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## Ethics in Antiquity: The Quest for the good life

### Abstract

What is a good life? How do we become happy? These are questions of perennial concern to human beings, questions that we today encounter in all sorts of public and private discourse. One of the distinguishing marks of ancient ethics from Socrates to Augustine is precisely that it places the concept of the good life, which philosophers and others agree is a life of happiness at the centre of ethical thought.

Our project is motivated by the conviction that the study of the ancient heritage in this field can offer a welcome opportunity to reconsider the complex issue of what a good life should consist in. To achieve a better understanding of how ancient ethics is organized around the concept of the good life, or happiness, a systematic as well as an historical approach is called for.

Since happiness was an issue that engaged people far beyond the schools of the philosophers, our project takes into account not only philosophical texts, but also pre-philosophical and "popular" concepts of the good life.

In view of the general interest and accessibility of the topic, the project aims not only at inquiring into ancient ethics broadly understood, but also to provoke and engage in discussion with people from various areas of life

Among the more strictly philosophical problems that will be scrutinized is the very concept of happiness, and the relationship between happiness and success, society, morality and the virtues. More broadly cultural topics are the idea of the choice of life, the role of models and paradigms, and the contribution of intellectual culture or *paideia* to happiness.