

Autarkia And Epicurean Living In The Modern World

Post by “Don” of September 17, 2021 at 3:58 PM

If we end up with a good discussion on autarkeia here, [Cassius](#) may want to move this part of the "Welcome Philia" thread to another spot. Just a suggestion.

Sorry, [Macario](#), for the delay in responding to your posts above!

[Quote from Macario](#)

It seems to me that the term 'self-sufficiency' in Epicurean Philosophy, is strongly related to an economic meaning.

My soapbox here on the forum is always go back to the original texts, and don't trust any one translation of any word that was originally in Greek or Latin. I saw that [Saint-Andre has this note on Vatican Saying 44](#):

Quote

VS44: When the sage contends with necessity, he is skilled at giving rather than taking — such a treasury of self-reliance has he found.

ὁ σοφὸς εἰς τὰ ἀναγκαῖα συγκριθεῖς μᾶλλον ἐπίσταται μεταδιδόναι ἢ μεταλαμβάνειν· τηλικούτον αὐτάρκειας εὔρε θησαυρόν.

[44] The word αὐτάρκεια is often translated as "self-sufficiency", but I think "self-reliance" is slightly better because the Epicurean sage needs friends and therefore is not entirely self-sufficient.

So, right away, we have self-reliance and self-sufficiency as two options. I agree they may mean similar things, but it doesn't get us closer to whether it's economic, a sense of satisfaction, contentment with circumstances, or a combination or something else.

Thank you for the quote from DeWitt. As [Cassius](#) will no doubt confirm, I have certain problems with DeWitt's interpretation and lack of citations sometimes. I took a look at the section you referenced, especially because I was curious about the beans! Sure enough, the footnote for that is from [Plutarch, Demetrius, Chapt. 24](#): "At this time also, we are told, the philosopher Epicurus sustained the lives of his associates with beans, which he counted out and distributed among them." In Greek, "associates" is [συνήθης](#) which seems more friendly than that word would imply, I'd like something like "ones with whom he was well-acquainted or intimate with one."

But, I realize, I digress. This doesn't get us closer to an understanding of what αὐτάρκεια conveyed to the ancient Greek mind. What I'm going to do is take a look at where that word shows up in Epicurus's extant work (to the best of my ability)

We've seen VS44 above.

VS45. The study of what is natural produces not braggarts nor windbags nor those who show off the culture that most people fight about, but those who are fearless and self-reliant and who value their own good qualities rather than the good things that have come to them from external circumstances. οὐ κομποῦς οὐδὲ φωνῆς ἐργαστικούς οὐδὲ τὴν περιμάχητον παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς παιδεῖαν ἐνδεικνυμένους φυσιολογία παρασκευάζει, ἀλλὰ σοβαροῦς καὶ αὐτάρκεις καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀγαθοῖς, οὐκ ἐπὶ τοῖς τῶν πραγμάτων μέγα φρονοῦντες.

VS77: The greatest fruit of self-reliance is freedom. τῆς αὐταρκείας καρπὸς μέγιστος ἐλευθερία

Fragment 202. He who follows nature and not groundless opinions is completely self-reliant. With regard to what is enough by nature, everything he owns is a source of wealth; whereas with regard to unlimited desires, even the greatest wealth is poverty. ὁ οὖν τῇ φύσει παρακολουθῶν καὶ μὴ ταῖς κεναῖς δόξαις ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτάρκης· πρὸς γὰρ τὸ τῇ φύσει ἀρκοῦν πᾶσα κτήσις ἐστι πλοῦτος, πρὸς δὲ τὰς ἀορίστους ὀρέξεις καὶ ὁ μέγιστος πλοῦτός ἐστι πενία.

Fragment 476: 476. Self-reliance is the greatest wealth of all. πλουσιώτατον αὐτάρκεια πάντων.

And, please let me add, I'm not copying these here to be pedantic! I just want all those in one spot to make it easier for us to refer to them. That's all for now that I can find on the fly.

Fragment 202 especially, to me, gets at contentment with what one has and not necessarily being economically self-reliant/self-sufficient.

The definition in LSJ for αὐτάρκεια is [here](#) and the definition gives links to:

Plato. [Philebus, 67a](#).

Socrates

In this argument, then, both mind and pleasure were set aside; neither of them is the absolute good, since they are devoid of self-sufficiency, adequacy, and perfection?

Aristotle, [Nicomachean Ethics, 1097b](#).

The same conclusion also appears to follow from a consideration of the self-sufficiency of happiness—for it is felt that the final good must be a thing sufficient in itself. The term self-sufficient, however, we employ with reference not to oneself alone, living a life of isolation, but also to one's parents and children and wife, and one's friends and fellow citizens in general, since man is by nature a social being....

Happiness, therefore, being found to be something final and self-sufficient, is the End at which all actions aim.

Aristotle, [Rhetoric. 1.6.](#)

To enumerate them one by one, the following things must necessarily be good. Happiness, since it is desirable in itself and self-sufficient, and to obtain it we choose a number of things.

Aristotle, [Politics, 1.1256b.](#)

This then virtually completes the list of the various modes of life, those at least that have their industry sprung from themselves and do not procure their food by barter and trade—the lives of the herdsman, the brigand, the fisherman, the hunter, the husband-man. Others also live pleasantly by combining some of these pursuits, supplementing the more deficient life where it happens to fall short in regard to being self-sufficing: for instance, some combine a pastoral life and brigandage, others husbandry and hunting, and similarly with the others—they pass their time in such a combination of pursuits as their need compels. Property of this sort then seems to be bestowed by nature herself upon all, as immediately upon their first coming into existence, so also when they have reached maturity.

The final selection from Aristotle definitely has an economic aspect; however, the excerpt from Plato has an aspect of contentment about it. So, it seems to have been a multi-purpose word. But I'll post this, and feel free to continue the discussion! I find this very pleasurable to engage in.