



Making peace with *finitude*

TIME: Why better doesn't always feel better

There are many ways that the progression of society has inarguably improved the lives of the average human living on our planet. Perhaps the most obvious are improvements in healthcare, nutrition, sanitation and safety. Our lives are longer and physically easier than they were 500 years ago. Despite these advances, however, our lives are not always happier or more fulfilling. One of the reasons for this contradiction is our modern concept of time.

by Catherine Blersch

What would your life have been like as a medieval peasant? You'd get up at dawn with the rooster crowing and spend most of your day doing the physically demanding daily activities required to keep you and your family alive. Without the efficiencies of modern technology, many of the basic tasks that take minutes today would have taken hours. You may assume that you would have felt endlessly busy with all these time-consuming tasks, but that's not the case. The experience of each day would have felt expansive and fluid because time only existed in relation to how long one thing took relative to another. The concept of busyness didn't even exist. Why not?

Methods for telling the time have existed for millennia, first in the form of sundials and later sandglasses, water clocks and candles. However, for most of history, ordinary people had no access to any form of time-measuring device. People did use devices to split the day into increments, but time as a concept didn't exist. It was only in the 1500s, as modern financial systems developed (charging interest on lending) and trade expanded, that time started becoming important. Later, during the industrial revolution, it became a necessary tool for organising salaried employees. It was only then that time became a concept separate from ourselves – something that we could have or not have enough of. The term 'busyness' was only coined in the 1800s.

Oliver Burkeman explores this idea in his thought-provoking book, *Four Thousand Weeks*. His premise is quite simple: The average human lives for about 4 000 weeks. If the entire history of the world was a day, our lives would be a millisecond long. Life is finite, so there is only so much we can do with it. However, because we live with the concept of time as being something that can be made, sold, saved and kept, we believe that if we can just become more efficient and productive we'll have the time to do the things we really want to. For some reason, this never works, which leaves us feeling frustrated, sad and inadequate.

Parkinson's law famously says that, 'work expands to fill the time available for its completion'. The more efficient you become, the more you fill your time with doing more productive things. The better you are at responding to emails, the more emails you get. The technology we use to make our lives more efficient simply increases the quantity of things we need to do. The problem with feeling like we need to 'use' time well (as an instrument) is that it makes us feel like we just need to get through each day until we get to some calmer place – which never comes. We adopt a 'When I finally finish X, I can do Y' mindset, but there are always more Xs and we never get to the Ys.

Perhaps the solution is to think a little harder about what time actually is

Burkeman references the philosopher Heidegger who argued that 'being' means existing not just in space, but also in time. So, it would be more accurate for us to say that we *are* time, rather than that we *have* time. It's an idea worth pondering. This means that the moment we are in right now is the only one that really matters. As adults we tend to dismiss 'living in the moment' as a platitude for shirking responsibilities, but it can simply mean using the moments we have to do the stuff that matters most.

But what on earth does any of this have to do with investing? To us, it's a reminder to stay focused and make time to think.

As an analyst with a natural bent towards productivity, my biggest challenge is finding time to think. There is only so much value that can be added by consuming and regurgitating content. To think creatively about ideas, build a latticework for approaching problems, and distil

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all the information available into a conclusion, you need periods of quiet and rest. There's a reason that we so often come up with our best ideas in the shower – it's the one time in the day when we aren't being productive or distracted (assuming you can be alone)! Us Granatians are relentlessly committed to protecting and growing our clients' savings, but relentless commitment can easily become burnout if there is no time for rest. This is particularly true with the underlying nerves that come with periods of volatility and uncertainty like we are living through now. If we are trying too hard to get everything done, we lose focus and probably aren't thinking deeply enough about the long-term future of the businesses we own. Our value of simplicity reminds us to stay focused on what really matters.

Burkeman's solution is to accept that time is finite and, instead of trying to get everything done, pick a few important things and forget about the rest. Cultivate a 'joy of missing out', finding peace in deliberately choosing what matters. Ditch the idea that rest is a waste of time. Instead, make sure your rest time is fully engaging. As he puts it, "Spending some of your leisure time focused solely on the pleasure of the experience is actually the only way NOT to waste time." So, if you're feeling anxious about the future and your never-ending to-do list, pause and take a breath. Crack open a bottle of your favourite tippie or put on a fresh brew, sit down with a couple of people you care most about, and engage in some distraction-free, engaged relaxation. I'm quite sure that as you approach the twilight of your life you won't give two hoots about the things you didn't accomplish.

Instead, you'll be wishing you had spent more quality time laughing with the people you loved most.

So, go do that!
And leave the responsibility of looking after your hard-earned savings to us.



TIME
IS
PRECIOUS.

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