

Now

The more I study philosophy, the more I understand the importance of time. How you think about it, how you comprehend it, and how you use it are all major factors in life. Those aspects of time management have a huge influence on your mental health, mindset, happiness, and also your success or failure.

I have written about the harm in dwelling on the past and the folly of predicting the future. So, today I want to talk about the most important time. That time is “now.”

Have you ever considered that from your perspective the time is always now? As you are reading this, and maybe thinking “what time is it?” the answer will always be “now”. It works just like when you ask yourself “where am I?” and the answer is always “here.” Wherever and whenever you do this, the only rational answer is that it is always “now” and you are always “here.” This is the only way we can experience life right here right now.

Being aware of the here and now and focusing on what is going on here and now is what many people call mindfulness. Everything else is imagination or memory. Only here and now is real. You only have agency, or the ability to control anything, in the here and now. Outside of here and now, action is just making plans or remembering events.

You can only experience true happiness here and now. Sure you can remember a time when you were happy, but it never has the same power as actually experiencing joy. All things fade with time. This is why we keep doing things that we enjoy: because the memory of that steak dinner I ate last week will never be as good as the ribeye that I’m currently eating.

The same goes for thinking about the future. I can imagine how happy I would be if my next book becomes a best seller, but I can’t actually experience that until the time comes. Right here right now, I can be happy about finishing a chapter, or I can feel good about productively working toward a goal.

Understanding that experience, happiness, and control only happen here and now is probably why Marcus Aurelius said:

“Give yourself a gift: the present moment.”

- Marcus Aurelius

This also helps you get through hard times. Marcus Aurelius pointed out:

“Stick with the situation at hand, and ask, ‘Why is this so unbearable? Why can’t I endure it?’ You’ll be embarrassed to answer.”

- Marcus Aurelius

The truth about here and now is that nothing is unbearable. Why? Because you are actively bearing it. It hasn’t killed you. It is possible. You can handle it. If it were actually too much and had defeated you, you wouldn’t be around to complain. It may not be pretty or fun, and you may not like it, but here and now you are up to the challenge.

Understanding here and now is critical to your productivity, your success or failure. The best time to do something, the best time to make progress, the best time to get to work is always now. Putting things off becomes a habit. Planning to do something later creates an endless loop of inaction, because when “later” becomes “now,” you have that habit along for the ride, and you push it off again. Seneca had some tough-love on this to offer:

*“The fool, with all his other faults, has this also,
—he is always getting ready to live.”*

- Seneca

Now is the best time to do anything that is important to you. Now is your opportunity to experience happiness and fulfilment. Now is bearable, because you are bearing it now. Now is the only time you can actually do anything.

I’ll give you the same tip that I gave my trainees when I was an FTO. On my dashboard for them to read constantly was a Post-it note with a short acronym that would see them through almost every situation: W.I.N (What’s Important Now?) Whenever they found themselves in a hot call or handling something stressful, they should try to WIN. (Do what needs doing now, and worry about the rest later.) They can’t handle the entire call all at once, and trying to do everything at once would be too overwhelming. Life is the same way. If you want to WIN, do the thing that’s right in front of you now, then when you reach the next now, repeat the process.

Amor Fati
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