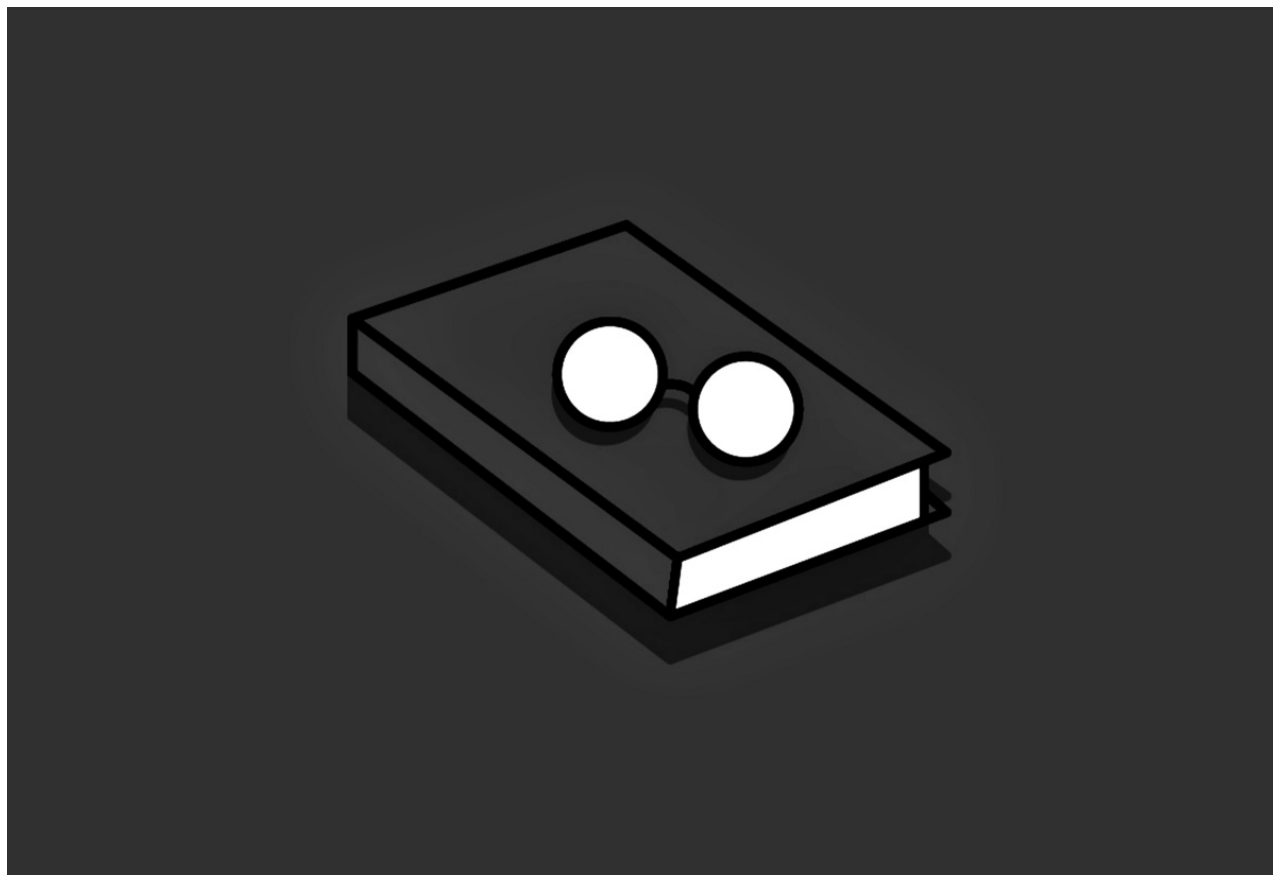


Lessons From Ancient Philosophers That Can be Applied to Everyday Life

M medium.com/personal-growth/lessons-from-ancient-philosophers-that-can-be-applied-to-everyday-life-57b0c5b3c9f1



Ancient philosophy is not an abstract theory, but practical wisdom that resonates century after century. It's precious knowledge that becomes familiar when we are faced with challenges. Instead of panicking, we can turn to Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Aristotle, Plato, Kant, Socrates, Confucius, Nietzsche and more for answers. Philosophy can give us a better worldview about life and living it.

These lessons from ancient philosophers can make you happier, more resilient and a wiser, better person.

Change what 's in your control— ignore the rest

The uncomfortable truth about life is that you can't control every event, experience, or outcome. All that stress and worry about what could possibly go wrong shouldn't be your burden. The basic idea of focusing on the actions and experiences within your control has been around for a while.

Epictetus, a Greek Stoic philosopher, classified things as being under our control or not under our control.

His classic Enchiridion (The Good Life Handbook) starts with this basic idea of control; “Some things are within our power, while others are not. Within our power are opinion, motivation, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever is of our own doing; not within our power are our body, our property, reputation, office, and, in a word, whatever is not of our own doing.”

You can't control everything that happens to you, but you can control the way you respond. And in your response is your greatest power.

Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor from 161 to 180 and a Stoic philosopher once said, “Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present.”

Worrying about the things outside your control accomplishes nothing except expending a lot of energy that could be better spent elsewhere.

Don't spend your life preparing for life

Here is an important truth about life and living it — it's too short if you spend it meaningfully and do what gives you a sense of accomplishment.

Life can also become a mental and emotional burden if you spend all your time worrying about the unpredictable future or the regrets of the past.

In his the popular book, *On The Shortness Of Life* (a 2,000-year-old masterpiece), Seneca, a Roman Stoic philosopher said:

“It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and a sufficiently generous amount has been given to us for the highest achievements if it were all well invested. But when it is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death's final constraint to realize that it has passed away before we knew it was passing. So it is: we are not given a short life but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it... Life is long if you know how to use it.”

The philosopher argues that we shackle ourselves to our labours and our professions while life and waste away the little time we have on earth.

Life can be short or long depending upon how you decide to live it. If you spend all your life preparing for life, you are not choosing to live now.

“The greatest obstacle to living is expectancy, which hangs upon tomorrow and loses today. The whole future lies in uncertainty: live immediately,” says Seneca. Don't lose yourself to your thoughts on what's next or worry about what's happening elsewhere.

Invest in the present, and the future will take care of itself.

Busyness without meaning is one of the greatest distractions from living

The world is getting louder. Distractions are inevitable.

Are you intentional about how you spend your time? Do you postpone rich experiences because of a busy schedule?

But busyness is still a choice. Many of us confuse being “busy” with being effective, or productive. It pays to reevaluate your schedule and do more of what makes you come alive.

Carpe diem! or ‘seize the day,’ in everything you choose to do. The phrase was first uttered by the Roman poet Horace over 2,000 years ago. The message of carpe diem matters more than ever today.

Seneca argues, “No one will bring back the years; no one will restore you to yourself. Life will follow the path it began to take, and will neither reverse nor check its course. It will cause no commotion to remind you of its swiftness, but glide on quietly. It will not lengthen itself for a king’s command or a people’s favour. As it started out on its first day, so it will run on, nowhere pausing or turning aside. What will be the outcome? You have been preoccupied while life hastens on. Meanwhile, death will arrive, and you have no choice in making yourself available for that.”

All the little tasks and decisions you have to make every day as you work gradually deplete your psychological resources. Take an intentional break (even for 15 to 20 minutes) to appreciate life and those around you. Taking breaks is also biologically restorative.

The impediment to action advances action

Obstacles are beneficial to our learning and growth if we leverage every opportunity life presents and keep moving.

Marcus Aurelius once said, “Our actions may be impeded, but there can be no impeding of our intentions or dispositions. Because we can accommodate and adapt. The mind adapts and converts to its own purposes the obstacle to our acting. The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.”

It’s profound and so true. Every obstacle you face is the way to advance your next action. What stands in the way becomes the way. Action is the solution and the cure to our predicaments.

Despite the setbacks in life, it’s in your best interest to turn obstacles into stepping stones. Don’t choose to complain, or worse, to just give up.

What matters to your progress is how we see them, how you react to them, and whether you keep your composure and keep moving.

The results you want can take twice as long. Don't quit because you can't figure out the process. Embrace and enjoy the journey.

The product of thought is superior to the product of intuition

Dare to understand. Socrates once said, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." He was a classical Greek philosopher credited as one of the founders of Western philosophy.

Socrates argued that we should not solely rely on those in "authority" to have sound knowledge and insight. He demonstrated that people may have power and high position and yet be deeply confused and irrational.

He says, "To find yourself, think for yourself."

He established the importance of seeking evidence, closely examining reasoning and assumptions, analyzing basic concepts, and tracing out implications not only of what is said but of what is done as well. "Prefer knowledge to wealth, for the one is transitory, the other perpetual," he recommends.

He urged us to probe the logic authorities used to reach them. He says the validity of an idea or action is determined not by whether it is widely believed or widely reviled but by whether it obeys the rules of logic.

One of the biggest triumphs in life is conquering your ego

The most common enemy of personal growth and success lies within: our ego. Ego is one of the biggest obstacles to making better connections. It encompasses all of our fears, and insecurities as well as what leads us to believe we're better than others.

It's the sworn enemy of our ability to learn and grow. As Epictetus put it, "It is impossible for a person to begin to learn what he thinks he already knows." It can blind us to our faults and sow future problems. Ego makes recovery more difficult when you fail. At every stage, ego holds us back.

"I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies, for the hardest victory is over self," says Aristotle, a Greek philosopher and polymath during the Classical period in Ancient Greece.

Don't be deceived by your strengths. The ability to develop a healthy relationship with your ego, and being able to limit its influence is an important skill you need to become a better person.

Ego interrupts reason and intuition. Don't allow it to fill the space not filled with knowledge. Once you tame your ego, you will be liberated to make the biggest impact in life and career.

In our choices and actions every day, we can apply the lessons of Philosophy to become wiser, less agitated, more thoughtful, appreciate life more, and think more deeply about your choices and how they enrich our lives.
