

Natural Wealth and Natural Goods in Epicureanism

Post by “Cassius” of July 22, 2022 at 4:48 PM

O'Keefe's title is "... on the DEVIANT craft of property management"?

It was not my understanding that Philodemus took a negative attitude toward property management.

I need a big caveat on my comments about this thread that I really need to read some of this material before commenting extensively. I have the Voula Tsouna book but it has been too long since I read it.

Scanning over it now I see this from page XXVI

Quote

According to Philodemus, Cynics and Epicureans agree that the best life is free from toil and worry but disagree as to how it can be attained, especially in respect of the possession and administration of wealth. On the one hand, the Cynics advocate a beggarly lifestyle for the reason that wealth is troublesome and, therefore, harmful to one's peace of mind.

On the other hand, Metrodorus maintains that a peaceful and happy life is obtained not by avoiding all toils and efforts but by opting for things that may involve a certain amount of trouble at present but relieve us of much greater concerns in the future. Wealth is such a thing, as are health and friendship. Although its possession and administration doubtless requires thought and labor, it is better to have it than not, for its presence allows the virtuous man to live pleasantly, whereas its absence is responsible for deprivation and distress. The only way in which the Cynics might be able to establish that the possession of natural wealth (φυσικὸς πλοῦτος , XIV.19) 22 is less preferable to the daily provision of goods would be to prove that, in fact, the former entails more pains and efforts than the latter. However, following Metrodorus's line, Philodemus suggests that it is highly unlikely that such a proof would be forthcoming. One practical implication of the Epicurean position is that the good person should not reject as useless the wealth that may come his way. The entire argument is based on the rational calculation of pleasures and pains and also makes use of the concept of natural wealth, which is related to the concept of the measure of wealth (πλούτου μέτρον). 23 Since Philodemus's presentation of Epicurean οἰκονομία (property management) involves both these notions, I shall explain them briefly.

In outline, natural wealth is one of the many objects that we naturally seek in order to satisfy natural desires and thus feel pleasure. In so far as this kind of desire has a limit, natural wealth also has a limit, and, besides, it is easy to obtain (Epicurus, Sent. 15) precisely because it is natural (Epicurus, Ep. Men. 130).²⁴ Correspondingly, the measure of wealth

that is appropriate for the philosopher covers the range of the philosopher's natural needs. "There is for the philosopher a measure of wealth that, [following] the founders of the school, we have passed down in [the treatise] *On Wealth*, resulting in an account of the capacity to administer the acquisition of this and the preservation of this" (XII.17-25). Further, in so far as the measure of wealth satisfies the philosopher's natural needs, it is slightly superior (De div. LI.27-30) or, from another perspective (see De oec. XIV.9-23), clearly preferable to poverty. In fact, there is tension in Philodemus's position. On the one hand, he emphasizes the instrumental importance of wealth and its administration for the good life. On the other hand, following the authorities of the school, he holds on to the view

that the difference between possessing and lacking wealth, and between preserving it and not preserving it, is but small (XVIII.25-31), and he suggests that the superiority of wealth is mainly practical rather than moral.

Roughly, the position that he maintains is the following. "More" wealth may be better than "less," because of the serenity and the material comforts that it affords when it is correctly used. Further, "more" wealth can be interpreted in many ways, since Philodemus does not fix precisely how much money and possessions are optimal for the philosophical life. On the other hand, "more" corresponds somehow to "the measure of wealth" but never amounts to the open-ended goal of traditional οἰκονομία, namely, to amass as many riches as possible through decent and lawful means.

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