

Thanatos

In Greek mythology, Thanatos is a winged figure representing the transition from life to death,

5 figure 1. Thanatos often greets the dying person and accompanies him/her to the afterlife, whatever that may be. The symbology is significant. Thanatos is depicted as a human being, a male perhaps, but the gender is not specific. Being of somewhat human form, it can be embedded among people and socialize with them. That is, Thanatos is not a god like figure with supernatural powers and not
10 at a level above humans. Thanatos circulates among humans, communicates with them, and sometimes makes deals. When the time comes, Thanatos will bond with the dying person and perhaps comfort their departing. The wings are significant too in that Thanatos will transport the departed far away where mortals cannot follow.

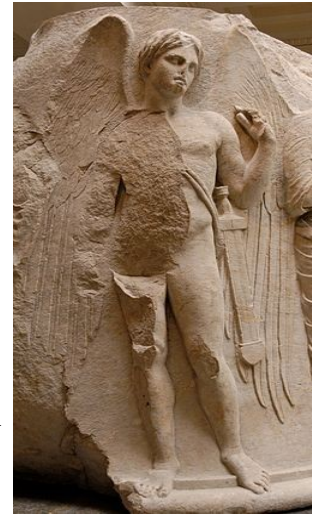


Fig. 1. Sculpted marble column from the temple of Artemis at Ephesus c.a.325 BC

15 This could be a morbid article, but it need not be. It could be uplifting with a clearer understanding of the human condition as it relates to the end.

The Conformal Way

All living creatures have an expiration date. The exact time and place is a secret for most. That
20 unknown leads to it's mystique, but it is a perfectly natural outcome that should not be a surprise. All creatures are bound to experience it one way or another. It is common to the life experience.

Death is just as natural as birth. From the moment of birth, we begin the process of dying. It has been happening all along as one continuous evolution. Birth, living, and dying are a continuum. They are all part of one process.

25 Most wild animals become food for others to survive. In this context, death is natural. We have survived on the death of other living things. There is no suggestion here that we should offer ourselves up as a sacrifice, only that dying is normal when it is due to old age. Think of it as your contribution to the environment and the continuity of the living ecosystem. Young people, however, are not supposed to die young. That is unnatural.

30

Death as a Business

Soldiers deal with death as a business. It is a dirty business, but necessary under survival circumstances. The business part of it is to dispatch your enemy as quickly and efficiently as possible. This means at minimal expense. This sounds grizzly, but the ultimate objective is to maintain life and
35 our civilization. That is the ethical thing to do.

There is another aspect to soldiering which is to satisfy the primeval urge to participate in a hunt. Let's go hurry up and kill something, but it doesn't have to be that way. Success in battle need not be the termination of the adversary. Disarming the opponent could be just as sufficient to remove the threat. Then no harm can come to us and we are left with a passive neighbor. Someday we may get
40 there and death in combat will be a thing of the past. It will be more like taking the stick away from the other side, or taking the wind out of their sail.

Medical professionals also deal with death as a business, but not intentionally. Their job is to preserve life. When that is not achieved, then their services transition to dealing with the aftermath. First responders, i.e. firemen, law enforcement, and rescue personnel, also encounter death as part of
45 their professional services. Finally, the funeral home is clearly a for profit business.

The big business with death is when money is involved. Religions and insurance companies capitalize on the fear of death. They both sell hope and collect money in the here and now. From this perspective, there is little difference between the business plans of religions and insurance.

Then there are the attorneys. They make money before the death in the estate planning and they
50 make money again from the remnants left behind by the dearly departed. They do provide a valuable
service by restraining other vultures attempting to swoop in on the spoils. More on this later.

Choices

When given the choice of living versus dying, it is safe to expect that most people, and in fact
55 all creatures, would chose living. That is the survival instinct. But would you want to live forever?
Let's ponder the consequences.

First, there would most likely be a progressive decline in physical and mental performance. The
body will continue to deteriorate, barring some reversal of that aging process with medical
breakthroughs. The brain will also change, probably not in a beneficial manner as it did when you were
60 20 years old. The quality of life will not be getting any better.

Second, if you lived longer than the normal 80 years, then you would need to find some means
of support to house, feed, and sustain yourself. It will not be easy, given the unknowns about your
condition. The available resources will be declining with the increase in population density. You will
need to compete more vigorously for your needs against more humans who are younger and in better
65 condition. You may want to reconsider getting on board when your ship comes in.

How about your relationships? We are social creatures that thrive on human interaction. What
would it be like if all your friends and family are dead while you still hang around? It could be a very
lonely place. Living forever may not be so desirable, besides, it is unnatural.

Dying can be a matter of choice and it may not be your choice. Some authority may decide that
70 I need to be eliminated, for various reasons, all based on the conclusion that I am undesirable. In one
case, I may have committed a crime punishable by death. We have capital punishment for two reasons.
One is to remove the undesirable behavior from our presence, and the second reason is as a deterrence.

The first reason is effective, but the second is not. Capital punishment is an attempt to remove evil behavior from the remaining others, but it does not work. The evidence is that we still have evil after
75 centuries of using capital punishment as a deterrent. So evil is resident in the human gene pool, and is likely to remain. Other reasons for external death decisions are genocide, homicide, and combat.

The above discussion indicates that death is not always from a supernatural cause. We can also do it to ourselves. In some cases it is a self inflicted early termination preceded by poor choices. Some do not experience death from old age but premature damage from a risky sport adventure. In that case
80 no one else is responsible. It was just a bad choice on the victims' part. The root cause can be an equipment malfunction that the person had no prior knowledge of. The termination was due to a pre-existing defect. The persons' choice to participate was also a factor.

Some people in pain, or poor quality of life, may decide that self elimination is a better alternative than continuing to live with the pain. It is difficult to argue against suicide as a personal
85 choice. Everyone has medical rights and personal choices. Suicide falls into both of those categories. The suicidal person has options that others may not in choosing the time and place, and also the method to make it somewhat painless. Thanatos, I expect, would remain neutral on these matters of choice and would be privileged to escort the departed wherever they want to go.

90 Biology and Psychology

I am not a subject matter expert on the biological changes of aging and the decomposition of organic matter. Neither am I educated or certified in geriatrics, but I am aware of several physical and psychological changes that are normal past 50 years of age. These are --

1. Weakening strength. The grip is weaker. You cannot jump as high nor run as fast.
- 95 2. Wounds heal slower, if at all. The body does not repair itself like it used to.
3. Parts do not work as well. Kidneys, liver, eyes, hearing, digestion, etc.

4. Coordination becomes less stable. Balance is especially affected. This can lead to falls.
5. Hair loss, especially among men.
6. Time perception. When you were 8 years old you couldn't wait to get to 9 years old. After 70
100 years old, you wonder where the past 10 years went.
7. Wrinkling skin. You enjoy looking into the mirror less.
8. Diminished libido. That is probably a good thing.
9. Aches and pains. Typically in the bones and joints.
10. Mortality awareness. The end to suffering is near. You know that it will be over soon.
- 105 11. Concerns about legacy, family matters, inheritance, property. Who gets it when you go.
12. Memory loss.

These aging changes are normal and to be expected. They appear, on average, in the late 70's or early 80's. Nothing to fear, they are symptoms of your body "winding down". They can be delayed with vigorous exercise, but not completely avoided. View them as an interesting part of life and death. Rapid
110 changes occurred within you when transitioning from child to adolescent to mature adult. These aging changes are slower. Enjoy them and accept them as normal. Some medical conditions can also be normal as organs decline in function. Acceptance of old age changes and dying is part of the maturing process. These consequential changes are highly personal and they belong to me alone. No one else around needs to be concerned, but the immediate family will be. Their reactions can vary along with
115 my attitude.

I may not care what others feel, rationalizing that I soon will no longer have a functioning mind to ponder that. Or, prior to death, I may care very much, not wanting to leave a mess for others to clean up, or I may want to "stir the pot". This attitude is difficult to predict beforehand, just like trying to predict the behavior of a novice soldier before the first battle. My attitude about the family is variable
120 just as their attitude about me is an unknown until the time comes. They may grieve or rejoice - who knows?

The nature of grieving a family member or friend at death is the loss of a personal relationship. It has nothing to do with money. At the time of death in the family, both of these emotions come alive, grief and greed. Which one manifests itself is a true indication of the characteristics of the prior
125 relationship. Be aware of old "friends" coming out of the woodwork claiming old debts.

A soldier has no grief for killing an enemy because there is no personal loss. It is a pure matter of the survival instinct to dispatch that professional killer before he/she gains the opportunity to do me in. The same sentiment applies to lethal force in a self defense situation.

Whatever the circumstances, I propose to rejoice, as the christians do, because the deceased no
130 longer has any suffering and is probably in a better place. It's all natural and good.

Legality

In a civilized society, there are some legal issues at the time of death. Attorneys will get involved, for good reason. People die by various causes. Some of the causes could be --

- 135 • Old age
- Medical malpractice
- Homicide
- Accident
- Suicide
- 140 • War
- Disease
- Domestic dispute
- Bar fight
- Act of terror
- 145 • Bad weather

Whatever the cause, a death certificate is usually produced by the medical examiner to specify the cause of death. This is to absolve blame or declare blame, for insurance purposes, and to provide a record for demographics. It also allows for the disposal of the remains and property. This is where an attorney gets involved. A will is searched for and retrieved. Property, both real and capital, is identified. Debts are disclosed. Next of kin are found and notified. This is all done under the watchful eyes of a lawyer and the court system to make it fair. If foul play is suspected, then it becomes another matter. The dark side of the human race is where some dispatch others for profit or pleasure.

The Afterlife

What comes after is a big unknown. No one has escaped death and left this planet alive. And no one has ever come back to testify where Thanatos took them. The Greeks were at least compassionate enough to invent a companion and an explanation, in poetry and plays. Another Greek philosopher, Epicurus, proposed that it doesn't matter. He explained that before you were born, things happened that you were not aware of and you did not care before your world entry. After death, things again happen that have no effect on you, so they would be painless and again a don't care. What is painful is only the here and now, but it does not have to be. A second Greek philosopher, Epictetus, taught that things happen all around you that you have no control over. Let them roll off your back. The only thing that you have control of is your attitude.

In Eastern European religions, the survivors have a mass, bury the person, then go have a big dinner party and get drunk. The person did not perish, but just went to a different place. They even have a word for it, which loosely translated, suggests that he/she left the room through a doorway into another space, where they can be re-united with later.

When a plant dies, another grows in its place. The remains left something behind provide for something else to grow and nourish from. This is akin to Newton's 3rd law of motion where you have

170 to leave something behind to go forward. All is replaceable. We have been discussing the death of an individual, but the same concepts can be applied to the death of a community.

What is the long term prospect for the human race? Based on historical statistics, Homo Sapiens will go extinct, naturally. Accept it. Everything goes away in time.

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