

Seneca on the Shortness of Life a Summary

This summary does not feel terribly cohesive, but the book was a bit stream of consciousness.

We complain that life is short, but life is actually long. We just waste time. When time is spent with no real purpose, it is wasted. Those who choose to have no purpose, waste their time chasing pleasure, or give it away to avoid working towards something. Many claim to yearn for a life of leisure, while working towards the opposite. Many vent about their hatred for their lives, only to go back and, fall into the same routines. "Don't let your life slip away, as it is not easily replaced."

"We all rush through life, torn between a desire for the future, and a weariness of the present... But he who devotes his time to his own needs, who plans every day as if it were his last, neither longs for, nor fears for tomorrow." As little value as we seem to place on our time, giving it away to anyone who asks; we are terrified that it will come to an end, and would sell everything just to keep living. "The greatest obstacle to living a full life, is having expectations delaying gratification based on what might happen tomorrow, which squanders today. Live now!"

The busy lose perspective because they are too distracted to look back and they would not want to anyway. Who wants to look back on what you can only regret? Those who live only for leisure are still busy. They are busy being idle. And those who are busy being idle are only half alive, as they are not masters of their own time. The busy man will spend time waiting for the next entertainment, and wasting the time in between in boredom, with no idea how to fill the day. By doing so, he shortens his life by not really living it, but merely spending it.

It is wasteful to spend time debating information of no value. Time spent spreading and discussing such information will not prevent future mistakes, or induce justice. It is useless knowledge. True leisure is gained by devotion to acquiring true knowledge, not trivia. Study of our ancestors, and the wisdom of the past will reward with a more fulfilling and engaged life than empty social engagements. Learn from the wisdom of past philosophers, and add the wisdom of their years to yours and thus increase your life. "The wisdom of the past is indestructible." You make your life longer by merging past, present, and future.