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影响人类的伟大思想

— 企鵝人文经典 —

论生命之短暂

On the Shortness of Life

[古罗马] 塞内加

伟大的思想家用简洁的文字，带给人类最伟大的思想启迪；
我们用简单的方法，走近这些卓尔不群的人物，
聆听他们振聋发聩的声音。



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On the Shortness of Life

· 英汉对照 ·

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观 念

——《伟大的思想》代序

每隔一段时间，媒体就喜欢评选一次“影响世界的 X 个人”或者“改变历史的 X 项发明”。然而，在我看来，几乎所有人类史上最重大的变革，首先都是一种观念的变革。

我们今天之所以会关注气候的变暖与生物多样性的保存，是因为我们看待地球的方式变了，我们比以前更加意识到人在自然中的位置，也更加了解自然其实是一个动态的系统。放弃了人类可以主宰地球的世界观，这就意味着我们接受了一个观念的变化。同样地，我们不再相信男人一出生就该主宰女人，甚至也不再认为男女之别是不可动摇的本质区分，这也是观念的变化。如果说环保运动和女权运动有任何影响的话，那些影响一定就是从大脑开始的。也不要只看好事，20 世纪最惨绝人寰的浩劫最初也只不过是一些小小的观念，危险的观念。比如说一位德国人，他相信人类的进化必以“次等种族”的灭绝为代价……

这套丛书不叫“伟大的巨著”，是因为它们体积都不大，而且还有不少是抽取自某些名著的章节。

可它们却全是伟大的观念，例如达尔文的论天择，潘恩的

论常识，它们共同构成了人类的观念地图。从头看它们一遍，就是检视文明所走过的道路，从深处理解我们今天变成这个样子的原因。

也许你会发现其中有些陌生的名字，或者看起来没有那么“伟大”的篇章（譬如普鲁斯特追忆他的阅读时光），但你千万不要小看它们。因为真正重要、真正能够产生启蒙效果的观念往往具有跨界移动的能力，它会跨越时空，离开它原属的领域，在另一个世界产生意外的效果。就像马可·波罗在监狱里述说的异国图景，当时有谁料得到那些荒诞的故事会诱发出哥伦布的旅程呢？我也无法猜测，这套小书的读者里头会不会有下一个哥伦布，他将带着令人惊奇的观念航向自己的大海。

梁文道

《伟大的思想》中文版序

企鹅《伟大的思想》丛书于2004年开始出版。在英国，至今已付印80种，尚有20种计划出版。美国出版的丛书规模略小，德国的同类丛书规模更小一些。丛书销量已远远超过200万册，在全球很多人中间，尤其是学生当中，普及了哲学和政治学。中文版《伟大的思想》丛书的推出，迈出了新的一步，令人欢欣鼓舞。

推出这套丛书的目的是让读者再次与一些伟大的非小说类经典著作面对面地交流。太长时间以来，确定版本依据这样一个假设——读者在教室里学习这些著作，因此需要导读、详尽的注释、参考书目等。此类版本无疑非常有用，但我想，如果能够重建托马斯·潘恩《常识》或约翰·罗斯金《艺术与人生》初版时的环境，重新营造更具亲和力的氛围，那也是一件有意思的事。当时，读者除了原作者及其自身的理性思考外，没有其他参照。

这样做有一定的缺点：每个作者的话难免有难解或不可解之处，一些重要的背景知识会缺失。例如，读者对亨利·梭罗创作时的情况毫无头绪，也不了解该书得到的认可及其影响。不过这样做的优点也很明显。最突出的优点是，作者的初衷又一次变得重要起来——托马斯·潘恩的愤怒、查尔斯·达尔文的灵光、塞内加的隐逸。这些作家在那么多国家影响了那么多人的生活，其

影响不可估量，有的长达几个世纪，读他们书的乐趣罕有匹敌。没有亚当·斯密或阿图尔·叔本华，难以想象我们今天的世界。这些小书的创作年代已很久远，但其中的语言已彻底改变了我们的政治学、经济学、智力生活、社会规划和宗教信仰。

《伟大的思想》丛书一直求新求变。地区不同，收录的作家也不同。在中国或美国，一些作家更受欢迎。英国《伟大的思想》收录的一些作家在其他地方则默默无闻。称其为“伟大的思想”，我们亦慎之又慎。思想之伟大，在于其影响之深远，而不意味着这些思想是“好”的，实际上一些书可列入“坏思想”之列。从书中很多作家受到同一丛书其他作家的很大影响，例如，马塞尔·普鲁斯特承认受约翰·罗斯金影响很大，米歇尔·德·蒙田也承认深受塞内加影响，但其他有些作家彼此憎恨，如果发现他们被收入同一丛书，一定会气愤难平。不过，读者可自行决定这些思想是否合理。我们衷心希望，您能在阅读这些杰作中得到乐趣。

《伟大的思想》出版者

西蒙·温德尔

Introduction to the Chinese Editions of Great Ideas

Penguin's Great Ideas series began publication in 2004. In the UK we now have 80 copies in print with plans to publish a further 20. A somewhat smaller list is published in the USA and a related, even smaller series in Germany. The books have sold now well over two million copies and have popularized philosophy and politics for many people around the world—particularly students. The launch of a Chinese Great Ideas series is an extremely exciting new development.

The intention behind the series was to allow readers to be once more face to face with some of the great non-fiction classics. For too long the editions of these books were created on the assumption that you were studying them in the classroom and that the student needed an introduction, extensive notes, a bibliography and so on. While this sort of edition is of course extremely useful, I thought it would be interesting to recreate a more intimate feeling—to recreate the atmosphere in which, for example, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* or John Ruskin's *On Art and Life* was first published—where the reader has no other guide than the original author and his or her own common sense.

This method has its severe disadvantages—there will inevitably be statements made by each author which are either hard or impossible to understand, some important context might be missing. For example the reader has no clue as to the conditions under which Henry Thoreau was writing his book and the

reader cannot be aware of the book's reception or influence. The advantages however are very clear—most importantly the original intentions of the author become once more important. The sense of anger in Thomas Paine, of intellectual excitement in Charles Darwin, of resignation in Seneca—few things can be more thrilling than to read writers who have had such immeasurable influence on so many lives, sometimes for centuries, in many different countries. Our world would not make sense without Adam Smith or Arthur Schopenhauer—our politics, economics, intellectual lives, social planning, religious beliefs have all been fundamentally changed by the words in these little books, first written down long ago.

The Great Ideas series continues to change and evolve. In different parts of the world different writers would be included. In China or in the United States there are some writers who are liked much more than others. In the UK there are writers in the Great Ideas series who are ignored elsewhere. We have also been very careful to call the series Great Ideas—these ideas are great because they have been so enormously influential, but this does not mean that they are Good Ideas—indeed some of the books would probably qualify as Bad Ideas. Many of the writers in the series have been massively influenced by others in the series—for example Marcel Proust owed so much to John Ruskin, Michel de Montaigne to Seneca. But others hated each other and would be distressed to find themselves together in the same series! But readers can decide the validity of these ideas for themselves. We very much hope that you enjoy these remarkable books.

Simon Winder
Publisher
Great Ideas



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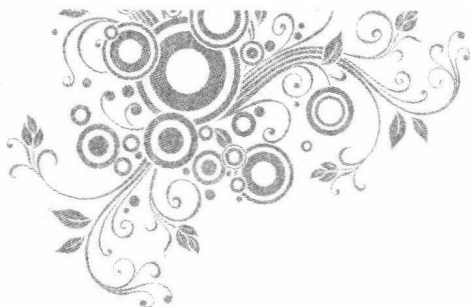


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论生命之短暂

On the Shortness of Life



On the Shortness of Life

Most human beings, Paulinus,* complain about the meanness of nature, because we are born for a brief span of life, and because this spell of time that has been given to us rushes by so *swiftly*¹ and rapidly that with very few exceptions life ceases for the rest of us just when we are getting ready for it.

Nor is it just the man in the street and the unthinking mass of people who *groan*² over this — as they see it — universal evil: the same feeling lies behind complaints from even *distinguished*³ men. *Hence*⁴ the *dictum*⁵ of the greatest of doctors:† ‘Life is short, art is long.’

Hence too the *grievance*⁶, most improper to a wise man, which Aristotle expressed when he was taking nature to task for *indulging*⁷ animals with such long existences that they can live through five or ten human lifetimes, while a far shorter limit is set

* A friend of Seneca's.

† Hippocrates

论生命之短暂

Notes

- 1 **swiftly** ['swɪftli]
ad. 迅速地, 很快地
- 2 **groan** [grəʊn] *v.*
呻吟, 抱怨
- 3 **distinguished**
[dɪ'stɪŋgwɪʃt] *a.*
著名的, 杰出的
- 4 **hence** [hens] *ad.*
因此, 所以
- 5 **dictum** ['dɪktəm]
n. 格言
- 6 **grievance**
['grɪ:vəns] *n.* 不满, 不平
- 7 **indulge** [ɪn'dʌldʒ]
v. 纵容, 迁就

保利努斯^①啊, 大多数人都抱怨自然之吝啬, 因为人生短暂, 而这被赋予的短暂人生竟又是如此转瞬即逝, 以至于除极少数人之外, 其余的人都还没来得及开始生活便寿数已尽。

并非只有平庸之辈和疏于思考的大众苍生才对这种人们所说的世间通病发出哀叹, 那些声名显赫的人物也会因同样感觉而抱怨, 因此也才有了最伟大的医学之父^②的至理名言: “人生苦短, 艺术恒久。”

连亚里士多德也会因此而大发牢骚, 那是与其智者身份极不相宜的。他指责自然如此偏宠动物, 竟然让它们活出五个、十个生命周期, 却把人的生命限制在极其短暂的时间里, 尽管

① 保利努斯: 塞内加的朋友, 是主管罗马粮食供养的官员。

② 希波克拉底。

for men who are born to a great and extensive destiny.

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*¹ *luxury*² and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death's final *constraint*³ 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. Just as when ample and princely wealth falls to a bad owner it is *squandered*⁴ in a moment, but wealth however modest, if *entrusted*⁵ to a good custodian, increases with use, so our lifetime extends amply if you manage it properly.

Why do we complain about nature? She has acted kindly: life is long if you know how to use it. But one man is gripped by *insatiable*⁶ greed, another by a laborious dedication to useless tasks. One man is soaked in wine, another *sluggish*⁷ with idleness. One man is worn out by political ambition, which is always at the mercy of the judgement of others. Another through hope of profit is driven headlong over all lands and seas by the greed of trading. Some are tormented by a passion for army life, always intent on inflicting dangers on others or anxious about danger to themselves. Some are worn out by the self-imposed servitude of thankless attendance on the great. Many are occupied by either pursuing other people's money or complaining about their own. Many pursue no fixed goal, but are tossed about in ever-changing designs by a *fickleness*⁸ which is shifting, inconstant and never satisfied with itself. Some have no

Notes

- 1 heedless ['hi:dli:s]
a. 不留心的, 不注意的
- 2 luxury ['lʌkʃəri] n.
奢侈, 享受
- 3 constraint
[kən'streɪnt] n. 限制, 约束
- 4 squander
['skwɒndə] v. 浪费, 挥霍
- 5 entrust [in'trʌst]
v. 委托, 托付
- 6 insatiable
[in'seɪjəbəl] a. 贪得无厌的, 不知足的
- 7 sluggish ['slʌɡɪj]
a. 懒惰的, 缓慢的
- 8 fickleness
['fɪkəlnis] n. 浮躁, 变化无常

他为那么众多、伟大的成就而生。

生命并非短促, 而是我们荒废太多。一生足够漫长, 如能悉心投入, 足以创造丰功伟绩。然而, 在漫不经心、挥霍无度、汲汲于无聊琐事、最终到达万劫不复的终极之时, 我们才会幡然醒悟。浑然不觉中, 时光荏苒, 生命已经逝去。因而, 实际赋予我们的生命原非短暂, 是我们自己使然; 上天所赐不薄, 是我们将其荒废虚掷。这正如败家之子将到手的万贯家财, 一掷千金, 顷刻散尽。若托付给经营有方者管理, 即便这财富不多, 也可提升使用价值。所以, 倘能妥善安排, 我们的生命便可延长。

我们为何要埋怨自然母亲? 她已经仁至义尽: 生命, 如能善用, 便足可长寿。然而, 有人贪得无厌, 欲壑难填; 有人碌碌无为, 不务正业; 有人醉生梦死, 慵懒怠惰。有人因政治野心而总是仰人鼻息, 结果心力交瘁; 有人经商发财, 惟利是图, 得陇望蜀; 有人热衷穷兵黩武, 总是损害他人, 或总惴惴不安, 唯恐大祸临头, 因而备受煎熬; 有些人殚精竭虑, 心甘情愿鞍前马后侍奉大人物而费力不讨好; 很多人或觊觎他人的财富, 或抱怨自己的贫穷, 无暇他顾; 不少人没有追求, 随波逐流, 反复无常, 永不满足。有些人一生了无目标, 而就在他们无精打采哈欠连天时, 死神已神不知鬼不觉地降临——至此, 我毫不怀疑那

aims at all for their life's course, but death takes them unawares as they yawn *languidly*¹—so much so that I cannot doubt the truth of that *oracular*² remark of the greatest of poets: 'It is a small part of life we really live.' Indeed, all the rest is not life but merely time. *Vices*³ surround and *assail*⁴ men from every side, and do not allow them to rise again and lift their eyes to *discern*⁵ the truth, but keep them *overwhelmed*⁶ and rooted in their desires. Never can they recover their true selves. If by chance they achieve some *tranquility*⁷, just as a *swell*⁸ remains on the deep sea even after the wind has dropped, so they go on tossing about and never find rest from their desires. Do you think I am speaking only of those whose wickedness is *acknowledged*⁹? Look at those whose good fortune people gather to see: they are *choked*¹⁰ by their own blessings. How many find their riches a burden! How many burst a blood vessel by their *eloquence*¹¹ and their daily striving to show off their talents! How many are pale from constant pleasures! How many are left no freedom by the crowd of clients surrounding them! In a word, run through them all, from lowest to highest: one calls for legal assistance, another comes to help; one is on trial, another defends him, another gives a judgment; no one makes his *claim*¹² to himself, but each is *exploited*¹³ for another's sake. Ask about those whose names are learned by heart, and you will see that they have these distinguishing marks: X cultivates Y and Y cultivates Z—no one bothers about himself. Again, certain people reveal the most stupid *indignation*¹⁴: they complain about the pride of their superiors because they did not have time to give them an audience when they wanted one. But

Notes

- 1 languidly
[læŋgwɪdli] *ad.*
无精打采地
- 2 oracular
[ɔ'rækjələ] *a.* 神谕的, 玄妙深奥的
- 3 vice [vais] *n.* 罪恶, 恶习
- 4 assail [ə'seɪl] *v.* 猛烈攻击
- 5 discern [dɪ'sɜ:n] *v.* 辨别, 识辨
- 6 overwhelm
[əʊvə'hwelm] *v.* 淹没, 压倒
- 7 tranquility
[træŋ'kwɪlɪti] *n.* 平静, 宁静
- 8 swell [swel] *n.* 起伏, 浪涌
- 9 acknowledge
[ək'nɒlɪdʒ] *v.* 承认
- 10 choke [tʃəuk] *v.* 使窒息
- 11 eloquence
[eləkwəns] *n.* 雄辩
- 12 claim [kleɪm] *n.* 要求
- 13 exploit [ɪk'splɔɪt] *v.* 剥削, 利用
- 14 indignation
[ɪndɪg'neɪʃən] *n.* 愤怒

位最伟大诗人的经典名句：“我们真正活过的那段生命仅仅是一小部分。”的确如此，其余的部分不能算是生命，仅仅是时间而已。恶习裹挟着人们，从四面八方发起进攻，使人们不得再起身睁眼去识辨真相，只能俯首就擒，任欲火中烧而不能自拔，永远失去自我。即使侥幸得到一丝安宁，依然辗转反侧，终难摆脱邪念的缠磨回归平静，就像深海的水即使在风暴肆虐过后仍然翻腾不息。你觉得我说的都是公认的邪恶之徒？看看那些被众人追捧的幸运儿吧，祝福的甜言蜜语令其窒息。多少人为财富所累！多少人高谈阔论，终日为展示自己的天赋才华而呕心沥血！多少人沉溺于无度的享乐而憔悴枯槁！又有多少人囿于门客的包围之中而身不由己！总而言之，纵观这些人，从平民百姓到达官显贵——这位请求法律援助，那位提供帮助；这位接受审判，那位为其辩护，而另一位做出判决；无人为自己提出要求，每个人都在为他人耗散精力。问到那些知名人士，你就会发现他们都有着这样的显著特征：甲想讨好乙，乙想讨好丙，没有人为自己操心。于是又有某些人无名火起——他们抱怨上司目中无人，因为他们希望有人倾听时，上司却忙得无暇旁顾。不过如果一个人自己总是自顾不暇的时候，又怎敢抱怨他人傲气十足呢？然而，无论你