

Autarkia And Epicurean Living In The Modern World

Post by “Macario” of September 16, 2021 at 6:06 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

I would be careful about ascribing the meaning of "economic" self-sufficiency to that word. From what I can find, autarkeia (the word in ancient Greek) had a self-sufficiency connotation of satisfied with yourself, content with yourself, etc.

[Quote from Don](#)

It appears there is some economic self-sufficiency implied by autarkeia, but more to be satisfied with what you have as far as I can tell.

It seems to me that the term 'self-sufficiency' in Epicurean Philosophy, is strongly related to an economic meaning. What I could understand from DeWitt's utilization of the word is that corresponds, not to be satisfied with what you have, but to the ability of fulfilling one's "natural and necessary desires" (food, water and shelter) with one's own resources. If this is the case, then I believe the self-sufficiency concept pursued in an eco-village/agro-forestry model would be in accordance with the Epicurean one, since the goal is to use the land (own resource) to provide food, water and shelter without depending on public/private services.

I'd like to quote fragments of DeWitt's book that led me to that interpretation of self-sufficiency:

Quote

[Chapter X: The New Freedom / Section: Necessity and Fortune]

"According to Epicurus, the wise man will keep himself prepared through addiction to the simple life and the cultivation of self-sufficiency. During a siege of Athens he kept his associates alive by doling out the beans. One of his apothegms applies to such an emergency: "The wise man, when confronted by lack of the necessities, stands by to share with others rather than to have them share with him; so great a reserve of self-sufficiency he discovers."

(...)

So consistently does Epicurus urge throughout his teaching the maintenance of freedom and the control of experience, which is freedom at its best, that he even brings it into relationship with diet and the general design of living. (...) To Epicurus the

simple life meant contentment with little and this was called self-sufficiency, which in turn meant freedom: "Of self-sufficiency the most precious fruit is freedom." That the reference of these words was to food and not to friendship is made clear by the following: "The wise man, when confronted by lack of the necessities, stands by rather to share with others than to have them share with him; so great a reserve of self-sufficiency he discovers." (...) The proper attitude toward the desires, according to Authorized Doctrine 29, is to regard some as "natural and necessary," others as "natural but not necessary," and the rest as "neither natural nor necessary." The first class has reference to food, drink, clothing, and housing. (...) The correct procedure is defined in Vatican Saying 21: "Human nature is not to be coerced but persuaded, and we shall persuade her by satisfying the necessary desires, and the natural desires if they are not injurious, but relentlessly denying the harmful."

[Chapter XIV: The New Virtues / Section: Hope]

(...) "there was no necessity of living with Necessity"; by building up a reserve of self-sufficiency the wise man could forestall the compulsions of poverty, war, or servitude.

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It also seems to me that "self-sufficiency" is a requirement to reach the state of "ataraxia", since the possibility of not being able to fulfill your basic needs (like having shelter and something to eat) would put you in a state of disturbance.

Quote

"The wise man, when confronted by lack of the necessities, stands by to share with others rather than to have them share with him; so great a reserve of self-sufficiency he discovers."

This sentence is very important to me in particular, since it makes me realize that that are basically two ways of increasing the "reserve of self-sufficiency": accumulating more resources or limiting your necessities; both will do it, but the last one seems much easier to achieve.

At last, my overall knowledge of Epicurean philosophy is still very limited, so I appreciate you guys pointing out any signs of misinterpretation.