

The Neglect of Metrodorus' Economics

Post by "Hiram" of February 15, 2020 at 4:35 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Hiram I do not understand why you conclude that this subject is not of interest here. The SUBJECT is certainly of interest, but even in the title of this thread you are stating that the topic is "The NEGLECT of Metrodorus' Economics" and accusing me or others of "neglecting" it?

I'm glad you're interested on the subject. As you know, the Philodeman translations on amazon sometimes go for over 200 dollars, so I felt that this was part of the work I wanted to do to make this available to modern people: comment on it, and comment from a MODERN perspective.

I don't accuse you particularly of neglecting the subject of Oikonomias, but in general most Epicureans today, and this is in part because there hasn't been enough of an attempt to update those ancient conversations for a modern paradigm on our part.

My first instinct when I read about a "doctrine of natural measure of wealth" was to use the canon, meaning empirical evidence. So I went after research associated with how happiness relates to wealth. That's when I found the study that claims that happiness correlates to wealth up to 60-75 K income, and beyond that other factors matter more.

<https://money.com/ideal-income-study/>

This allows us to begin to modernize those ancient conversations.

But it also provides some evidence for what Metrodorus was arguing: if the studies showed that there is NO correlation between wealth and happiness, then this would have proven the Cynics' view that wealth doesn't matter, you can be fully destitute and be happy. But that's not the case. See? This is how I expect others to use the canon. If enough minds study these teachings in a focused manner, and with a modern outlook, rather than give up and say "oh that's silly", or "Metrodorus was wrong", then a modern version of the Oikonomias aspect of the doctrine can be articulated.

Quote

So when you say:

I don't think it is obvious at all what you mean. What kind of "evolution of discourse" is necessary in order to find reliable quotes, post them publicly, and analyse what they say? That is what I am trying to do by pointing out the basic context of the hedonic calculus, and then applying that general rule to economics so that we can judge in context what these fragmentary remains appear to say.

Yes, we all agree that there are no absolute rules of justice, but we also agree that we need to furnish our basic expenses and necessities no matter when and where we live, and that our philosophy IS useful and HAS concrete things to say about how we go about securing these basic goods.

Evolution of discourse, one of the things that comes to mind is how Epicurus had slaves and the ancients saw nothing wrong with that. We can not enslave people today. Also, this brings up many questions (on the objectification of others and to what extent it's inevitable, for instance, even if we are pursuing mutual benefit) that we should as modern Epicureans be ready to discuss and handle meaningfully and intelligently, using the tools we've been given. They're not EASY issues to tackle, but they're there, and it's a good intellectual challenge for us. At some point I will have to tackle this maybe with other authors, or with economist-philosophers maybe, to bring the useful points from Philodemus' "On wealth" and "On property management" into a modern context.

Another thing that comes to mind is how Philodemus considered "equestrian" a bad profession choice, but that does not exist today.

or how I can't make a living as a non academic philosopher, unlike Philodemus. So that first, and ideal, way of making a living that he recommended is not available to us today.

Our economics paradigm is completely different, but similar criteria to what they employed in antiquity can be employed to figure out a modern appreciation of the Oikonomias aspect of the teaching. So when I speak of evolution of our discourse, of our discussions about Epicurean economics, those are some of the issues.

Quote

I expect to have to debate the role of pleasure with academics who are set on interpreting Epicurus from a minimalist perspective, but I would not think it would be necessary for us to be debating that here -- and yet that is the clear implication of the way you are wording your approach - that you are looking for a "natural measure" framed in Stoic / absolute / virtue terms rather than in terms of pleasure always being the end goal.

If what bothers you about the "natural measure of wealth" is that it's a minimalist doctrine, then I would challenge you to interpret it non-minimally. I would not say "discard it", because there are two main issues:

1. On the lower end, there is the Cynical view that pleasure or happiness has nothing to do with wealth. This doctrine says that IT DOES, and that we do not recommend extreme poverty.
2. On the upper end, it's limitless and empty desires, which is address again and again in the sources.

And so it seems to me that the natural measure of wealth is meant to rectify both errors, and that we should be critical of both, not only of the minimalist one. It's not pleasant to be destitute, and it's also not pleasant to have endless cravings when so much of the banquet of life is already right under our noses.

I do not think I need to even mention that our discussion must happen within an Epicurean context, and I should not have to repeat this every single time we investigate some philosophical issue.

I believe that this natural measure of wealth was discussed in the context of choices and avoidances and of hedonic calculus, not in service of virtue. If you accuse me of that at this point after all these years, you're just talking past me and not with me. If I find a commentator like Yona who uses virtue as a referent, then I'll switch the referent to pleasure, but I won't dismiss the entire discussion for that reason, or the sources, or the moral questions being addressed which may be legitimate.

I hope these issues become clearer. Epicurus says we should study alone and with others, and there are different benefits to both, and I'd like to be able to carry out focused study with knowledgeable people from time to time without so much unnecessary miscommunication, suspicion, and accusation.