

## THE LIFE WORTH LIVING IN ANCIENT GREEK AND ROMAN PHILOSOPHY

The account of the best life for humans – i.e. a happy or flourishing life – and what it might consist of was the central theme of ancient ethics. But what does it take to have a life that, if not happy, is at least worth living, compared with being dead or never having come into life? This question was also much discussed in antiquity, and David Machek's book reconstructs, for the first time, philosophical engagements with the question from Socrates to Plotinus. Machek's comprehensive book explores ancient views on a life worth living against a background of the pessimistic outlook on the human condition which was adopted by the Greek poets, and also shows the continuities and contrasts between the ancient perspective and modern philosophical debates about biomedical ethics and the ethics of procreation. His rich study of this relatively neglected theme offers a fresh and compelling narrative of ancient ethics.

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ROMAN PHILOSOPHY

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*To my grandparents  
mým prarodičům  
Majka, Jára, Janko a Sáva*

[Odysseus visiting the Kingdom of the Dead]

‘But you, Achilles,  
there’s not a man in the world more blest than you –  
there never has been, never will be one.  
Time was, when you were alive, we Argives  
honored you as a god, and now down here, I see,  
you lord it over the dead in all your power.  
So grieve no more at dying, great Achilles.’

I reassured the ghost, but he broke out, protesting,  
‘No winning words about death to me, shining Odysseus!  
By god, I’d rather slave on earth for another man –  
some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive –  
than rule down here over all the breathless dead.’  
(Homer, *Odyssey* xi.548–559, transl. Fagles)

## *Contents*

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	I
1.1 Questions and Objectives	1
1.2 Pessimistic Poets, Optimistic Philosophers?	8
1.3 The Analytic Toolbox	12
1.4 The Contemporary Discourse and the Ancient Views	20
1.5 Some Background Assumptions of Ancient Theories	27
1.6 The Approach	32
1 Plato on Making Life Worth Living by Doing One's Job	34
1.1 Happy Life and Life Worth Living	34
1.2 The Unexamined Life Is Not Worth Living	36
1.3 Death Better than Life with a Corrupted Soul	40
1.4 Why Is a Good Carpenter's Life Worth Living?	49
1.5 Bad Use of the Soul and the Value of Mere Living	55
1.6 The Unexamined Life Reconsidered	58
1.7 Retrospect and Prospect	60
2 Aristotle on the Natural Goodness of Life	63
2.1 Three-Level Axiology of Life	63
2.2 <i>Eudaimonia</i> , or the Life Most Worth Living	66
2.3 Life Is Fine	70
2.4 The Good versus the Mere Exercise of Function	77
2.5 Lives Not Worth Living	85
2.6 Unhappy Lives Worth Living	91
2.7 Practical Implications of Choosing Life	94
2.8 Jellyfish and Humans: Plato and Aristotle on Life Worth Living	95
3 Decoupling Happy Life from Life Worth Living in Stoicism	99
3.1 Two Ways of Doing Well	99
3.2 Happiness, Virtue and Indifferent Things	103
3.3 Life Worth Continuing	113
3.4 Life Worth Beginning	124

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
3.5	Mere Living As a Preferred Indifferent	127
3.6	The Necessary Meaningfulness of the Human Life	130
3.7	Stoics and Aristotle on Life Worth Living	132
4	Threshold Nears the Target: Hellenistic Hedonists on the Life Worth Living	135
4.1	Ancient Hedonists As Optimists?	135
4.2	Hegesias the Cyrenaic: Threshold as the Target	138
4.3	Epicureans on Happiness and Death	141
4.4	The Axiological Dominance of <i>Ataraxia</i>	151
4.5	The Life Worth Continuing	155
4.6	Epicureans and the Value of Mere Living	159
4.7	No Life Worth Living without Philosophy	160
5	Peripatetics on Vicious Humans and Caged Animals	164
5.1	Introducing Later Peripatetics	164
5.2	Peripatetic Happiness After Aristotle	168
5.3	Life as an Intrinsic Conditional Good	178
5.4	Lives Not Worth Living	183
5.5	Unhappy Life Worth Living, or the Decent Life	190
5.6	No Life Worth Living without Freedom	193
6	Plotinus on the Worth of Embodied Existence	195
6.1	Competing Perspectives on the Value of Embodied Life	195
6.2	Metaphysical Fundamentals	200
6.3	Happiness as the Abundance of Life	205
6.4	Life Worth Beginning	212
6.5	Life Worth Continuing	218
6.6	Plotinus, Plato, the Stoics and Aristotle on the Value of (Mere) Life	221
	Conclusions	224
	C.1 Philosophers and the Poets	224
	C.2 Ancients and Moderns	230
	<i>Bibliography</i>	233
	<i>Index Locorum</i>	247
	<i>Subject Index</i>	251

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## *Abbreviations*

### **Alexander Aphrodisias**

*Eth. Quest.*      *Ethical Questions*

### **Aristotle**

DA	<i>De anima</i> (On the Soul)
EE	<i>Eudemian Ethics</i>
GA	<i>Generation of Animals</i>
GC	<i>Generation and Corruption</i>
HA	<i>History of Animals</i>
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>Mete.</i>	<i>Meteorology</i>
NE	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
PA	<i>Parts of Animals</i>
<i>Ph.</i>	<i>Physics</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politics</i>
<i>Protr.</i>	<i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>Rh.</i>	<i>Rhetoric</i>

### **Cicero**

DND	<i>De natura deorum</i> (On the Nature of the Gods)
<i>Fin.</i>	<i>De finibus</i> (On Moral Ends)
<i>Off.</i>	<i>De officiis</i> (On Duties)
<i>Tusc.</i>	<i>Tusculan Disputations</i>

### **Diogenes Laertius**

DL	<i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i>
----	--------------------------------------

**Epictetus**

*Diss.*            *Dissertationes*  
*Ench.*            *Enchiridion*

**Epicurus**

*Ep. Men.*        *Letter to Menoecus*  
 KD                *Key Doctrines*  
 VS                *Vatican Sayings*

**Galen**

PHP                *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* (On the Doctrines of  
 Hippocrates and Plato)

**Lucretius**

DRN                *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things)

**Marcus Aurelius**

*Med.*                *Meditations*

**Plato**

*Alc.*                *Alcibiades*  
*Ap.*                *Apology*  
*Charm.*            *Charmides*  
*Clit.*                *Clitophon*  
*Cr.*                 *Crito*  
*Euthyd.*            *Euthydemus*  
*Grg.*                *Gorgias*  
*Leg.*                *Laws*  
*Men.*                *Meno*  
*Phd.*                *Phaedo*  
*Phlb.*                *Philebus*  
*Resp.*                *Republic*

*List of Abbreviations*

xiii

**Plotinus**

*Enn.*                      *Enneads*

**Plutarch**

*De com. not.*        *De communibus notitiis contra Stoicos*  
 (On Common Conceptions)  
*De st. rep.*            *De Stoicorum repugnantiiis* (On the Stoic  
 Self-Contradictions)  
*De virt. mor.*        *De virtute morali* (On Moral Virtue)

**Seneca**

*Ep.*                      *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* (Moral Letters)

**Sextus Empiricus**

AP                      *Against the Professors*

**Stobaeus**

*Ecl.*                      *Eclogae*