zarathustra*: "Thus does the nature of noble souls wish it: they want to have nothing for free, and least of all life. Whoever is of the rabble wants to live for free: we others, however, to whom life has given itself—we are always wondering *what* we can best give *in return*!"

We are to accord value to the slightest moment of existence. As Hadot has pointed out, Epicurus's teaching seeks to transform our relationship to time, in which we become focused on the present moment, and this transformation presupposes a quite specific conception of pleasure, "according to which the quality of pleasure depends neither on the quantity of desires it satisfies, nor on the length of time it lasts."[44] As Guyau notes, true pleasure bears its infinity within itself, and as Nietzsche teaches the time of the moment is "eternity", an eternity reclaimed "for the fair earth", as Marcuse put it.[45] As Hadot puts it, the "secret" of Epicurean joy and serenity "is to live each instant as if it were the last, but also as if it were the first". In this way we "experience the same grateful astonishment when we accept the instant as though it were unexpected, or by greeting it as entirely new..."[46] Metrodorus memorably expressed the wisdom one might acquire by living the Epicurean life: "Remember that, born a mortal, with a limited life-span, you have risen up in soul to eternity and the infinity of things, and that you have seen all that has been and all that shall be."[47]

But is Epicureanism a philosophy of life-affirmation, or does it simply depict a universe of atoms and the void that is indifferent to life and in which freedom consists in little more than attaining a contemplative tranquillity with respect to this fact? As Lawrence observes in an Epicurean moment, the universe has no why or wherefore but at all times simply is. Indeed, we cannot even say what it is as it is "unto itself".[48] As James Porter notes, life has no intrinsic value for Epicurus, but does this mean that life is an indifferent for him?[49] When viewed from a third-person point of view, that is, the cosmological one (of atoms and the void), then life has no claim on us; rather, it discloses to us that "we are nothing more than physical entities, mere fortuitous combinations of matter which reduce to their elements upon disbanding."[50] From the viewpoint of nature, then, life is an indifferent. The matter changes, Porter argues, when we take a first-person perspective on life, that is, the world of sensations, desires, and needs, or of nature in its human aspect. Here we find that life by definition is not indifferent but a meaningful source of value. As Porter puts it, the issue facing the Epicurean philosopher "is to decide just what this value is and where it lies."[51] The argument is that life is a source of human pleasure and thus of moral happiness, involving a strong attachment. Porter argues that once we connect pleasure to life it is possible to show that Epicurus has a philosophy of life in addition to a philosophy of death and that, in fact, it is this emphasis on life and not death that dominates his writings.

Porter goes on to note that the "apparent pessimism" of the doctrine "clashes with the joy and even fascination with life" that are found in the Epicurean perception of the world.[52] The task is to account for this disparity and the urgent question to focus on is that of what makes creatures cling to life and remain attached to it. We can rule out, he thinks, the fear of death since such a fear produces phantasms of life (such as ideas of the afterlife) and does not prolong or propagate life itself. He thinks that love of life, in the form of an attachment to life, precedes the fear of death, operating at a primitive level of psychic attachment, "and may even precede" what he takes to be the most primitive root fear present in the fear of death, that of the fear of the blank void or *horror*

vacui. Furthermore, it cannot be supposed that what makes us cling to life is constant novelty since this seems to be a consequence of the love of life and not its cause. The Epicurean affirmation of life, the practise of its love, consists in attending to and enjoying the present feelings or sensations of life, that is, living in the here and now without desire and expectation and in a condition of gratitude. As Porter puts it, "To love life is to be in an unqualified state of affirmation about what lies most immediately to hand: it is the pleasure, the unalloyed passion, and even thrill, of living itself."[53] For Epicurus, then, a correct understanding of our mortality is one that should lead to the enjoyment of this mortal life. The Epicurean love of life "*is a love of mortal life* and not a love of life abstracted from death, much less of immortal life."[54] Moreover, this Epicurean love of life is not a longing for life, but "rather an immediate expression of what is dear about life, what is most life worthy in life," and which makes it something fragile and easily ruptured.[55]

Nietzsche is capable of arresting psychological insight into Epicurus. In 1882, in *The Gay Science*, he writes, for example:

> I see his eyes gaze upon a wide, white sea, across rocks at the shore that are bathed in sunlight, while large and small animals are playing in this light, as secure and calm as the light and his eyes. Such happiness could be invented only by a man who was suffering continually. It is the happiness of eyes that have seen the sea of existence become calm, and now they can never weary of the surface and of the many hues of this tender, shuddering skin of the sea. Never before has voluptuousness (*Wollust*) been so modest.[56]

As Monika Langer has recently noted in her interpretation of this aphorism, although clearly a paean of sorts to Epicurus, Nietzsche does not elaborate on the origin or nature of his happiness and suffering, but rather tacitly encourages the reader to consider various possibilities. In the end she argues that Nietzsche is reading Epicurus as a figure who whilst standing securely on firm ground, gazes at the sea and is able to enjoy the possibility of uncertainty it offers. She writes, "Literally and figuratively he can float on the sea."[57] Epicurus is depicted as the antithesis of modernity's shipwrecked man since such is his liberation and serenity he can "chart his course or simply set sail and let the wind determine his way."[58] Although he might suffer shipwreck and drown or survive he does not live in fear of dangers and hazards: "In taking to the sea he might lose his bearings and even his mind." In contrast to modern man who is keen to leave behind the insecurity of the sea for the safety of dry land, "Epicurus delights in the ever present possibility of leaving that secure land for the perils of the sea."[59]

This interpretation misses the essential insight Nietzsche is developing in the aphorism. Rather than suggesting that the sea calls for further and continued exploration, hiding seductive dangers that Epicurus would not be afraid of, Nietzsche seems to hold to the view that Epicurus is the seasoned traveller of the soul who has no desire to travel anymore and for whom the meaning of the sea has changed. Rather than serving as a means of transportation or something that beckons us towards other shores, the sea has become an object of contemplation in the here and now. It is something to be looked at for its own sake and in a way that discloses its infinite nuances and colours. One might describe this in Heidegger's terms, with its mode of being changed from the ready-to-hand (either threatening or alluring, but in both cases on the background of a form of instrumentalization, such as exploration) to something more akin to the present-at-hand, except that here the disclosing attitude is not one of theoretical detachment but a sensitivity that entails a special receptivity that is hard to attain and maintain.[60] One might even invoke *Gelassenheit* to define the experience.

The scene Nietzsche depicts in the aphorism is one of Epicurean illumination or enlightenment: Epicurus is not estranged from nature and recognizes his kinship with animals and the elements of nature. Rather than deploying his contemplation of the sea to bolster his own ego (thinking of his own safety or taking pride in fearlessness), Epicurus abandons his sense of self altogether so that he can open himself up to the sea of existence, and perhaps here we find an alternative to Dionysian ecstasy, entailing a more peaceful and less grandiose loss of the self into the *Ur-Eine*. Unlike Christ, Epicurus does not walk on the water but floats serenely on the sea, buoyed up by it and even cradled by it, happy with the gifts life has to offer, and existing

beyond fear and anxiety even though he is opening himself up to troubling realities, such as the approach of death and his personal extinction: "We are born once and cannot be born twice, but we must be no more for all time."[61]

Nietzsche finds in Epicurus a victory over pessimism in which "death becomes the last celebration of a life which is constantly embellished."[62] This last of the Greek philosophers "teaches the joy of living in the midst of a world in decay and where all moral doctrines preach suffering."[63] As Richard Roos puts it, "The example of Epicurus teaches that a life filled with pain and renunciation prepares one to savour the little joys of the everyday better. Relinquishing Dionysian intoxication, Nietzsche becomes a student of this master of moderate pleasures and careful dosages."[64] Like Epicurus, then, Nietzsche seeks to live and philosophize away from the masses, without masters or gods, idyllically and heroically. Here we encounter that "refined heroism" that accepts death without fear and chooses not to even speak about it.

We have to acknowledge that there are gaps, potentially significant ones, in Nietzsche's appreciation of Epicureanism as a philosophy of life and death. For example, he never subjects to critical analysis the effectiveness of Epicurus's arguments but simply assumes that the rediscovery of the certainty of death within modern science, along with the demise of the Christian afterlife, is sufficient to eliminate mortality as a source of anguish. But the triumph of the Epicurean view that we are mortal and need not live in fear of an after-life is not necessarily a triumph for the Epicurean view that we should not fear death: one can eliminate fear of the after-life by exposing it as a myth, but this does not liberate us from the fear of extinction. To his great credit this is something Schopenhauer clearly appreciated: our fear of death is not over the pain but firmly centred on the fact of our personal extinction.[65] Nietzsche does not make it clear whether he thinks the Epicurean arguments suffice to console us for the fact of our mortality, though there are places in his corpus, such as book five of *Dawn*, where he appears to be offering new post-religious consolations, such as the consolation we can gain from the recognition that as experimental free spirits the sacrifices we make of our lives to knowledge may lead to a more enlightened humanity in the future (others may prosper where we have not been able to).

I now want to shift perspective and examine Lawrence on death, especially on the need to understand death. Here my question is a simple and modest one: what is the nature or character of this "understanding"? My view is that Lawrence makes a remarkable contribution to our thinking of death.

LAWRENCE'S ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND DEATH

Let's now ask a seemingly simple question: Is it possible to understand death? In *Women in Love* Lawrence puts the problem as follows: "To know is human, and in death we do not know, we are not human."[66] Death would appear to be something we cannot understand and the annihilation of all conditions of understanding. As one writer has put it, "Death exposes the limit of all concepts and so death itself is incomprehensible."[67] But, then, as Lawrence also notes, in his attempt to "understand" death, "death, beautiful death searches us out, even in our armour of insulated will. Death is within us, while we tighten our will to keep him out. Death, beautiful clean death, washes slowly within us and carries us away."[68] As Nietzsche notes, it is for certain that we form a brotherhood of death if not a brotherhood of anything else: "Everyone wants to be the first in this future—and yet death and deathly silence alone are certain and common to all in this future."[69]

It is the very "impenetrability of death" that we find so frightening and that a philosopher such as Epicurus uses to defuse the fear.[70] The way he does this is by seeking to show that death involves not simply no more pleasures and pains, but no more experience of any kind. What, then, is the problem in being dead? Epicurus finds consolation in the fact that we do not survive death, but what about us? Is it really possible to step outside the perspective of our own lives to see things from the perspective of death? More pertinently perhaps, is death as the end of our experience of the world a way to relieve us of its threatening character, or does it instead heighten the threat to our engagements and involvements? As one writer puts it, it is the prospect of death that places the "nothing", the end of my world, before my eyes. Death is the end, the disintegration, and annihilation

of everything I know and can imagine; death is even the annihilation of all conditions for understanding, "of all the conditions by which we think something, ourselves included."[71] Philosophers such as Gadamer considered our questions regarding death as necessarily a cover for the unthinkable, namely, non-being. And is it not the case that we are always thinking death from the perspective of life? This is something Lawrence recognizes I think but in a moment of genuine serenity: although this constitutes the limit of our thinking of death, it is a limit we need to affirm.

In his reflections on death Lawrence makes central the task of *understanding* death. I shall focus on several of the essays found in the remarkable collection *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*, in particular an essay from 1917, a not insignificant date, entitled "The Reality of Peace". Lawrence is not oblivious to what Herbert Marcuse has called "the ideology of death."[72] In this powerfully written essay Lawrence writes:

> We have wanted to deal death, ever more and more death. We have wanted to compel every man whatsoever to the activity of death. We have wanted to envelop the world in a vast unison of death, to let nothing escape. We have been filled with a frenzy of compulsion: our insistent will has co-ordinated into a monstrous engine of compulsion and death.[73]

Nevertheless, Lawrence holds that it is vitally important we make the effort to understand death and to make the reality of death central to any philosophy of life.

How is it possible to "understand" death? For Lawrence it consists in recognizing that death, like life, is desire, or that there is a desire of death as much as there is a desire of life. Apart from these two desires we can only recognize pure being where we are absolved from desire and rendered perfect. In a quasi-Spinozist moment, Lawrence writes, "In true understanding I am always perfect and timeless."[74] We are, then, desire and understanding, in which desire is twofold, of life and of death. All the time we are active through these two powers that are both contrary and complementary. The desire of life is a desire of "putting together", that of death is "putting asunder". The view that there is only life, or pure life, is a mistaken and misleading point of view:

> We wish to say that we are single in our desire for life and creation and putting together. But it is a lie, since we must eat life to live. We must, like the leopard, drink up the lesser life to bring forth our greater. We wish to conquer death. But it is absurd, since only by death do we live, like the leopard. We wish not to die; we wish for life everlasting. But this is mistaken interpretation.[75]

If life feeds death, so death feeds life. Death, says Lawrence, including "the dark flux of undoing", are an inevitable half. It is through "understanding" that we can pass beyond the scope of this duality into perfection, "in actual living equipoise of blood and bone and spirit", but the understanding has to be dual, with both life and death understood.[76]

Lawrence acknowledges our understanding of death is always an understanding of death in life and an act of the living. Death, however, can cease being a mystery, an event that causes us embarrassment and shame. Our actual death can be a fulfilment of our own knowledge. Although it is impossible to destroy death it can be transcended in understanding. Here, Lawrence says, we "envelop and contain it", and by this means we set ourselves free.[77] In a moment of great insight Lawrence writes:

> If we live in the mind, we must die in the mind, and in the mind we must understand death. Understanding is not necessarily mental. It is of the senses and the spirit.
>
> But we also live in the mind. And the first great act of living is to encompass death in the understanding. Therefore the first great activity of the living mind is to understand death in the mind. Without this there is no freedom of the mind, there is no life of the mind, since creative life is the attaining a

> perfect consummation with death. When in my mind there arises the idea of life, then this idea must encompass the idea of death, and this encompassing is the germination of a new epoch of the mind.[78]

Death is so difficult for us to comprehend simply because we desire most of all to belong to life. Lawrence calls this a "primal desire", which is like a desire to come into being or the desire to achieve a transcendent state of existence; we might call it a desire for absolute life. Although the desire for death is equally strong within us, it is a desire that we find it almost impossible to admit to: "We cannot admit the desire of death in ourselves even when it is single and dominant. We must still deceive ourselves with the name of life."[79] What is the desire for death in the human? It is a desire for anarchic revolution, for violent sensationalism, for the breaking down of things, for putting things asunder, and so on. Creation and dissolution are the "systole diastole of the physical universe."[80] Although creation is primal and original, and corruption is only a consequence, it is an "inevitable consequence" and as inevitable as the water that flows down the hill. For Lawrence we are now presented with an ethical task, namely, that of reconciling ourselves to ourselves:

> I must make my peace with the serpent of abhorrence that is within me. I must own my most secret shame and my most secret shameful desire. I must say, "Shame, thou art me, I am thee. Let us understand each other and be at peace". Who am I that I should hold myself above my last or worst desire? My desires are me, they are the beginning of me, my stem and branch and root… [81]

At one point in the essay Lawrence writes of this ethical task in strikingly Nietzschean terms as one of "incorporation and unison."[82] It is a condition of freedom, he says, that in the understanding we fear nothing. Powerfully he writes:

> In the body I fear pain, in love I fear hate, in death I fear life. But in the understanding I fear neither love nor hate nor death nor pain nor abhorrence. I am brave even against abhorrence; even the abhorrent I will understand and be at peace with. Not by exclusion, but by incorporation and unison. There is no hope in exclusion. For whatsoever limbo we cast our devils into will receive us ourselves at last. We shall fall into the cesspool of our own abhorrence.[83]

Lawrence thus invites us to pull down the craven veils that we hang up to save our appearances: everything must be understood, included, and nothing on earth is to be ashamed of.

Ultimately, Lawrence, thinks we must choose in favour of life; indeed, life is the very domain of the voluntary and the spontaneous, the domain of choice itself. As he puts it:

> Life does not break the self-insistent will. But death does. Death compels us and leaves us without choice. And all compulsion whatsoever is death, and nothing but death.
> To life we must cede our will, acquiesce and at one with it, or we stand alone, we are excluded, we are exempt from living. The service of life is voluntary.[84]

For Lawrence, then, it is vitally important we understand death. If you ask him why, the only answer he can give is that we are death. As he says, there is no "hope" in exclusion. He appreciates that what he calls the "anguish of this knowledge", the knowledge of what we are within the *flux* of death, is a death of sorts in itself. It is the death of our established belief in ourselves and the end of our current self-esteem. Thus, those "who love in the mind must also perish in the mind."[85] Here we pass into a new mode of being as Lawrence figures another meaning of the overman: "That which is understood by man is surpassed by man. When we understand our extreme being in death, we have surpassed into a new being."[86] For Lawrence, the ultimate incorporation we can make, and Nietzsche may have been hinting at this when he spoke of the incorporation of truth as our great task and experiment,[87] is death and its desire. He writes:

> I shall accept all my desires and repudiate none. It will be a sign of bliss in me when I am reconciled with the serpent of my own horror, when I am free both from the fascination and the revulsion. For secret fascination is a fearful tyranny. And then my desire of life will encompass my desire of death, and I shall be quite whole, have fulfilment in both. Death will take its place in me, subordinate but not subjected, I shall be fulfilled of corruption within the strength of creation. The serpent will have his own pure place in me, and I shall be free.[88]

What is sublime in life is not an indomitable will, but the will to surrender and having the courage to yield to the fate of death, or, should I say the fate of a life? On this question Lawrence invites us to become serene: although the inevitable dark hand of death plucks us into darkness, it is something to be feared only with strange satisfaction and reverence. Our final satisfaction is "to be gathered blossom by blossom", all our lives long, "into the finality of the unknown" which is our end.[89]

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, then, we can say that Epicurean philosophy shows how it is possible to affirm life and just what this consists in. Here death provides the horizon by which life appears to us as something to be prized and in the midst of our recognition of its precarious character. However, even the Epicurean dissolution of the fear of death cannot provide a satisfactory response to our anxiety over our personal extinction. It is here that perhaps the fear of death remains. Lawrence's treatment of death shows the need to comprehend death and as a way of dissolving something of its enigmatic or mysterious character. However, there is an inevitable limit in our understanding of death since it necessarily remains a metaphor for understanding something about the nature of life. Nietzsche himself wrestled with this problem and let me finish by citing a most curious and thought-provoking note of Nietzsche's from his notebooks of 1881:

> Fundamentally false evaluations of the *dead* world on the part of the *sentient* world. Because we *are* [the latter] and *belong* to it! ... It is a *festival* to go from this world across into the "dead world" … Let us see through this comedy and thereby *enjoy* it! Let us *not* think of the return to the inanimate as a regression! ... *Death* has to be reinterpreted! We thereby *reconcile* ourselves with what is actual, with the dead world.[90]

So, the question remains: just how do we "reinterpret" death?

KEITH ANSELL-PEARSON is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warwick.

NOTES

1. Krzysztof Michalski, *The Flame of Eternity: An Interpretation of Nietzsche's Thought*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012, Preface.
2. Michalski, *The Flame of Eternity*, xii.
3. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*. Volume Two. Trans. E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover Press, 1966, 171.
4. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, II, 172.
5. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1974, section 278.
6. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, section 58.
7. Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 103.
8. Lucretius, *The Way Things Are*. Trans. Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968, 88.
9. Nietzsche, *Dawn: Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality*. Trans. Brittain Smith. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012, section 425.
10. Nietzsche, *Dawn*, section 211.
11. Nietzsche, *Dawn*, section 501.
12. Ibid.
13. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, section 322.
14. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, section 185.
15. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*. Trans. Duncan Large. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, IX: section 36.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Nietzsche, *Dawn*, section 78.
19. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, section 185.
20. James Warren, *Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 6.
21. Nietzsche, *Dawn*, section 72.
22. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow,* section 295.
23. Nietzsche, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, section 224.
24. Nietzsche, *Human, all too Human*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, section 291.
25. Jean-Marie Guyau, *La Morale D'Epicure*. Paris: Librairie Gemer Baillière, 1878, 280.
26. See Nietzsche's letter to Carl von Gersdorff of end of August, 1866, in Christopher Middleton, Ed. *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996, 18-19.
27. F. A. Lange, *The History of Materialism*. London: Kegan Paul, 1925, First Book, 103.
28. Lange, *History of Materialism*, 102. See also Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*. Trans. R. E. Latham. Middlesex; Penguin, 1994, 39: "All life is a struggle in the dark…This dread and darkness of the mind cannot be dispelled by the sunbeams, and the shining shafts of day, but only by an understanding of the outward form and inner workings of nature."
29. Warren. *Facing Death*, 7.
30. Ibid.
31. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Trans. Michael Chase. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995, 93-101.
32. Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus." *The Epicurus Reader*. Trans. Brad Inwood & L. P. Gerson. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994, 29.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. For further insight into ataraxia in Epicurus see James Porter, "Epicurean Attachments: Life, Pleasure, Beauty, Friendship, and Piety." *Cronache Ercolanesi*, 33 (2003): 205-227. Porter describes it as "stable (katastematic) pleasure" (214), and, furthermore, as the "basal experience of pleasure' on account of it being the criterion of all pleasure" (218). In this sense, then, it is more than a condition of simple or mere happiness: "it seems to operate as life's internal formal principle, as that which gives moral sense and shape to a life that is lived..." (218).
36. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 87.
37. Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow,* section 350.
38. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*. Ed G. Colli and M. Montinari. Berlin and New York/Munich: dtv and Walter de Gruyter, 1967-77 and 1998, 8, 28 [15].
39. Epicurus "Vatican Sayings", no. 45 in *The Essential Epicurus*. Trans. Eugene O' Connor. New York: Prometheus Books, 1993, 81.

40. For further insight see Julian Young, *Nietzsche. A Philosophical Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 279-81.
41. See Nietzsche, *Dawn*, sections 13, 33, 36. On Epicurus on fear and chance see Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 87, 223, and 252.
42. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 252.
43. Graham Parkes, "Nature and the human 'redivinised': Mahāyāna Buddhist themes in Thus Spoke Zarathustra," in *Nietzsche and the Divine*. Eds John Lippitt and James Urpeth. Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000, 181-199, 195.
44. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 223.
45. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*. London: Ark, 1987, 123.
46. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 225.
47. Cited in Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* 226.
48. D. H. Lawrence, "The Reality of Peace" in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*. Ed. Michael Herbert. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 27.
49. Porter, "Epicurean Attachments", 206.
50. Porter, "Epicurean Attachments", 207.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid. 211.
53. Ibid. 212.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 45.
57. Monika M. Langer, *Nietzsche's Gay Science: Dancing Coherence*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 67.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980, 99-103. I am grateful to Beatrice Han-Pile for suggesting this use of Heidegger to illuminate the section.
61. Epicurus, "Vatican Sayings," 14.
62. Richard Roos, "Nietzsche et Épicure: l'idylle héroique." *Lectures de Nietzsche*. Eds Jean-François Balaudé and Patrick Wotling. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2000, 283-350, 299.
63. Ibid. 301.
64. Ibid. 309.
65. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, volume one. Trans. E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover 1969, section 54, 283.
66. Cited in Michalski, *The Flame of Eternity*, 81.
67. Ibid.
68. Lawrence, "The Reality of Peace", 42.
69. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 278.
70. Todd May, *Death*. Durham: Acumen, 2009, 25.
71. Michalski, *The Flame of Eternity*, 81.
72. Herbert Marcuse, "The Ideology of Death." *Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Emancipation*. Eds Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce. London: Routledge, 2011, 122-32, 124.
73. "The Reality of Peace", 32.
74. Ibid. 38.
75. Ibid. 39.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid. 40.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid. 36.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid. 35.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid. 34.
86. Ibid.
87. See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 110.
88. Lawrence, "The Reality of Peace", 38.

89. Lawerence, "Life", *Death of a Porcupine and other Essays*, 18.
90. Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Volume 9, 11 [70].