

# Seneca: The 3 Periods of Life

Do not merely exist; live



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Life is a mystery that no one can truly figure out. We are constantly in a state of flux, always wondering where we will be in the future or what our present circumstances will be.

Seneca, a Roman Stoic philosopher, once said that life is divided into three periods: that which has been, that which is, and that which will be. Or better still, what we have already experienced, what we are currently experiencing, and what is yet to come. He argued that each period has its unique challenges and opportunities and that how we approach them shapes our destiny and the trajectory of our lives.

“Life is divided into three periods — that which has been, that which is, that which will be. Of these the present time is short, the future is doubtful, the past is certain,” he said in his book, *On the Shortness of Life*.

Seneca’s quote speaks to an essential truth about our existence: that the present time is fleeting, the future is uncertain, and the past is set in stone. This wise perspective provides invaluable insight into how to live our lives.

We can strive to live in the moment, be mindful of our choices, and look to the past as a guide for the present and future. With this in mind, we can live a life that is both meaningful and fulfilling.

He also acknowledges that the past is certain and that we can learn from it. By reflecting on our past experiences, we can gain insight and wisdom to help us navigate the present and the future.

In this sense, the past can be a valuable teacher to help us navigate the present and the future.

“But those who forget the past, neglect the present, and fear for the future have a life that is very brief and troubled; when they have reached the end of it, the poor wretches perceive too late that for such a long while they have been busied in doing nothing,” he says.

Seneca's thought also highlights that we cannot go back and change the past and that we must take advantage of our present moments and plan for the uncertain future accordingly.

The present is short, fleeting, and over in an instant. "Present time is very brief, so brief, indeed, that to some there seems to be none; for it is always in motion, it ever flows and hurries on; it ceases to be before it has come..." observes Seneca.

The future, however, is still being determined and unknowable; we can never be sure what it will bring. We can make plans, anticipate possibilities, and set goals, but the only thing we can be sure of is that the future will always be unpredictable.

## **Do not merely exist; live**

"Everyone hurries his life on and suffers from a yearning for the future and a weariness of the present. But he who bestows all of his time on his own needs, who plans out every day as if it were his last, neither longs for nor fears the morrow, argues Seneca.

In the present moment, then, lies the opportunity to make the most of our lives, to live each day to the fullest, and to create a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Seneca's Stoic philosophy teaches that we should focus on developing

wisdom, virtue, and self-control to live a fulfilling and meaningful life.

By practicing mindfulness, we can cultivate these virtues and become better equipped to deal with life's many challenges.

Seneca's model of life serves as a reminder of the importance of living in the present and making the most of our experiences.

Stoics believed that the ultimate goal of life was to achieve inner peace and tranquillity by living in accordance with nature.

One of the central tenets of Stoicism is the idea that we should focus on what is within our control and let go of what is not.

That means we should focus on our thoughts, feelings, and actions rather than worrying about external circumstances beyond our control.

Stoics stressed the importance of mindfulness and self-awareness.

When we understand our thoughts and emotions, we can gain greater control over them and avoid being swept away by our feelings.

Seneca's quote about the past, present, and future exemplifies Stoic philosophy. By focusing on the present moment and letting go of the past and the future, we can achieve greater self-control and inner peace and live a life full of meaning and purpose.