Aristotle on the Goodness of Unhappy Lives

In this talk I engage with Aristotle’s views about the value of human life from a perspective that goes beyond his familiar theory of the good or happy life. For Aristotle, the happy life is the ultimate end and the highest good; but could even unhappy human lives, possibly including vicious lives, have some non-instrumental value? In the first part of this talk I argue that, for Aristotle, all human lives are intrinsically good by virtue of fully satisfying the definition, and thus function, of their biological species. This rudimentary goodness is independent of whether the life is lived well or badly. In the second part, I discuss broader systematic implications of this view both within the framework of Aristotle’s ethics and beyond. If a human life can be a good independently of its being good, does this not lead to two different and potentially competing ends of the human life? One end is the life of excellence, or the virtuous life; another end is the life of intensity, which maximizes one’s vital activities regardless of their moral value.

Zur Person:
David Machek is a Swiss National Science Foundation Ambizione-Fellow at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Berne. He is the author of The Life Worth Living in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy (forthcoming with Cambridge University Press), as well as numerous scholarly articles on Greek and also Chinese philosophy published in Archiv für die Geschichte der Philosophie, Journal of the History of Philosophy, Philosophy East and West and elsewhere.

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InteressentInnen sind herzlich eingeladen!