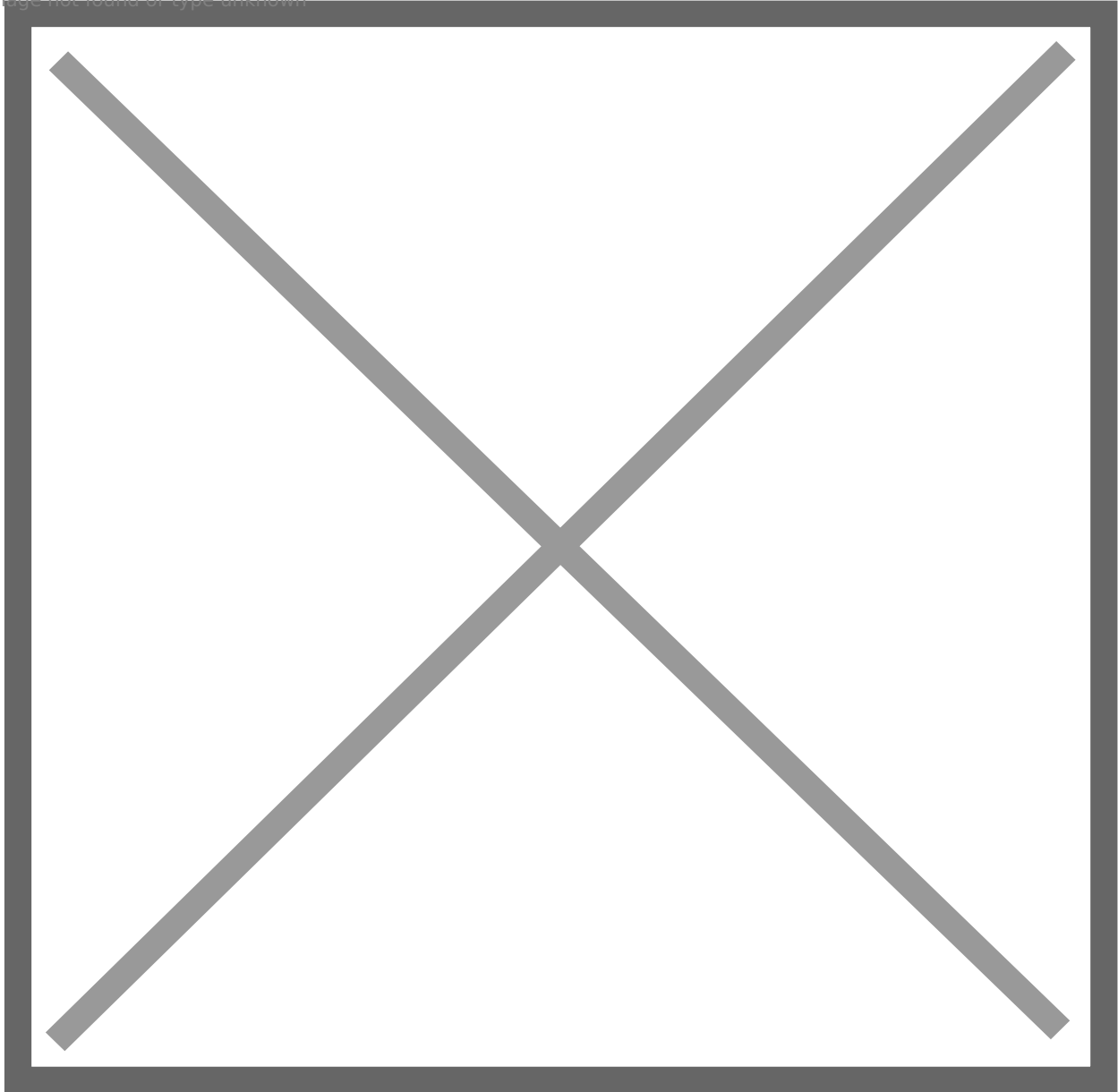


"most useless observation ever made by an ancient Greek philosopher"

Post by "Don" of June 10, 2022 at 7:17 AM

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[In your own time: how to live for today the philosophical way](#)

What's gone is gone, but don't waste time worrying about that. Or on what comes next. The ideal way to age is to be in the moment

www.theguardian.com

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2551-most-useless-observation-ever-made-by-an-ancient-greek-philosopher/>

"Arguably the most useless observation ever made by an ancient Greek philosopher – putting aside, for now, Pythagoras’s theory that fava beans contained the souls of the dead – was Epicurus’s argument that we shouldn’t fear death, because we won’t be around when it happens."



Thoughts on this article?

Mine? First blush: Surprising number of words and still mostly content-free. This is what passes for "insightful prose"??

Post by “Don” of June 10, 2022 at 8:07 AM

This article just strikes me as lazy writing. I'm already writing a rebuttal in my head. Here are the opening lines:

Arguably the most useless phrase ever uttered by pop spirituality is that we should "live in the moment." Devoid of context or further instruction, "live in the moment" is an easy throwaway line, an otherwise vacuous trope to make one sound deep without actually having to do any work in providing real, substantive, helpful advice for living.

Epicurus, on the other hand, said, "A philosopher's words are empty if they do not heal the suffering of mankind."

Post by “Eikadistes” of June 10, 2022 at 8:14 AM

If he only realized that he ends with a uniquely Epicurean observation:

"[Y]ou should [not] try to meditate yourself into a mystical state of total presence or concentration, but just that to recognise the fact that the past is past, and that soon you won’t have any future left – so you really might as well be here. It’s not so bad. Often enough, it’s wonderful. And in any case, there’s nowhere else to be."

"[Death is nothing to us](#)" is not just a temporal categorization of "before" versus "after", but, more important, it is a proposition that we are mortal, that life is finite, that time is precious, and pleasure is prudent.

Besides, Aristotle suggesting that men have more teeth than women is really the most useless pseudo-observation.

Post by “Kalosyni” of June 10, 2022 at 8:16 AM

Thanks Don for sharing the article, simple as it is.

I think his negative opening comment on Epicurus was because he might think that the fear of death will help motivate someone to enjoy the present moment.

I think everyone is at their own level of dealing with time and the idea of death, depending on how much they have contemplated their own mortality. Unlike the author of the article, I personally think that no matter how old one is, that some amount of planning is a good thing. But of course if one is retired, then one will plan different types of activities compared to if one is still employed. Also, it does take some planning in order to organize social events, so hopefully we all keep that up until the day we die. I think some amount of planning also can help make life more enjoyable, but also not being too attached to any one specific outcome (being able to go with the flow as things unfold).

This was a fun quote, as I myself do tend to live in the future:

Quote

The result is what’s been called the “when-I-finally” mindset: the sense that real fulfilment, or even real life itself, hasn’t quite arrived yet, so that present experience is merely something to get through, en route to something better. The person stuck in such a mindset, wrote [John Maynard Keynes](#), “does not love his cat, but his cat’s kittens; nor, in truth, the kittens, but only the kittens’ kittens, and so on forward for ever to the end of cat-dom”.

Post by “Don” of June 10, 2022 at 9:28 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

I think his negative opening comment on Epicurus was because he might think that the fear of death will help motivate someone to enjoy the present moment.

I could see that, and maybe even appreciate it, if the prose wasn't so hamfisted. There might be a good article in there somewhere. I get the impression he's working under a deadline and thought "Live in the moment. Yeah, everybody loves that. I'll write a few hundred words with that."

One of my biggest annoyances with this article is that he completely misses Epicurus's intent. People live their lives fearing death and the afterlife and completely miss living their lives. We shouldn't worry about that but instead pay attention to what's happening now. "Living in the moment" is often construed to mean blocking out all else. People who really -really!- live in the present moment are miserable! The only people that *only* live in the present are those rare individuals who cannot form long-term memories and each moment is a new experience. They keep logs of their experiences in a diary, their only link to the past. I realize this isn't what is usually "meant" by "live in the present" but it comes off like that.

In its wider contextual meaning, "living in the moment" is exactly what Epicurus encouraged. Listen to your body. Pay attention to your feelings of pleasure and pain. Make choices and rejections now to live your fullest, most pleasurable life because this is all you have. Make plans and write wills, but don't always expect them to come to fruition or to be followed. But be prudent. You can't rely on chance or the gods.

That is a good quote, and even sounds a little Epicurean.

Post by “Don” of June 10, 2022 at 4:39 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I'm already writing a rebuttal in my head. Here are the opening lines

Meh. Life's too short to write a rebuttal to every mediocre, ill-conceived article. The opening lines are all I'm willing to put in... That and my continuing voluminous word count on this forum 😊

Post by “beasain” of June 11, 2022 at 7:23 AM

<http://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2551-most-useless-observation-ever-made-by-an-ancient-greek-philosopher/>

[Quote from Don](#)

Living in the moment

This made me think of my own experiences. I was once ambitious and highly stressed, till I had a series of panic attacks. For those who never had a serious panic attack, it feels like a heart attack with similar symptoms, but it is quite innocent, although you have the impression of dying. First pills etc and then psychologist. It became soon clear that I projected my whole life on the future, I postponed happiness to the future, and at the same time I feared the uncertain future. So the ideal cocktail for anxiety, high blood pressure and panic attacks. The therapy consisted among other things in graphically imagine a time line and situating your thoughts on that time line, when in the future, you move the lamp (¿cursor?) to now. After a month moving my thoughts to now, and thinking at the moment everything is OK, my level of anxiety became lower than ever. This was for me a kind of wisdom experience.