



## Think About Your Death and Live Better

### 思考死亡，是为了更好地活着

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590 Words

For most people, death is hard to think about. We tend to avoid the subject—**involuntarily**, even. The philosopher Stephen Cave offers one explanation for this avoidance in his 2012 book, *Immortality*. “Death,” he writes, “presents itself as both **inevitable** and impossible.” You can know **rationally** that you will die, yet struggle to understand your nonexistence. Put another way, you cannot be conscious of your own nonconsciousness.

对大多数人来说，死亡是难以想象的。我们往往不自觉地回避这个话题。哲学家史蒂芬·凯夫在他 2012 年出版的《永生》一书中对这种回避给出了解释。他写道，“死亡既不可避免，又难以置信。”从理性的角度你知道自己会死，但难以理解你的消失。换句话说，你不可能意识到自己的无知无觉。

So we **banish** death from our thoughts. But this leads us to make choices in life that actually **curtail** our happiness. People who express more regrets tend to be those who **postponed** profound activities that **yield** meaning, such as appreciating beauty or spending more time with loved ones. When we avoid thoughts of death, we unconsciously assume that tomorrow will look a lot like today, so we can do tomorrow what we could do today. But when we focus on death, that increases the **stakes** at play in the present, and clarifies what we should do with our time.

所以我们不去思考死亡。但这导致我们在生活中做出的选择实际上削弱了幸福。有诸多遗憾的人往往推迟过意义深远的活动，比如欣赏美景或

**involuntarily** [ɪnˌvɒləntərɪli]

adv. 不自觉地，无意识地 | His left eyelid twitched involuntarily. 他的左眼皮不由自主地跳着。

**immortality** [ɪmɔːrˈtæləti] n. 永生，不朽，不灭

**inevitable** [ɪnˈevɪtəbl] adj. 不可避免的，必然的 | It was inevitable

that there would be job losses. 裁员已是不可避免的事。

**rationally** [ˈræʃnəli] adv. 理性地，合理地 | We were too shocked to

think rationally. 我们太过震惊，难以理智地思考。

**banish** [ˈbænɪʃ] v. 消除，去除；驱逐，赶走 | He has now banished all

thoughts of retirement. 他现在已经完全打消了退休的念头。

**curtail** [kɜːrˈteɪl] v. 限制，缩短 |

Spending on books has been severely curtailed. 购书开支已被大大削减。

**postpone** [pooˈspoun] v. 延迟，延期 | We'll have to postpone the

meeting until next week. 我们将不得不把会议推迟到下周举行。

**yield** [jiːld] v. 产生，得出；屈服，让步；弯曲，变形 | The research has

yielded useful information. 这项研

花更多时间与所爱的人在一起。当我们不去思考死亡时，我们会下意识地认为明天和今天没什么两样，所以今天能做的事情可以推到明天。但当我们关注死亡时，当下的风险凸显了出来，让我们明白应该如何利用时间。

By forcing ourselves to think about death—our own death and that of loved ones—our resources-use decisions change. I ask my 20-something graduate students to estimate how many Thanksgivings they **realistically** have left with their parents, and then to consider how they should spend those remaining occasions. This is a hard exercise for them, and usually **provokes** a strong emotional reaction. But it can also alter such decisions as where they choose to live and work. This highlights that facing discomfort and thinking seriously about the **impermanence** of your **mortal** life is important for making decisions that enhance your happiness.

强迫自己思考死亡——我们自己和所爱之人的死亡——我们对资源的运用就会改变。我让我那些 20 多岁的研究生估计一下，他们实际上还能和父母共度多少个感恩节，然后考虑他们应该如何度过剩下的日子。对他们来说是一个困难的练习，通常会引起强烈的情绪反应。但它也可以改变他们在哪里生活和工作的决定。这表明面对不适感并认真思考生命的无常对于做出提升幸福感的决定非常重要。

There are other benefits. For example, **paradoxical** though it may seem, **contemplating** death can encourage positive thinking, as researchers found in 2007. People **primed** to think about their **demise** tended to focus on favorable emotional information around them, and to interpret random words in a more **congenial** way. You begin to think extremely clearly, and realize that you have a choice about how to see the present moment—and choose the positive.

还有其他好处。例如，2007 年研究人员发现，虽然这看起来有点矛盾，但思考死亡有助于正向思考。准备好思考死亡的人倾向于关注周围有利的情感信息，对随机的单词给出更善意的解读。你开始极其清晰地思考，并

究提供了有用的资料。

**stake** [steɪk] *n.* 赌注，风险；重大利益，重大利害关系；股份；桩 | Climbing is a dangerous sport and the stakes are high. 爬山是一项危险的运动，风险很大。

**realistically** [ˌriːəˈlɪstɪkli] *adv.* 现实地，实际地；逼真地，栩栩如生地 | You can't realistically expect to win the whole competition. 你指望场场比赛都赢是不现实的。

**provoke** [prəˈvʊk] *v.* 激起，引发；挑衅，激怒 | Dairy products may provoke allergic reactions in some people. 乳制品可能会引起某些人的过敏反应。

**impermanence** [ɪmˈpɜːrmənəns] *n.* 暂时，非永久 | His philosophy stressed the impermanence of the world. 他的哲学观点强调世界的无常。

**mortal** [ˈmɔːrtl] *adj.* 不能永生的，终将死亡的；致命的，非常危急的；极度的，极大的 | We are all mortal. 我们都总有一死。

**paradoxical** [ˌpærəˈdɒksɪkl] *adj.* 自相矛盾的；荒诞的，出乎意料的 | a paradoxical statement 自相矛盾的说法

**contemplate** [ˈkɒːntəmpleɪt] *v.* 深思熟虑，沉思；考虑，思量；凝视，注视 | I haven't got time to sit around contemplating the meaning of life. 我没时间坐下来思忖人生的意义。

意识到你可以选择如何看待当下，从而选择看到事物积极的一面。

As **persuasive** as the evidence is that thinking about your death can be a good happiness **protocol**, it doesn't come naturally, as we've seen. Like so many valuable habits, it takes practice. That is exactly why ancient thinkers recommended the **memento mori**, a reminder of death. As the **Stoic** philosopher Marcus Aurelius reminded himself in his *Meditations*, "You could leave life right now. Let that determine what you do and say and think."

尽管有充分的证据表明，思考死亡能够提升幸福感，但正如我们所见，我们并不会自然而然地思考死亡。像许多有价值的习惯一样，它需要练习。这正是古代思想家推崇“死亡警告”的原因。斯多葛派哲学家马可·奥勒留在他的《沉思录》中提醒自己：“你此刻就可能离开人世。让这条真理来决定你的言行和想法吧。”

Start by making this a regular routine in your life. Try beginning each day with a version of this: "I know that in a few years, I will be dead, and a few years after that, no one will even remember my name. But I am alive this day, and I will not waste it." The practice will feel less and less unnatural as time goes by, even as you feel more positive and energetic.

首先让思考死亡成为你生活中的例行事项。试着这样开始每一天：“我知道再过几年，我就会死去，然后再过几年，甚至没有人会记得我的名字。但我今天还活着，我不会浪费这一天。”随着时间的推移，这种练习也会变得越来越自然，同时你会感到更加积极，充满活力。

Next, survey your goals and plans. How many of your dreams are leading you to postpone love and happiness right now? **For the sake of** some future reward, are you neglecting your family life today? Your friendships? Your spiritual development? **Envision** yourself having just months to live and giving your current self some life advice.

接下来，审视你的目标和计划。你有多少梦想导致你推迟了当下的爱

**prime** [praɪm] v. 使做好准备 *adj.* 首要的，基本的 *n.* 盛年，鼎盛时期 | She had been well primed about what to say to the press. 她已经准备好对新闻界怎么说了。

**demise** [di'maɪz] *n.* 终止，消亡，死亡 | the demise of the typewriter in this computer age 在这个计算机时代打字机的消失

**congenial** [kən'dʒiːniəl] *adj.* 宜人的，令人舒适愉快的；适宜的，适合的 | The department provides a congenial atmosphere for research. 这个部门为研究工作提供了轻松愉快的环境。

**persuasive** [pər'sweɪsɪv] *adj.* 有说服力的，令人信服的 | His arguments are quite persuasive. 他的论据很有说服力。

**protocol** ['prəʊtəːkəl] *n.* 科学实验计划，医疗方案；礼节，礼仪；协议 | the Montreal Protocol on the protection of the ozone layer 关于保护臭氧层的《蒙特利尔议定书》

**memento mori** [məˌmentuː'mɔːri] *n.* 使人想到死亡的物品（或图符），死亡警告

**Stoic** ['stɔɪk] *n.* 斯多葛派人（对痛苦或困难能默默承受或泰然处之），坚忍克己的人

**for the sake of** 为了 | He moved to the seaside for the sake of his health. 他为了健康而迁居海滨。

和幸福？为了将来的回报，你是否忽视了今天的家庭生活、友谊和精神修行？想象一下你只剩下几个月的时间，给现在的自己一些生活建议。

If you insist on ignoring your own demise, you are likely to make decisions that cause you to **sleepwalk** through life. You may not be dead yet, but you're not fully alive either. If you can look across that border with **resolve** and confidence, you will experience every day fully and deeply.

如果你始终无视死亡，你很可能会做出让你浑浑噩噩度过一生的决定。你可能尚未死去，但也没有真正活着。如果你能带着决心和信心看透生死，你就能充实而深刻地体验每一天。

**envision** [ɪnˈvɪʒn] v. 想像，展望 |

They envision an equal society, free of poverty and disease. 他们向往一个没有贫穷和疾病的平等社会。

**sleepwalk** ['sli:pwɔ:k] v. 梦游

**resolve** [rɪˈzɒlv] n. 决心，坚定的信念 | Recent events strengthened

her resolve to find out the truth. 最近发生的事件坚定了她找出真相的决心。

## ➤ 脉络梳理

Para. 1-2 指出人们通常回避思考死亡，结果导致了很多遗憾

Para. 3-4 分析思考死亡的好处：有助于提升幸福感，看到事物积极的一面

Para. 5-7 就如何练习思考死亡提出建议：将其作为例行事项；审视自己的目标和计划

Para. 8 总结全文，强调思考死亡的重要性

## ➤ 长难句拆解

让步状语从句 | 同位语从句，解释说明 evidence  
As persuasive as the evidence is that thinking about your death can be a good happiness protocol,  
主句 | 非限制性定语从句 (as 指代主句内容)  
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