

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

[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)

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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>
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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

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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*