

"Natural and Necessary" As A Sliding Scale

Post by "Cassius" of March 29, 2019 at 3:04 PM

This was posted elsewhere by one of our members here:

I recently bought a copy of Philodemus's On Property Management. I have not read the whole thing yet, and there are a lot of interesting points that might be good for this discussion. For now, though, I'd like to give a short summary of the attitude towards wealth that Philodemus presents so far in what I have read: "The wise man will never be bound by wealth in such a way as to endure, in order to preserve it, toils that are great and are not such as to be exchanged for any quantity of wealth. For what makes its use painless and the enjoyment deriving from it pure must be this, the fact that for sages no heavy care about how it will be possible to preserve it is attached to the possession of wealth, not even when circumstances become most critical."

About a paragraph later, he adds: "As to greater wealth, if it comes in a harmless and easy manner, then it is to be welcomed; but to suffer on account of that very thing should not be tolerated"

OK one more: "the right management of wealth lies in this: in not feeling distressed about what one loses and in not trapping oneself on treadmills because of an obsessive zeal concerning the more and the less."

One of the points he made was that the amount of work required to provide some of the luxuries of wealth take very little extra effort above and beyond what is required to provide for our necessities and they provide enough ease and comfort to make it worth that effort - even if they are, in fact, luxuries. There is no overall prescription in the writing about how much one should own or not and Philodemus refers to both the wealthy and moderate lifestyle. The take-away for me seems to be that the amount of wealth is not what is important so much as the attitude we have towards it. Thus fragment 108 quoted above is meant more as a prescription for a diathesis rather than a prescription for our actual level of wealth that we work towards. Diogenes of Oinoanda was, after all, a wealthy man, was he not?

Thoughts?