

The Neglect of Metrodorus' Economics

Post by "Hiram" of February 12, 2020 at 6:05 PM

<http://societyofepicurus.com/on-philodemus-...gement-part-ii/>

I'm currently working on the audiobook, will include Philodemus writings and am re-reading some of them. While reading the closing paragraph of "Art of property management", this grabbed my attention:

Quote

"We believe that the tranquil administration of one's property does not require great subtlety and that wealth is superior to poverty. At the same time we believe that **it's necessary to hand down a tradition of the most general principles and to outline many details in the treatises concerning the care and preservation of possessions.**"

I noticed here that the epicureans were being instructed to write Outlines of the Doctrines on Epicurean economics. This, like almost all else on this scroll, must have started with Metrodorus.

Also noticed that throughout this scroll Philodemus is constantly mentioning "Metrodorus said this, Metrodorus said that". And he cites many works that had been written by Metro on the subject of economics that did not survive to our time, as well as he mentions that Metrodorus was a great manager of property.

This quote indicates that economics was an important and necessary part of the doctrine, but there seems to be very little interest in the subject among modern Epicureans except for myself. I'd like that to change.

Have others read the translation of On the art of property management?

<https://www.amazon.com/Philodemus-Pro.../dp/1589836677/>

Post by "Cassius" of February 12, 2020 at 6:36 PM

I have a copy of that but I have only scanned it. I think there is or would be a TREMENDOUS amount of interest in anything reliably handed down by Philodemus, but not when

(1) the Academic world keeps the material under wraps and makes it impossible to study freely by anyone, and

(2) what is left is so fragmentary that the narrative is largely a matter of speculative reconstruction so that you don't really know whether to trust the rendering or not.

For example this is what I see as to what you just quoted. The parts in brackets are reconstructed, but what about the rest of the text? What does the piece of paper or papyri that bears these characters look like? Is this a penciled version made by those who unrolled the text 100+ years ago? How do we know that they deciphered the texts correctly? As far as being instructed to write outlines, we know that Epicurus says that in the letter to Herodotus. But these words "to hand down a tradition" are in brackets - what is the basis for this reconstruction? Sounds reasonable, but how do we know?:

COLUMN XXVIII 20

καὶ εἶναι πρὸς τὰς ἐπιπέδους καὶ πολλὰ κατὰ [μέρος]¹
διαζώδους πρὸς ἐπι-
μειλίαιαν καὶ φυλακὴν [χρη]μά-
των, καὶ [μ]ὲν [στ' ἐ]ν τῇ [παρ]
πλούτου καὶ πενίας καὶ τῇ
πε[ρ]ὶ θε[σι]τῆς πολυτε[λο]υς
τε καὶ λι[σι]τῆς καὶ τῇ περὶ
αἰρέσεων καὶ φυγῶν κἄν εἴ
τινὲς εἴσιν ἄλλαι τοιαῦται.

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10

COLUMN XXVIII

it is, nevertheless, necessary [to hand down a tradition] of the most **general principles** and to outline [many details]⁸⁰ in the treatises [concerning] the care and preservation of possessions, and [chiefly in] the treatise on wealth and poverty, the one on the luxurious and the frugal ways of life, the one on things to be chosen and to be avoided, and in any other treatises of this sort.

So as far as I can tell the best way to change and expand the level of discussion would be to find a way to bridge the gap between what we have free access to and the original sources.

In writing this I mean no criticism whatsoever to anyone, Hiram or Voula Tsouna. All I am saying is that reliance on heavily reconstructed texts is perilous without a clear chain documenting the evidence at every stage. And maybe equally importantly, having it only be the available only at significant cost makes the work much that harder.

Perhaps these texts are in fact available somewhere on one of the public websites, but tracking down that chain is a large part of the work that needs to be done.

Post by “Hiram” of February 12, 2020 at 6:54 PM

Re: the fragmentary nature of it, this is one of the most complete scrolls, but also we should not shy away from developing A MODERN oikonomia tradition, translating those conversations into relevant discussions of today on how to best carry out hedonic calculus on these issues today, like they were doing.

I think now that on this forum you have started podcasts and systematic studies of DeWitt and other sources, and are encouraging students to write outlines, it might be a good project to set aside some time to study this scroll and encouraging outlines of the economics, as well as having MODERN discussions of this content, since so much of it is relevant but we don't live in ancient Roman times and this needs updating.

Philodemus even mentions that people should diversify their nest egg. I mean, we have a pretty developed doctrine of economics.

Oh and I wanted to see if Vatican Saying uses the same word that Philodemus uses / oikonomia / so I checked the monadnock translation, which has the Greek next to the English. It does say "oikonomein". This means that the founders believed that the management of one's property and household is woven into how Epicureans should philosophize.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 41. One must laugh and seek wisdom and tend to one's home life and use one's other goods, and always recount the pronouncements of true philosophy. | γελᾶν ἅμα δεῖ καὶ φιλοσοφεῖν καὶ οἰκονομεῖν καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς οἰκειώμασι χρῆσθαι καὶ μηδαμῆ λήγειν τὰς ἐκ τῆς ὀρθῆς φιλοσοφίας φωνὰς ἀφιέντας. |
|---|---|

Post by “Cassius” of February 12, 2020 at 8:15 PM

Certainly I agree that any reliable text material should be explored and discussed, so I will try to follow along and comment on anything you post in this area. I know my comments may appear to be negative but I do not intend them that way -- as long as we can present reliable and verifiable material to work with, and we make clear the limitations and what part is speculative and what part is clear, and what part is our own speculations, I'm all in favor of the discussion.

Post by “Hiram” of February 13, 2020 at 8:44 AM

Below is my latest updated version of my commentary on the scroll.

Also notice that there are two essays on Horace and how he writes about the “natural measure of wealth”. Keep in mind Horace was at Piso’s villa studying philosophy. So he was deeply familiar with these discussions, and even created a character Ofellus who embodied Epicurean teachings on economics and this might be worth studying to help us evaluate what beliefs and values Ofellus embodied.

In this scroll, Philodemus makes frequent appeals to the authority of Metrodorus, one of the founders of the School, who promoted the idea that hedonic calculus must be employed in the management of one’s household and economic affairs, making the point time and again that we must run certain risks and go through certain inconveniences in order to avoid greater ruin and gain greater advantages.

He disagreed with the destitute life of the Cynics, and appears to have made this point while arguing against them and in favor of a doctrine of the natural measure of wealth. This corresponds to that which is needed to secure the natural and necessary pleasures, and to have the confident expectation that we will be able to secure them in the future.

Metrodorus argued that some things cause pain when present, but cause even more pain when absent and, therefore, shouldn’t be avoided. This is the case with health, which requires some work and some inconvenience to secure, but without it we suffer greatly. It is also the case with family members and friends who oftentimes are difficult to understand and to get along with, but whom we miss when absent.

Quote

Indeed, I think that 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. – Metrodorus

Philodemus also advances the idea of expressing value in terms of social capital. He compares our investment of time, money and effort in our dearest friends with “those who sow seeds in the earth. From these things ... it becomes possible to reap many times more fruits”. For this reason, he says that the philosopher who manages property will secure his natural measure of wealth, and use some of the surplus generously with his friends. This way, he will be able to count on his friends when in need, and they will also add to his happiness and security in the present. By comparison, a property manager who is not informed by Epicurean philosophy, will likely avoid spending time with friends, and will deprive himself of the enjoyment of their

company and of the many other benefits that come from having good friends.

Philodemus was teaching philosophy to wealthy Romans, and in the scroll on the art of property management he helps his students to distinguish the good property manager from the good philosopher who happens to be a property manager. In other words, Philodemus concedes that a good property manager may be immoral or amoral, and may suffer from greed and other vices, and that the practice of philosophy among friends may lead to a shift in priorities that puts losses and gains aside to some extent. However, Philodemus maintains that a philosopher may still be a good property manager, and gives advice to help his students enjoy a life of pleasure while managing property.

Since, he says, “the philosopher does not toil”, some of his advice involves the delegation of tasks to assistants. Philodemus says that earning a living from teaching philosophy is the noblest profession. He also praises having a diverse nest egg, rather than putting all of our eggs in one basket, and so investing seems like a legitimate contemporary outlet for a philosopher.

Some of the professions available in antiquity—such as “equestrian”—as well as the practice of slavery, do not transfer into our modern reality, but Philodemus said that rental income is a dignified way to make a living, as is the gainful employment of others—so long as it’s not in a dangerous or demeaning activity, if we are to infer from Philodemus’ criticism of those who make their slaves work in mines.

The key takeaway of the scroll is that Metrodorus sought to demonstrate that the Epicurean methodology of hedonic calculus is highly practical when applied to how we manage our money, our business, and our property.

Quote

We believe that the tranquil administration of one’s property does not require great subtlety and that wealth is superior to poverty. At the same time we believe that it’s necessary to hand down a tradition of the most general principles and to outline many details in the treatises concerning the care and preservation of possessions.

Towards the end of the scroll, we learn that ancient Epicureans were instructing their students to keep outlines of Metrodorus’ doctrines on economics, saying that it was considered “necessary to hand down a tradition” of the general principles they were discussing. One of the goals of the study of this scroll is to plant the Epicurean conversation on economics and self-sufficiency firmly in the modern world so that the people of our day can relate to the teaching and more easily apply its prudent calculations to their lives. I have distilled the contents of the scroll into Seven Principles of Epicurean Economics. They are as follows:

1. There is a **natural measure of wealth** (as opposed to the corrupt, cultural measure of wealth), which is tied to natural and necessary desires. Understanding this will provide us with serenity and indifference to profit and loss.
2. There is **social wealth** in addition to the wealth of things and possessions.
3. Philodemus plainly stated it: **the philosopher does not toil**. However, we must always remember that toil is evil, not productivity.
4. **Association** is important in labor. We must choose our company prudently.
5. **Our revenue** must more than meet our immediate needs: it **must facilitate a dignified life of leisure**.
6. It's always prudent to cultivate **multiple streams of income**, among which deriving fees from the Garden's teaching mission, rental property income and business ownership, which includes gainful employment of others, have special priority.
7. It's also prudent to have fruitful possessions. The various forms of **ownership of means of production** is another way to independence that can potentially relieve us of toil.

Further Reading:

[Philodemus, On Property Management \(Writings from the Greco-Roman World\)](https://www.ancientlibrary.com/philodemus/philodemus_on_property_management.html)
[in?title=ataraxia&author=philodemus&id=1589836677](https://www.ancientlibrary.com/philodemus/philodemus_on_property_management.html)

[Horace, Ofellus and Philodemus of Gadara in Sermones 2.2, by Sergio Yona](#)

[An Epicurean measure of wealth in Horace](#)

Post by "Cassius" of February 13, 2020 at 9:08 AM

Hiram anything on Horace is presumably fully in public domain with cites to the full text where everyone can read the original and see the original context. Do you have cites for those?

I note also that the third link does not work.

Post by "Hiram" of February 13, 2020 at 12:33 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I note also that the third link does not work.

I did a search for it and this came up:

https://www.academia.edu/38083767/An_Ep...ace_Satires_1.1

Post by “Cassius” of February 13, 2020 at 1:29 PM

Thanks Hiram. THIS statement from that article is **RIDICULOUS**, which is why we need to process this material and not accept the existing discussions at face value. And more than that, we have to keep in mind that the majority of such articles are statistically going to be written expressing this kind of ridiculous opinion. Ridiculous, of course, unless we are going to accept that Epicurus was a total hypocrite by amassing the slaves and wealth that he held at the time

Overall, Epicurus strongly recommends that one seek only the bare necessities of life in stating that “poverty limited by nature is great wealth, but limitless wealth is great poverty” (SV 25: Ἡ πενία μετρουμένη τῷ τῆς φύσεως τέλει μέγας ἐστὶ πλοῦτος· πλοῦτος δὲ μὴ ὀριζόμενος μεγάλη ἐστὶ πενία). As a defender of poverty rather than penury, Epicurus’ approach to wealth lies in between that of the Cynics, who reject it outright, and the Stoics, who view its acquisition as morally obligatory since it is a “preferred indifferent” (cf. *SVF* 1.190–96), as Cicero explains in *On Duties* 2.87: *res autem familiaris quaeri debet iis rebus a quibus abest turpitudine, conservari autem*

Post by “Cassius” of February 13, 2020 at 1:33 PM

I also find these sections in red borderline ridiculous, and this emphasizes to me that it is useless and counterproductive to keep talking about "measure of wealth" without defining what we mean. How is this "measure of wealth" any different from any other measure of any other tool for happiness in the Epicurean perspective? I don't think it is, so why imply that there is some magic here? (talking to the writer, not to you, Hiram).

For the sage manager, Philodemus recommends a "measure of wealth" (*On Property Management* col. 12.17–19), which, when obtained easily from a grateful patron, frees one from troubles and, through the recipient's generosity, strengthens the bonds of friendship. Perhaps with the concerns of his Roman audience in mind, in *On Property Management* Philodemus carefully expands Epicurus' defense of poverty by arguing that "natural wealth" (col. 14.19: ὁ φυσικὸς πλοῦτος), which affords more benefits than the trouble involved in having it (col. 14.9–23), is preferable to a "life of little means" (col. 14.21–22: τῆς ἁπ' [ὀλιγίων ζωῆς]).¹³ He later qualifies this striking assertion by placing emphasis on the sage manager's disposition toward poverty: although he is by no means afraid of or distressed by the thought of poverty (coll. 15.45–16.3) because he understands that nature is easily satisfied (col. 16.3–4), he nevertheless "inclines in his wishes toward a more affluent way of life" (ῥέπει δὲ τῆς βουλεύσεια μᾶλλον ἐπὶ τὴν ἀφθονοτέραν, col. 16.4–6).

Post by "Cassius" of February 13, 2020 at 1:36 PM

Two more points here: (1) the writer is again being ambiguous and tending to make people think that the acquisition of anything by means of ANY harm (pain) is to be avoided, when that is clearly not the case.

(2) I think that this distinction about "the sage" is a dangerous distinction to. No doubt Epicurus did consider at time what the "founder of a school" might do different from any other wise person, but a philosophy oriented toward founders of schools is worse than useless -- Epicurean philosophy is oriented toward wise people in all stations of life, not specifically concerned with "sages"

Above all, he reaffirms that "one [i.e., the sage] should accept more, whenever it comes easily and without harm" (τὸ [δὲ] πλεον, ἄν ἁβ[ε]λ[ε]θ[ε]ς καὶ [εὐ]πόρος γίνηται, δεκτέ[ον], 44–46). Philodemus' observation, although strictly intended for the sage, may also have allowed wealthy Romans in his day to justify the

Post by "Cassius" of February 13, 2020 at 1:37 PM

Philodemus' observation is simple: the potential "koi" (νόσος) involved in wealth acquisition must not be more than the ultimate pleasure derived from it. In other words, it is not wealth itself that is to be avoided as an evil (cf. *On Property Management* col. 14.5–9) but only the obsession with it that inevitably violates the pleasure calculus.

THAT seems to me to be the correct point, but also a fairly obvious one. Is there really anything going on in this discussion OTHER than this point?

Post by "Cassius" of February 13, 2020 at 1:45 PM

Ok this is the final paragraph, which seems to me to summarize that nothing new is being added: the ultimate point is that wealth is to be judged just like any other choice, by the amount of pleasure and pain that it brings:

One may certainly be tempted to read *Satires* 1.1 within the context of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean or the roughshod tradition of Cynic philosophy. An interpretation that incorporates the tenets of Epicurean economics as communicated by Philodemus, however, helps to reveal the consistency of Horace's approach to the problems of false desires and their effect on wealth administration in a poem hitherto regarded as inept and inconsistent. Despite the lack of detail regarding economics in Epicurus' extant remains, his followers—especially Philodemus—provide a rich and uniquely Epicurean account of virtuous wealth administration, and one that deserves much more than a simple acknowledgement of the hedonic calculus or a citation made in passing. It has been the purpose of the preceding study to provide a more nuanced examination of the Epicurean underpinnings of Horace's financial advice. In addition to revealing the poet's consistent application of such doctrine throughout, these underpinnings may also help to articulate further something that scholars in previous generations have noted, namely, the unity of one of Horace's more vigorous satiric portraits.

I don't have anything really negative to say about the article, and all the detail is certainly interesting from many points of view. But what I do have a problem with is essentially the same as the Epicurean criticism of Socrates: **Don't hide the ball.** Make your point and explain at the outset where you are going and the ultimate point so that the reader can process the information efficiently. There is nothing strange about the "Epicurean measure of wealth" any more than that there is an "Epicurean measure of ice cream." To me, it is distracting and disconcerting to go on and on with details about translations and what other people argued without being clear what the ultimate point is.

And in fact in this closing point, the writer is actually DISMISSING the ultimate point as if there is some reason not to keep that front and center.

OK with all that being said there is a lot of good material here for discussion as an example of the Epicurean calculus of action, but NOT toward the direction of poverty that the writer seemed to want to plant in the reader's mind as Epicurus' viewpoint!

Post by “Hiram” of February 14, 2020 at 8:37 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I also find these sections in red borderline ridiculous, and this emphasizes to me that it is useless and counterproductive to keep talking about "measure of wealth" without defining what we mean. How is this "measure of wealth" any different from any other measure of any other tool for happiness in the Epicurean perspective? I don't think it is,

so why imply that there is some magic here? (talking to the writer, not to you, Hiram).

This is the importance of working with this material.

The conclusion says that we believe (meaning, METRODORUS taught) that wealth is preferable to poverty. We should elaborate in our writings and commentaries on why that is.

Also we must never lose sight of the fact that Epicurean philosophy is a coherent system and all things refer to the first principles.

This natural measure of wealth is not arbitrary, it cannot be, its based on nature and corresponds to the natural and necessary goods which, in LMenoceus, is what's needed for life, health and happiness. The doctrine of the natural measure of wealth was central to Metrodorus economics and his emphasis on self sufficiency. To love pleasantly we need to secure these things and have the confident expectation that we will be able to secure them in the future. I think this is the core of Metrodorus' theories about household management and economics.

Also the natural measure of wealth, by nature's definition is not poverty, this is a mis interpretation by the commenter.

Also according to Philodemus, Metrodorus was highly critical of the cynics, so if we try to imagine what this consisted of, we can clearly articulate an Epicurean position against poverty and destitution, which is what the cynics represented.

(If we wanted to have fun with this, we COULD use the parody of foul-smelling Gryphon visiting the Garden in Few Days in athens, to illustrate what metrodorus would've been criticizing)

Post by "Cassius" of February 14, 2020 at 9:17 AM

I think I am agreeing with you Hiram, but I still sense danger in "wealth is preferable to poverty" and "this natural measure of wealth is not arbitrary." I agree that those statements can generally and easily be interpreted in a way that makes clear that the goal is pleasure and that all tools are subjective and relative to context.

However lots of people will make the leap on those to hearing "wealth is ALWAYS or INTRINSICALLY preferable to poverty" and "this natural measure of wealth is not arbitrary BUT ABSOLUTE" and I think we have to constantly be on guard against that. This is related to the entire issue of the natural and necessary categorization, which I also think is easily misunderstood to imply that there are bright lines such as a Platonist or Aristotelian or Stoic

would assert (which they would assert derives from gods or from virtue).

In fact that's the danger I see in the phrase "natural measure of wealth" is that it will be misunderstood almost as much as would be the word "god" and so demands almost immediate definition in Epicurean terms.

And THAT's the issue I have with the article we're discussing -- it buries the conclusion under reams of details that most people won't read, and then when it gets to the end it doesn't even make the point clearly then.

I agree that it helps a lot to discuss these issues and strategies for presenting them because I think that there IS a hugely important issue here, which is that Epicurus doesn't advise poverty any more than he advises aiming for great riches. But that's what 98% of the people talking about Epicurus seem to think or advocate, so if you take up this issue and make the fundamental point then I really applaud the effort.

Post by “Hiram” of February 14, 2020 at 11:03 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

... so if you take up this issue and make the fundamental point then I really applaud the effort.

I will have to do it because I seem to be the only one who sees the lacuna in Epicurean doctrine concerning economics and wants to fix it.

I think you should challenge yourself, though, on your unwillingness to address Epicurean doctrines. The points you mention can easily be mentioned along with the doctrine. The ancient Epicureans are never seen avoiding the discussion of any subject with the excuse that "this or that could be misinterpreted by XYZ". Instead, what we always see is that words are defined clearly according to nature (as we saw with Philodemus when he mentions the prolepsis of a good property manager), and the discussion moves on and the matters can be addressed.

Concerning "natural measure of wealth", this is mentioned enough times that it clearly serves an important purpose in our evaluation of how to manage our estate using Epicurean principles. There is no reason whatsoever to confuse "absolute" for "natural", just as we don't confuse the terms when we speak of natural desires (we don't say "absolute desires"). I believe Metrodorus used this in his critique of cynics, but also that this is a fundamentally Epicurean understanding of oikonomia, and if you notice what is meant by natural (for health, happiness, and life / safety) measure of wealth, you will see that this relates to the BODY. It's a materialist

philosophical concept that separates the endless whims of culture from nature. Which is, again, an Epicurean way of understanding things and calling things by their proper name according to nature.

The danger of seeing "a danger" at every corner and avoiding delving into what EP says about economics or any other subject, is that it gives the impression that we are armchair philosophers and that our philosophy is an impractical retreat from reality and from pragmatic matters.

The matter of economics and against limitless desires (which = anti-consumerism and related anxieties and false opinions) is a huge point where Epicurean teachings give moral guidance that is urgently needed in the modern world, as the Uruguayan ex-president has said before.

Post by "Cassius" of February 14, 2020 at 1:17 PM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

I think you should challenge yourself, though, on your unwillingness to address Epicurean doctrines

Ok I don't understand you here at all. I AM addressing Epicurean doctrine, and taking the position that "natural measure of wealth" is no different that natural measure of courage or friendship or anything else.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

The matter of economics and against limitless desires (which = anti-consumerism and related anxieties and false opinions) is a huge point where Epicurean teachings give moral guidance that is urgently needed in the modern world, as the Uruguayan ex-president has said before.

I think your citing this is further evidence of my concern. "Anticonsumerism" with which of course I agree is in no way near the most important issues involved in Epicurean philosophy, and what I am trying to say in a diplomatic way to you is that I disagree with efforts to reinforce that impression, which I believe will be a result of choosing to focus on this issue as if it is different from the general rule.

I think that's what you are interpreting as my "unwillingness." I am not unwilling to deal with and explore **any** Epicurean doctrines, but I do my best to nudge people away from paths which

seem to me to be less productive.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

There is no reason whatsoever to confuse "absolute" for "natural", just as we don't confuse the terms when we speak of natural desires (we don't say "absolute desires")

For example, I agree with you that there is no reason whatsoever to confuse "natural measure of wealth" with "austerity" or "minimalism." Where I disagree with you is that it seems to me that 98% of the internet commentary DOES make that mistake, and unless you first and foremost highlight that that is NOT where you are going, then the more times "natural measure of wealth" gets discussed WITHOUT that clarification, then it just digs a deeper and deeper hole.

Post by “Elayne” of February 14, 2020 at 1:53 PM

If Metrodorus thought there was such a thing as a "natural measure of wealth", I would say he was wrong. That's a silly idea, and it will get people obsessed with trying to assess and maximize some abstract quality called "natural", lol, instead of maximizing pleasure.

Culture itself is entirely natural. The alternative is supernatural, and there's no such thing. Some of culture is not innate, meaning an infant could be raised in different cultures and absorb them, within a range of biology. But I wouldn't get caught up in trying to find the amount of wealth I "innately" need. That can lead to a futile effort trying to unravel nature and nurture, and humans always develop some sort of culture. There's no single culture we are born to fit.

Dropping those overly complicated ideas, I would tell Metrodorus to stick to maximizing pleasure and leave off distractions. Unless he enjoyed all that, lol.

Post by “Hiram” of February 14, 2020 at 2:12 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

If Metrodorus thought there was such a thing as a "natural measure of wealth", I would say he was wrong. That's a silly idea, and it will get people obsessed with trying to assess and maximize some abstract quality called "natural", lol, instead of maximizing pleasure.

well, and that would be your view, not his 😊

Post by “Hiram” of February 14, 2020 at 2:18 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Ok I don't understand you here at all. I AM addressing Epicurean doctrine, and taking the position that "natural measure of wealth" is no different that natural measure of courage or friendship or anything else.

well, I guess my initial reaction was that it sounded a bit dismissive. Maybe it was not. It seems to me that an argument for a natural measure of courage or friendship would have to be related to the canon (empirical / scientific studies) or to the concepts in LMenoceus on our natural desires.

For instance, I argued that there's a natural measure of community, following the Philodeman and Metrodoran approach with wealth, and I based this on 1. studies on how isolation is bad for one's health (therefore friendship / relations seem to be natural and necessary for happiness and health), and 2. Dunbar's number (which shows that our brains are only able to process about 150 interpersonal relations).

Post by “Cassius” of February 14, 2020 at 2:21 PM

Pending further detail from clear texts of Metrodorus and/or Philodemus that says otherwise, my position is that what Elayne is stating IS the "natural measure of weath" and her reaction to the term is more evidence that people think that it implies an absolute.

If that term is really present in a well-preserved text (and it sounds like it does) then I am sure I am going to expect that it's meaning is what we are saying -- that there IS no "absolute" rule

for measuring wealth that is different from measuring anything else -- the rule is going to be "choose the measure that maximizes pleasure" whatever that may be under the circumstances.

Sometimes you are going to tune your wealth lower, sometimes you are going to tune your wealth higher, but always with the result (the "natural measure") being that amount which maximizes pleasure.

But that's just the same as with wine, food, sex, friends, etc-- no difference in principle.

Post by "Hiram" of February 14, 2020 at 2:36 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Pending further detail from clear texts of Metrodorus and/or Philodemus that says otherwise, my position is that what Elayne is stating IS the "natural measure of wealth" and her reaction to the term is more evidence that people think that it implies an absolute.

Her reaction has many problems 😊 and reveals what I see as a lack of process of correction on this forum, when even [Elayne](#) (who is an admin) say that Metrodorus was "wrong" and what he said was "silly", and even that Philodemus was not an Epicurean, and you do not correct her, and none of the other admins corrects her. If an admin says this and the other admins care about the credibility of the forum, they should apply parrhesia.

Metrodorus was called "almost another Epicurus" by Cicero, there are busts with both their heads, and he spent DECADES discussing these matters with Epicurus and all his associates and developing the teachings together ... but I guess he was just wrong and silly ...

I'm sorry, [Elayne](#), but I hope you see the problem that explains the title of the thread.

Post by "Cassius" of February 14, 2020 at 3:01 PM

The problem I see here is not that Elayne does not have proper respect for Metrodorus, but that you (Hiram) are submitting fragmentary / speculative texts in support of people like Metrodorus saying things that appear to be in contradiction to the core Epicurean texts which are themselves clear.

Here, in this situation, we know from many many text references that there is NO "bright line test" on application of any tool because the end result is "does it bring pleasure?" and that given the nature of the universe there CAN BE no "one size fits all" answer.

That's really the problem I have been trying to express here. Elayne (and anyone who builds from the ground up) is going to start with that premise, and they are not going to be tempted to look for a bright line test in anything, especially something as specific and contextual as "wealth."

Discussing a "natural measure" of anything is always, in Epicurean terms, going to be contextual, but by implying otherwise (which you are doing in your writing about this subject, and which the article we are discussing otherwise, you are falsely suggesting that Metrodorus would have taken a position different from Epicurus -- and I say falsely because the texts you are citing are fragmentary and speculatively reconstructed, and they could easily be read in a way that is totally harmonizable with Epicurus himself.

This issue is very similar to the attempt to construe Lucretius in a way that differs from Epicurus, which I also gather from some of your past writings Hiram is an interest of yours,

The pattern that I am seeing here is that you are looking for deviations among the Epicurean leaders, probably so as to support the contention that Epicurean philosophy needed to evolve in the past - and *still needs to evolve* - to meet needs which you personally feel need to be addressed, but either were not addressed, or more accurately, were addressed in ways that you disagree with personally.

I would not be so blunt about this but for your stating that this is a continuing editorial problem for the leadership of this forum. I do not see it that way at all, and I think the problem is much more in your determination to "improve" Epicurean philosophy in a way that is not supported by the core reliable texts.

Post by "Godfrey" of February 14, 2020 at 3:01 PM

To follow up on Elayne's post, what is "natural" for a wealthy Roman is far different than what is "natural" for a bushman. So is there a "necessary" or a "cultural" measure of wealth? Metrodorus and Philodemus were operating in specific cultural contexts and it seems that they were describing what was "natural" to those contexts. In trying to get to the essence of their ideas, you need to find a description that is relative, in that it can be applied in any context. Or maybe define your context. I think you're correct in linking whatever it is to natural and necessary desires.

But this is only the first principle. Some comments on the others....

3) Personally, I don't consider toil to be evil and your statement is pretty absolute. Toil is of course beneath a wealthy Roman, but a fact of life for many people. If toil implies mental bondage then that can be addressed, otherwise I think that it can be a pain endured for greater future pleasure.

6) and 7) While these may be true, I don't think I'd make them principles but put them lower in the hierarchy. Maybe have a discussion about revenue in principle 5 and list them there as possibilities.

2) and 4) seem good as they are written.

Post by “Cassius” of February 14, 2020 at 3:04 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

To follow up on Elayne's post, what is "natural" for a wealthy Roman is far different than what is "natural" for a bushman.

Yes -- this is an obvious point but one with overriding implications. There IS no "natural measure of wealth" other than that which is arrived at by applying the calculus of pleasure and pain to a particular context. We can call THAT the "natural measure" if we like, and if Metrodorus used the term then I feel sure that is what he meant. But to imply that there is a fixed amount that would apply to all turns Epicurean philosophy on its head.

Post by “Elayne” of February 14, 2020 at 3:06 PM

☐ Hiram. None of us has any duty to agree with everything a philosopher says, no matter who they are. If Epicurus had said something I found inconsistent with reality, I would tell him so, if he were alive today. I did not put words in anyone's mouth-- I spoke for myself.

I do not consider saying someone would be wrong or that an idea is silly to be an attack on someone. I have myself said wrong or silly things-- this doesn't happen to be one of those times. Metrodorus isn't here, so he can't be insulted. But I have my doubts that he would have framed things as you are doing. That's why I said "if he said it." It should have been obvious

that I don't think he would have agreed you've understood his economics.

If all that is meant by "natural wealth" is "the amount of wealth that will facilitate your pleasure in your specific circumstances"-- which includes the reality of your culture and personal tastes-- then that's fine, but it's not how people today are using the word "natural", and it adds zero information to just using pleasure. Your repeated insistence on focusing on other measures of how to live than pleasure is a problem. It indicates to me that there's something about pleasure that bothers you.

One cannot measure "natural" but one can easily and immediately know whether one is having pleasure or not.

Post by “Elayne” of February 14, 2020 at 3:30 PM

This also happens to be a topic I've spent significant time thinking about over the years-- this whole obsession with "natural", which has acquired a bizarre mystique. People use it to mean "not manufactured" or "innate", and they equate it with being inevitably desirable. I see this in my medical practice. I'll be working this weekend seeing patients, and it's a given that several parents will say "we want to use something natural." Well, you know, arsenic is natural.

Of course, I do not call them silly-- I actually feel sorry for them and for the kid. Because what the kid wants is to not be in pain.

The same thing applies to economic decisions. We want to not be in pain-- we want to have pleasure. Sometimes that requires manufactured items or non-innate behaviors, depending on the culture. There's no reason to give priority to any quality of a thing or action other than its relationship to pleasure.

Post by “Elayne” of February 14, 2020 at 4:04 PM

From your article:

"There is a **natural measure of wealth** (as opposed to the corrupt, cultural measure of wealth), which is tied to natural and necessary desires. Understanding this will provide us with serenity and indifference to profit and loss."

I recommend wealth "necessary for pleasure" ... and I don't advise cultivating "indifference"--that's Stoic. I prefer to retain my feelings as a guide. If I lose all my resources tomorrow, I'm not going to be indifferent.

"2. There is **social wealth** in addition to the wealth of things and possessions."

Social capital is well studied, and many of Epicurus' words refer to the same thing. I agree.

"3. Philodemus plainly stated it: **the philosopher does not toil**. However, we must always remember that toil is evil, not productivity."

You've said similar things in the past-- you like the idea of effortlessnes. I enjoy a lot of activities involving toil. I toiled to give birth, twice, and it wasn't an evil to me. I will toil this weekend helping sick kids feel better, and that's not an evil to me. I find this idea unhelpful. There's no effort after death, nor pleasure. Put pleasure first and you can do effort when you want to.

"4. **Association** is important in labor. We must choose our company prudently." I choose my company according to the hedonic calculus, yes.

"5. **Our revenue** must more than meet our immediate needs: it **must facilitate a dignified life of leisure**." I advise deciding the type of life you enjoy most and then fund it, in addition to funding for emergencies.

"6. It's always prudent to cultivate **multiple streams of income**, among which deriving fees from the Garden's teaching mission, rental property income and business ownership, which includes gainful employment of others, have special priority." I advise giving priority to the types of income stream best suited to give you personal pleasure. No need for someone who doesn't want to be a landlord or business owner to do that. We have NO idea what Metrodorus would advise in today's economic climate. It's risky to extrapolate like that. If everyone in a group is Epicurean, and they are all advised to rent out property, who is going to be the renter, lol? Who is going to be the employee, if they are supposed to be employers? What if they don't enjoy managing employees? What if they enjoy a paycheck and want to unionize? There are multiple ways to arrange things.

"7. It's also prudent to have fruitful possessions. The various forms of **ownership of means of**

production is another way to independence that can potentially relieve us of toil."

I would advise just including that decision in one's hedonic calculus. If you've got an all-Epicurean group, and they all think they've got to each own their means of production and all be owners, they will either stick to very small businesses (because they'd all avoid being employees) or decide to co-own. And if none of them are going to do any work, eventually, then I'm not sure how you apply this on a large scale. This scheme requires a whole bunch of non Epicureans to do all the toiling, so you probably want to limit who you spread the philosophy to, if you want it to work. ☐☐

Post by "Elayne" of February 14, 2020 at 4:23 PM

Did you know reading is not innate? Language is an innate skill, but learning to read requires using brain functions evolved for other purposes. It's likely why we have far more reading disabilities than we do language disabilities.

Reading is a great pleasure to me. And writing. It's not "natural", though, so if I'm supposed to only value natural desires, I should not care if my library burns up-- I should not care about making enough money to buy books, which are manufactured and require unnatural activity, reading.

This is the kind of thing obsession with natural leads to, and I picked a silly example to demonstrate the silliness of the whole idea as a criterion, instead of pleasure.

Post by "Cassius" of February 14, 2020 at 4:31 PM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

several parents will say "we want to use something natural." Well, you know, arsenic is natural.

I had to quote so I could say "LOL" -- excellent illustration, and I do agree with Elayne's point that people today infer from the word "natural" some very strange things -- and that is the problem with referring to "natural measure of wealth" without explanation. In due respect and

deference to Metrodorus and Philodemus, I think it highly likely that if we had more complete texts to show the full context, I would expect that they either (1) placed to term in clear context, or (2) were clearly speaking to Epicureans who were expected to know the context, or probably (3) both one and two.

Post by “Hiram” of February 15, 2020 at 10:39 AM

Toil being evil is An instance where this mustve been submitted by them in the service of hedonic calculus. If we toil we have to consider what pleasures justify it. But I don't think reasonable people would say that toil is pleasant when carrying out hedonic calculus.

It has precisely been my intention to bring the conversations on economics into the modern reality. That requires an evolution of the discourse, obviously, but I think understanding what the ancients said about economics (rather than call them wrong or silly) is a good starting point because they were the first to use Epicurean methods in this. I do not believe Metrodorus would've contradicted epicurus, but if you think that's what is happening or that's what I said, then that may explain you're categorization if these writings as “unclear”.

Concerning the use of “natural”, Epicurus specifically used this word in LMenoceus in the context of hedonic calculus and choices and avoidances, and a few of the Doctrines mention “natural” as a category, so if we approach the text on property management in good will we will see the connection.

I care about the Herculaneum texts because I spent weeks at the University of Loyola library reading and taking notes to make this content available to everyday people in the form of modern commentaries. But if this is a subject that does not interest others we do not have to carry on with a study of economics. There will be another time and another audience for this.

Post by “Cassius” of February 15, 2020 at 11:06 AM

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?

We don't have a disagreement as to the importance of the subject, we have a disagreement as to your interpretation of what Metrodorus or Philodemus said and meant, and that's where we

need to focus the discussion.

So when you say:

[Quote from Hiram](#)

That requires an evolution of the discourse, obviously,

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.

So when you say this:

[Quote from Hiram](#)

Concerning the use of "natural", Epicurus specifically used this word in LMenoecus in the context of hedonic calculus and choices and avoidances, and a few of the Doctrines mention "natural" as a category, so if we approach the text on property management in good will we will see the connection.

.. I am 100% in favor of posting the original quotes and their context, and attempting to tease out of them any new meaning or examples which we can find in them. It may well be the case that Philodemus and others give us lots of specific examples that, if we understand them clearly, can be used as examples of good analysis based on Epicurean reasoning and their personal contexts.

But in doing so I would expect the entire discussion to be held in the framework of understanding that there are no absolute rules of justice or any other type of virtue and morality, and that the overall goal and focus remains where it always is, in contextually pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain. I cannot imagine that Metrodorus or Philodemus approached it any other way, and I say "cannot imagine" because I am aware of no evidence that they ever intentionally set out to deviate or reform Epicurus' own perspective.

So to repeat, when you say this:

[Quote from Hiram](#)

But if this is a subject that does not interest others we do not have to carry on with a study of economics. There will be another time and another audience for this.

I just think you are wrong to state that the subject "does not interest" me or others here. The SUBJECT is of great interest, but analyzing the subject in a framework that misses the ultimate context of the philosophy is something that I would expect us to have to debate with people Sergio Yona, who wrote that article referenced in this thread and concluded that the topic is about **VIRTUOUS** wealth administration:

Quote

"Despite the lack of detail regarding economics in Epicurus' extant remains, his followers especially Philodemus provide a rich and uniquely Epicurean account of virtuous wealth administration, and one that deserves much more than a simple acknowledgement of the hedonic calculus or a citation made in passing."

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.

I know you and I disagree on the emphasis that should be placed on "pleasure as the goal" but THAT is really what we are going back and forth on here in this thread, not a question of whether others share your interest in the topic. If we could keep the focus on explaining things in a way that is consistent with Epicurus rather than crusading against consumerism in [Alain De Botton](#) style (such as [this at the Daily Stoic](#)) then I think we would be doing a lot more talking about what the texts actually say and less in describing them in language that obscures the main point. De Botton may be accomplishing great things in crusading against consumerism, but he is doing next to nothing to advance Epicurean philosophy, nor would he even seem to be embracing that as his goal. But promoting Epicurean philosophy IS our goal here, not picking and choosing some particular problem and presenting it in a way that can be read to undermine the core analysis.

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 addressed 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.

Post by "Cassius" of February 16, 2020 at 3:22 AM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

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:

No, it doesn't bother me that "natural measure of wealth" is a phrase that is necessarily minimalist, because it can be interpreted as "right-sizing" wealth to produce the greatest pleasure. What bothers me is that you seem to be interpreting it and preaching it as minimalist, when (1) it is not, and (2) minimalism is clearly non-Epicurean.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

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.

Well good luck on that, because in Yona using "virtue as a referent" she is preaching virtue as the goal, so by accepting her premises as "legitimate" you are undermining the Epicurean view,

which is the opposite of

[Quote from Hiram](#)

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.

Yes I agree let's be critical of both minimalism and money/capitalism/whatever word fits here. But the problem that requires me to make these comments is that I don't see anyone here advocating maximization of money, or else I would call them out just as I am calling out minimalism, which is what your phrasing ends up advocating.

As for the beneficial results of these discussions I agree they are definitely beneficial, because we are building a record where we can point others in the future who will then not have to start at the same point as we did in attempting to explore these issues.

Post by "Elayne" of February 16, 2020 at 7:42 AM

Hiram, let me be more clear-- I don't believe Metrodorus was promoting a "natural measure" of anything, as different to or opposed to a "pleasurable measure." I said "if" he had done so, I would have told him he was wrong. I am not calling Metrodorus wrong or silly. I am calling the way this material is being interpreted wrong-- and the concept of "natural" as a goal for measurement in place of pleasure is absolutely silly. I doubt Metrodorus did it.

You have a repeated tendency to glom onto words in the philosophy that are not pleasure and start elevating them as criteria instead of pleasure. Happiness, wellbeing, natural-- it goes on and on. I really think you should check yourself on this. Why, oh why, are you reluctant to stick to pleasure as your single goal? You are leading your readers in all kinds of unhelpful directions.

When we point out what you are doing, you start prooftexting. But this invariably has been taking single phrases out of the context of the whole, which has made me think you don't understand the whole. You don't understand how differently you are using these words than how they are used by Epicurus.

The income studies aren't measuring "natural"-- they are measuring pleasurable. And income and wealth are different anyway-- related, but different.

Instead of the focus on natural, if you instead wrote about the economics of pleasure, directly,

it would be both true to the ancient writings and applicable to modern life. It's a real shame that you are not being direct about pleasure and instead constantly reframe.

Post by "Cassius" of February 16, 2020 at 8:43 AM

I agree with what Elayne is saying, but I would say that it is "possible" that Metrodorus or Philodemus would or did use the term "natural measure," because they have previously stated clearly that the only tool given by nature for our guidance is pleasure and pain, and in that sense feeling - pleasure and pain - ARE, or at least PROVIDE the tools for assessing, a "natural measure" of anything. But this is so obvious as to hardly need saying, and it does not lead in the direction of "happiness correlates to wealth up to 60-75 K income" except to state that such calculations are truly impossible either to expand to the world at large, or even to apply to any individuals within that statistical sample. This is nothing but Benthamite utilitarianism in action.

Hiram, we cannot ourselves even agree what the definition of "happiness" is. How useful is a survey about "happiness" really going to be without giving some explanation of what that term means?

But I really do not like continuing to debate issues like this without providing CLEAR references to the texts that are involved, and evaluating THEM for reliability, and that is as much my frustration with this discussion as anything else.

It ought to be right at the top of our list of things to do to establish What exact text we are talking about and how reliable it is. It is not a violation of copyright to cut and past excerpts from passages from any of these books we are talking about, and whenever we introduce something controversial we ought to start with our documentation of it so we know exactly who and what we are relying on -- because in every case we are NOT relying on Philodemus or Metrodorus or even Epicurus themselves, we are relying on a 2000 year chain of copyists and interpreters and commentators, of which well over 90% - especially the moderns - are hostile to the core ideas of Epicurus.

If indeed there is good documentation of the use of "natural measure of wealth" then lets by all means discuss it, along with all the details that go along with it, but Elayne's comments about the general situation are correct in my view.

Post by "Hiram" of February 16, 2020 at 9:51 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

Hiram, let me be more clear-- I don't believe Metrodorus was promoting a "natural measure" of anything, as different to or opposed to a "pleasurable measure." I said "if" he had done so, I would have told him he was wrong. I am not calling Metrodorus wrong or silly. I am calling the way this material is being interpreted wrong-- and the concept of "natural" as a goal for measurement in place of pleasure is absolutely silly. I doubt Metrodorus did it.

Okay, here: without buying another Herculaneum book, I will cite to you that one of the main points in these texts are as follows (not my words, but of the publisher):

Quote

This article is a study and partial translation of two of Philodemus' tractates, "On Wealth" and "On Household Management." In both works, the Epicurean author mounts a polemic against the Cynics, and some of these arguments can be traced back two and a half centuries to Metrodorus, a founder of the Epicurean school. **Philodemus argues for a mean of wealth, so that the extremes of both luxury and Cynic poverty (πτωχεία) are vices. He argues for "natural wealth"** and himself lived in the villa of his wealthy patron, while Cynics had nothing and were homeless.

Here is the link:

<https://brill.com/view/book/edco...xml?language=en>

So again, Elayne, I'm neither making this up 😊 nor sharing this to confuse students, or anything of that sort. This is there, and I'm studying and trying to distill it for a modern audience of people that are committed to Epicurean teachings and who would find it useful.

also, [Cassius](#) I'm glad you recognize both the lower and upper limit of the wealth that is necessary, because I was beginning to be under the impression that you always seem to recognize the lower but not the upper (you always argue against minimalism, but never against consumerism and limitless desire)--which I totally understand if you perceive that this is the main error you feel that you are trying to correct. But both limits must be acknowledged for different reasons, and the ancients (for whatever reason) had much more criticism for the upper than the lower limit (limitless desires, which Diogenes of Oenoanda counts among the three roots of all evils).

Post by "Elayne" of February 16, 2020 at 10:18 AM

If he meant this as anything other than "pleasurable measure", he was wrong. IF, Hiram. IF. I do not think he meant it the way you are running with it.

I do not think he was talking about some kind of Buddhist-like happy medium of wealth either. In many settings, extremes are unpleasant, but it is not because they are extreme that we avoid them, merely because they are unpleasant.

I don't think you are deliberately leading readers away from pleasure. I just don't think you understand the big picture.

Post by “Hiram” of February 16, 2020 at 10:53 AM

[Quote from Elayne](#)

If he meant this as anything other than "pleasurable measure", he was wrong. IF, Hiram. IF. I do not think he meant it the way you are running with it.

I do not think he was talking about some kind of Buddhist-like happy medium of wealth either. In many settings, extremes are unpleasant, but it is not because they are extreme that we avoid them, merely because they are unpleasant.

I don't think you are deliberately leading readers away from pleasure. I just don't think you understand the big picture.

I'm not "running with it" in any direction, Elayne. I'm reading what it says. This is one of the central points of the scroll Peri Oikonomias, and it's an Epicurean doctrine, a fact to which all the scholars who have worked with this text will attest to. You seem to agree with me, but you seem to attribute to me the view that these extremes are bad because of reasons other than they are unpleasant. Please cite where I have said that. I haven't.

Again, this is from Column 12 of Peri Oikonomias (Philodemus' On property management)

Post by “Cassius” of February 16, 2020 at 11:21 AM

Hiram what is the source of that clip? Does that clip not indicate by brackets that the word
xliv PHILODEMUS, *ON PROPERTY MANAGEMENT* al?

In the present volume, the text of PHerc. 1424 is based primarily on Jensen's text, but it also contains new readings. I have worked from my own readings of the papyrus in 1989–1990 and in 1995, from the originals as well as copies of N and O, and from the multispectral images of the papyrus (MSI). Textual footnotes are intended to serve as a very limited apparatus, indicating the new readings and juxtaposing them with Jensen's text. In some cases a brief explanation or comment is supplied as well. The translation uses square brackets to indicate those places in which a given passage or word is heavily restored, whereas it does not use square brackets for supplementations that appear to me fairly certain. Parentheses are intended to clarify or to complete the meaning of a word or phrase, but neither the parentheses nor what is included in them correspond to anything in the Greek text. Philodemus's parenthetical phrases are placed in between dashes. The text offered in this volume differs in several places from Jensen's text regarding punctuation, in part because of new conjec-

Post by "Cassius" of February 16, 2020 at 11:36 AM

This clip (also from Tsouna) seems to me to be good reason to remember that even where we have a passage that is well preserved, it is not necessarily clear that the passage refers to Epicurean views, because the writers are quoting extensively from adverse writers:

Post by "Hiram" of February 16, 2020 at 11:44 AM

That was from here:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=82Kdj...0wealth&f=false>

Post by “Hiram” of February 16, 2020 at 11:50 AM

Here is the text of column 12 as seen in my book (do you have this book) Peri Parrhesias.

Notice there are brackets, but not on the key words of dispute.

Post by “Cassius” of February 16, 2020 at 11:51 AM

Ok so that essay is someone looking to draw parallels between Philodemus and Jesus, who also notes that Philodemus' Greek is "difficult." Many reasons for caution.

³ I thank Professors Ronald F. Hock and Abraham J. Malherbe for substantive assistance with this translation of *On Piety*, especially Hock for his full translation. I also thank Prof. Voula Tsouma for further suggestions. I remain responsible for the final wording. *On Philodemus'* difficult Greek, see the comments of Eiler, "Epicurus" 335-36.
⁴ Cirillo's emendation (apud Tepedino Guerra's edition) is ἀ[να]β[α]σι[σ]τος ["con-

Post by “Cassius” of February 16, 2020 at 11:52 AM

This is also out of context, but still probably reinforces the disposition that one would expect Epicurus to say different things about poverty depending on the context. We shouldn't expect Epicurus to say that poverty is always evil any more than he would say that it is always good:

“... he means that mendicancy... is the privation not of many, but of all things... This is why some Epicureans are said to use such calculations *on* behalf of (the notion) that poverty is evil. Epicurus in many other (books) says that poverty is an evil, but in different (writings) that have been collected this is not [his] opinion...” (πινηρία[v... δια]νοσι τ[ῆ]ν στέρησιν οὐ πολλῶν, ἀλλὰ πάντων...] διὰ ταύτηα [τῶν] Επικουρείων λέγονται[ί τινες] ὑπ[ὲρ] τ[οῦ] κακῶν εἶνα[ι] τ[ῆ]ν πε[ν]ίαν [ἐ]πιλο- γισμοῖς] χρησθαι τοιούτοις· ὁ Ἐπίκουρος ἐν τε ἄλλοις πο[λλ]οῖς φησι τὴν πενίαν κακὸν εἶναι, καὶ ἐν ταῖσδ' ἐτίραις συναχθεῖσθ[ις] μὴ φέρεσθ[αι]... ; XLV.15-40)

Post by “Cassius” of February 16, 2020 at 11:54 AM

Again totally out of context and unclear as to who "I" is, but this is what I would expect Epicurus to say:

But if it is not a good for everyone, it is an evil to some and indifferent to others. But I say that it is neither absolutely a good nor an evil nor something indifferent; nor, by analogy, is wealth. Others have different opinions . . .” (... την πενίαν . . . αγαθὸν [καθόλου] ἢ κακὸν ὀρθῶς [ἂν τις ἔλεγε]· εἰ δ' οὐ πῶς ἔστιν ἀγαθόν], ἀλλ' ἐνίοις καὶ κακόν, τισὶν

Post by “Cassius” of February 16, 2020 at 11:57 AM

LIV and LV are difficult columns:

“. . . so that there is almost no bodily suffering. Even if wealth cures, it is not permitted to say that it [wealth] is a great thing. Insofar as it is also easily destroyed and perfectly subject to being taken away, wealth does not permit . . .” (ὥσθ' ὅσον οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλγημα κἂν [θ]εραπεύη(ι) πλοῦτος, οὐκ ἔ[ξ]εστιν αὐτὸ¹⁷ μέγα λέγειν· ἐπεὶ καὶ καθ' ὅσον [εὐ]φθαρτὸς ἐσ[τι] καὶ [τελ]έως εὐαφαίρετος ὁ [πλ]οῦτος οὐκ [ἐ]πιτρέπει . . .; LIV.4–10)

“The fact that the sources of wealth are easily destroyed hinders in perfect or even worthy pleasure. For it is not possible, in view of such considerations, to make (pleasure) excessive. Therefore, not great . . .” (. . . πρὸς δὲ τελείαν ἡδονὴν ἢ καὶ ἀξιόλογον ἐμποδίζει τὸ τὰ ποητικὰ¹⁸ εὐφθαρτα εἶναι· [σ]φοδρὰν γὰρ ο[ὐ] δύν[α]ται παρασκ[ευάζειν τοι]αῦτ' ἐννοο[με]να· [δι]όπερ οὐδὲ μέγала . . .; LV.4–14).

“But reason in this situation and henceforth brings the same pleasures from poverty as those from wealth, so that it [poverty] becomes a matter of indifference . . .” ([. . . ὁ μὲν] λό[γος] κατὰ] τοῦτο κα[ὶ] κατὰ τὸ λοιπὸν ἐ]κ τῆς πενίας τὰς ἴσ[α]ς] ἡδονὰς κομίζεται τὰς ἐκ πλούτου ὡστ' εἰς ἀδιαφορίαν καθί(σ)τασθαι . . .; LVI.2–9)

“If we are poor, nor even if we are rich shall we think with pride of such non-things for this reason, nor shall we betray our souls by desire for wealth . . .” (ἐὰν ὦμεν πένητες, οὐδ' ἂν πλουτῶμεν ὑπερφρονήσομεν χάριν τούτου [τῶ]ν μὴ τοιούτων, οὐδ' ἐκ[δ]οθησόμεθα τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπὸ τῆς [ἐ]πιθυμίας τῆς π[ρ]ὸς πλοῦτος . . .; LVIII.3–9)

“We shall admire the discoveries of treasures and the arrangements of livelihoods, but we shall admire the philosophy that prepares for such

Is it "poverty" that is a matter of indifference, or "wealth" -- we don't know as the word is in brackets!

Post by "Cassius" of February 16, 2020 at 11:59 AM

Here is another example: "moderation / mean" is by no means the same as "managing wealth with anxiety nor fearing its loss! These are the words of a commentator trying to reach a preferred conclusion, not someone trying to be fair with the text and judge it from an unbiased eye.

B. Observations Concerning *Philodemus*, "On Wealth"

Philodemus' principal thesis is πλούτου μέτρον, moderation/mean of wealth,¹⁹ neither managing wealth with anxiety nor fearing its loss.

Post by "Hiram" of February 16, 2020 at 12:22 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Here is another example: "moderation / mean" is by no means the same as "managing wealth with anxiety nor fearing its loss! These are the words of a commentator trying to reach a preferred conclusion, not someone trying to be fair with the text and judge it from an unbiased eye.

And that's fine, the translator or commentator is probably an academic and not necessarily Epicurean. If Epicureans write commentaries on this, those commentaries would be Epicurean commentaries. (I do remember both things being addressed separately, though: Metrodorus used the doctrine that you find controversial to argue against the Cynics, and we also see a discussion of anxiety over loss and profit, which presumably is a critique of the extremes of wealth)

The only favor I ask of you moving forward is never again to accuse me of making up doctrines or putting words in the mouth of Epicurus or Metrodorus without first consulting the sources in

good faith. That is a huge accusation, and I would never accuse other of that in that manner, particularly without checking the sources first.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 16, 2020 at 4:18 PM

Hmmm...how do you guys interpret VS 25? It says "Poverty, if measured by the natural purpose of life, is great wealth; but wealth, IF NOT LIMITED, is great poverty."

Here, we believe it was Epicurus who said it. Did Metrodorus contradict Epicurus if wealth is preferable to poverty?

Post by “Cassius” of February 16, 2020 at 4:24 PM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

The only favor I ask of you moving forward is never again to accuse me of making up doctrines or putting words in the mouth of Epicurus or Metrodorus without first consulting the sources in good faith. That is a huge accusation, and I would never accuse other of that in that manner, particularly without checking the sources first.

Hiram -- Courtesy goes in many ways, and I can't fail to note that your title of this thread, "The Neglect of Metrodorus' Economics" was from the very beginning an accusation that those of us here were "neglecting" something that you find to be important. In fact as I reread your first sentence here, is the essence of your accusation that I or others are complaining that you put words in the mouth of Epicurean leaders *without checking the sources first*? Or that you are *putting incorrect doctrines in their mouths*?

As far as the critical comments in this thread go, the essential point is that you are suggesting that "natural measure" constitutes an absolute test based on something other than pleasure, and that's a substantive disagreement that is separate from the issue of whether you are putting those words in their mouths. As far as "without checking the sources first" I am sure you have checked them to some extent, but as I see it you regularly fail to stress how speculative and reconstructed many of these quotes really are.

Both are issues of substantive disagreement, not intended to be personal insults. But they are serious issues of substantive disagreement, and at some point if you don't see it necessary to

closely document your sources, and if you are also committed to looking for absolute-based standards of conduct not based on pleasure and pain, then I think we'll all conclude that it would be better to be more careful in what you post here rather than risk disagreement on substance appearing to be personal.

It's not personal - these are just very important issues.

Post by "Cassius" of February 16, 2020 at 5:02 PM

[Quote from Mike Anyayahan](#)

Did Metrodorus contradict Epicurus if wealth is preferable to poverty?

I would say that there is no contradiction because I do not believe that Epicurus did say, or would say, that wealth is *always* preferable to poverty, nor is poverty *always* preferable to wealth. And I would expect that if we had more of the writings of Metrodorus and Philodemus we would see that they held the same view, because it is so obviously related to the individual circumstances of the person involved. We see that kind of thing over and over, for example in the advice to the young man whose sexual appetites were apparently too strong, while at the same time Epicurus said that he would not know the good except for experiences such as the pleasure of sex.

That's the clear meaning of [VS63](#). "Frugality too has a limit, and the man who disregards it is like him who errs through excess." which appears to be well documented, and is consistent with the underlying physics and so much of the rest of the philosophy. VS 23 can easily be read to be consistent with this by focusing on the contextual and non-absolute nature of the issue.

There are obviously times when more wealth is more conducive to happiness than poverty, and also some circumstances when less wealth is more conducive. Would anyone dispute that and suggest that there is a bright line that ALWAYS is the case? That's really the issue involved in much of the back and forth here. My position is that it is obvious that wealth and poverty are sliding scales that must be evaluated in context. That's the thrust as to every decision in life which is clearly established by the fundamentals of the philosophy.

So I would say that anyone who would contend that Metrodorus or Philodemus or any other reputable Epicurean ever deviated from that analysis would face a very high burden of showing from reliable and well-documented texts, in reasonable context, that showed such deviation. And if such texts exist, I have never seen them, despite my continuing efforts to keep aware as to new excerpts from Herculaneum.

Commentators to the contrary are generally observed, in my experience, to be using fragmentary texts, heavily reconstructed, and clearly are engaged in speculation, much as some people try to say the Lucretius' physics depart strongly from Epicurus, which arguments I have not found to be persuasive in any degree.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 16, 2020 at 7:23 PM

[Cassius](#) If wealth is not preferable to poverty nor poverty is preferable to wealth, does it mean that moderation remains significant?

Post by “Cassius” of February 16, 2020 at 7:31 PM

Mike in my view "moderation" is a false Aristotelian category that tells us nothing. What we want is the RIGHT AMOUNT THAT MAXIMIZES PLEASURE / MINIMIZES PAIN and I would expect that to vary by situation, and rarely if ever being right "in the middle" for the sake of being in the middle. There are all sorts of jokes about how standing in the middle of the road will get you run over from both sides, worse than being only in one lane, and I think the principle behind that joke is sound. Postulating "extremes" and "middle" would seem to be valid only if there were absolute rules from which those positions could be judged, which would not make sense in an Epicurean universe. Certainly generalities can often be made, and it is often possible to tell when we eat too much ice cream and too little, but those measurements are going to vary by individual circumstances so that there is no reason that "the middle" (which is meant by moderation) would be the right answer.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 16, 2020 at 7:42 PM

I see. So instead of moderation, prudence must be the guiding measurement?

Post by “Cassius” of February 16, 2020 at 7:47 PM

That is my conclusion Mike. "Prudence" is specifically mentioned in Torquatus and I think other places, while as far as I know the word "moderation" rarely if ever appears in the core Epicurean texts. There may be exceptions, but I think the letter to Menoeceus is a good example. If "moderation" were a key Epicurean concept then it would likely appear there, but I do not think you will find it there. People like to INFER that term from the regular advice given that certain appetites should be reigned in, but I do not believe you find it in the core texts stated in terms of "moderation" as an end in itself. I am no authority on Aristotle, but my understanding is that "moderation" was sort of trademarked by him and perhaps other Greeks (as "moderation in all things") I and expect that would be the kind of "absolute rule" that would be typical for Epicurus to reject, as he would reject all "absolute rules" such as justice, etc.

Post by “Cassius” of February 16, 2020 at 7:50 PM

From the letter to Menoeceus, I think these are examples of the focus on PRUDENCE rather than "moderation": (I should have remembered these immediately! duh)

Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all these matters. For the good on certain occasions we treat as bad, and conversely the bad as good.

For it is not continuous drinkings and revelings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produce a pleasant life, **but sober reasoning, searching out** the motives for all choice and avoidance, and **banishing mere opinions**, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit.

Of all this the beginning and the greatest good is **prudence**.

Wherefore **prudence** is a more precious thing even than philosophy: for from **prudence** are sprung all the other virtues, and it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honourably and justly, (nor, again, to live a life of prudence, honour, and justice) without living pleasantly.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 16, 2020 at 8:32 PM

I got it. Prudence is what I think the core texts are suggesting when faced with the dichotomy of pleasure. It is because moderation is primarily the core philosophy of Taoism/Daoism. Key words such as Yin/Yang, balance, stillness, neutrality describe Taoism as a philosophy of moderation. I don't think Epicurus is a Taoist. But I think he is prudent.

Post by “Cassius” of February 17, 2020 at 6:26 AM

[Quote from Mike Anyayahan](#)

Key words such as Yin/Yang, balance, stillness, neutrality describe Taoism as a philosophy of moderation.

That is interesting - I was not aware of that. That would explain why people who are attracted to the "ataraxia" model would similarly be interested in Taoism - I think Peter St Andre would be an example of that - <https://stpeter.im/writings/ismbook/taoism.html>

[From the name of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BCE).]

1. (ethics) A school and theory of ethics that advocated enlightened [hedonism](#). Epicurus held that true pleasure consists in the absence of all bodily pains and mental disturbances, a condition he claimed could be easily achieved through moderation, friendship, and the pursuit of wisdom. While Epicureanism was more individualistic than the competing school of [Stoicism](#), its view of happiness was less activist than that of [Aristotelianism](#) and can even be compared to some Eastern views like Taoism. Epicurus founded his school in an Athenian garden in the generation after the death of Aristotle and it flourished throughout the Mediterranean for over 700 years.

[The Ism Book](#) by [Peter Saint-Andre](#)

I had not previously seen this page on St Andre's site. This view of Epicurus would explain why he wrote some about Epicurus and then moved on to something else, because IMHO this viewpoint is both incorrect and unsustainable over time for anyone who takes his or her life seriously enough and really understands the philosophy. So you have one life to live, you cease to exist for all eternity afterward, and you're going to spend the time you have in pursuing "moderation" and "absence of pain and mental disturbance," when you interpret those words in a "less activist" version of Aristotle or in an Eastern sense???? **Absolutely No Way.** But thus kind of box explains perfectly why a certain type of neo-stoic personality is drawn to the modern view of Epicurus.

Post by "Elli" of February 17, 2020 at 7:42 AM

What has to do the "mega fronountes" (the great thinkers) with the "metrious" (moderates) and what has to do the "fainesthai" (to look like) with the "eisai" (of what you really are OR the genuine of yourself)?

Please read again the VS 45 and the words that are used by Epicurus as characteristics for all the genuine epicureans as "serious", "self-sufficient" and "mega fronountes" men. In english language, the words "mega fronountes" means "great thinkers" i.e. pride for their own personalities/themselves and their achievements/goods which are based on their own experiences that are measured prudently among pleasure and pain. In the greek language next to the word "metrious" that in english is given with the word "moderates" follows the greek word "tapeinos" (**humble**)...and good grief !


That is to say that the persistence of some persons to transform the "mega fronountes" i.e. the free, highly self-esteem epicureans for living as "moderates" and "humbles" i.e. as stoic andrapoda (slaves) obedient to their leaders/masters, it is still in vain. 😊

Post by "Cassius" of February 17, 2020 at 8:13 AM

For reference, 45:

Vatican Saying 45

<<Prev | Vatican Sayings | Next>>

Οὐ κομποῦς οὐδὲ φωνῆς ἐργαστικῶς οὐδὲ τὴν περιμάχητον παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς παιδείαν ἐνδεικνυμένους
(The) [study of nature] (does) not (make) (people) boastful nor → big talkers nor (those) [who exhibit] the (kind of) [education] (that is) fought over by the many → →
φυσιολογία παρασκευάζει, ἀλλὰ σοβαροῦς καὶ αὐτάρκεις καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀγαθοῖς, οὐκ ἐπὶ τοῖς τῶν πραγμάτων μέγα φρονούντες. 

Translation

Post by "Elli" of February 17, 2020 at 11:14 AM

On the above VS 45 there are also two greek words "περιμάχητον παιδείαν" [pron. perimachiton peadeian] and is translated "the kind of education that is fought over by the

many", although it literally means "the kind of education that is sought after by the many". That is to say, if you follow/study the marketable education that is based on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the like you will lose yourself/identity for becoming one of the mobs that follow blindly their leaders!

Post by “Cassius” of February 17, 2020 at 11:17 AM

Elli are you aware of the word "moderation" or variations of it appearing in any of the core Epicurean texts?

Post by “Elli” of February 17, 2020 at 11:24 AM

No, Cassius the word "moderation" does not exist in the epicurean texts. Epicurus speaks often for limits that the person is able to set them through his/her personal hedonic calculus.

Post by “Cassius” of February 17, 2020 at 11:39 AM

[Quote from elli](#)

No, Cassius the word "moderation" does not exist in the epicurean texts.

Given how often this "moderation" issue comes up, at some point it would be interesting to do a search for any appearances of forms of that word in anything in Diogenes Laertius, Diogenes of Oinoanda, Lucretius, or the key Epicurean sections of Cicero, just to be able to hammer this point home as persuasively as possible. And of course we can and should do the same with the Herculaneum fragments, though that will be much harder to evaluate.

But already Elli's comment is good confirmation that the concept of "moderation" is not consistent with how Epicurus thought or presented his philosophy. Given that he was so firm on rejecting "virtue for the sake of virtue" it would only make sense that he would reject "moderation" as a goal in itself. But we can count on this question coming up over and over in future discussions, since so many people think that "moderation in all things" makes sense. And

in fact it makes sense that "moderation" like other bright line rules should run through so many of the Greek philosophers, given their theist / idealist / rationalist orientation - **but not Epicurus.**

Post by "Hiram" of February 17, 2020 at 3:44 PM

[Quote from Mike Anyayahan](#)

Hmmm...how do you guys interpret VS 25? It says "Poverty, if measured by the natural purpose of life, is great wealth; but wealth, IF NOT LIMITED, is great poverty."

Here, we believe it was Epicurus who said it. Did Metrodorus contradict Epicurus if wealth is preferable to poverty?

According to this, Epicurus articulated a "defense of poverty" while criticizing Empedocles (who in one poem personified Poverty as constantly in the company of a poor man when he ate, and even accompanying him to his funeral)

https://www.academia.edu/31634534/Philo...er_and_Epicurus

In pages 116-117 (and I think this is mentioned afterwards) it says that Epicurus appeared before Leostatus and gives a teaching on wealth that Philodemus appears to be quoting, and here he attributes to Epicurus the teaching that there is a distinction between natural wealth that is easy to acquire and empty wealth which is not. It's possible that this is the context in which VS 25 may have been given. Either way it should be related to the PDs and VSs.

Post by "Hiram" of February 17, 2020 at 3:49 PM

[Quote from Mike Anyayahan](#)

[Cassius](#) If wealth is not preferable to poverty nor poverty is preferable to wealth, does it mean that moderation remains significant?

I think the Epicurean position was to juxtapose nature and culture, and to say: follow nature. Your body needs warmth, safety, something to eat, something to drink, clothing, etc. Culture will plant all kinds of cravings and desires that are foreign to your nature. So This is the focus. If

you have all the natural needs met, you are wealthy. But if you're trying to "keep up with the Joneses" and constantly working to impress strangers, you need to adjust your opinions to nature.

Post by "Cassius" of February 17, 2020 at 4:03 PM

[Quote from Hiram](#)

Your body needs warmth, safety, something to eat, something to drink, clothing, etc

Well, if warmth, safety, something to eat, something to drink, and clothing are all that is needed to be "wealthy" then the inmates at San Quentin are wealthy indeed!

[Quote from Hiram](#)

If you have all the natural needs met, you are wealthy.

The problem with these formulations is that they imply (rather clearly state, actually) that there is something wrong with wanting more than the bare necessities of life. Cue the disney song here, as others regularly do in this context.

But it is foreign to Epicurus to say that any set of facts is good or bad, desirable or undesirable, without linking them to the pleasure of the person involved.

[Quote from Hiram](#)

So This is the focus. If you have all the natural needs met, you are wealthy. But if you're trying to "keep up with the Joneses" and constantly working to impress strangers, you need to adjust your opinions to nature.

Nowhere in any of this Hiram are you linking any of this to the specific pleasure under the context being discussed? Why not? Are you looking for a formula that you can apply to everyone and say that Nature says that that person has enough? Why not look to the actual pleasure being experienced by the individual no matter what amount of money he has in the bank. You can be rich in pleasure with little money, or a billionaire full of pain and sorrow.

is THAT not the message here?

Are you suggesting that Epicurus is Phil Harris / Baloo singing to Mowgli to go only for the bare necessities of life? If not, how is what you are saying different from Baloo?

This is a cute song, but it's a DEROGATORY CARICATURE, not what **Epicurus** really taught.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ogQ0uge06o>

Post by “Elayne” of February 17, 2020 at 4:40 PM

"Nature" is what has caused the phenomena of keeping up with the Joneses and working to impress others. It's not an artifact of civilization. Social status in human groups is a serious issue for health-- it's even an issue for less advanced primates. So nature won't help a person make those decisions, which are quite natural, unless the person has fully absorbed the primary lesson that pleasure is the goal. By taking pleasure as the goal, a person would avoid getting caught in unpleasant social competition but could engage in it strategically if necessary to serve pleasure.

When I go for a job interview, I make sure my clothes and typed CV are in condition to make a good impression on strangers-- for the pleasures I will use my income for. I'm aware of competing with others for the position. If it were necessary to do that "constantly" to gain pleasure and prevent pain, there are times that would be the wisest choice. It would only be unwise if there were more pleasurable alternative choices.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 17, 2020 at 7:50 PM

I think the real problem lies in our use of the word "wealth" as opposed to how Epicurus used it.

The conventional meaning of wealth is significant amount of resources while Epicurus seems to have used the word figuratively by saying that poverty is wealth.

If we define wealth literally, not figuratively, we will lose sight of the simplest message here by Epicurus.

As far as I understood, Epicurus seems to be telling us that the equivalent value of pleasure that we can find in a significant amount of material resources can also be found in poverty.

If that is the case, it is vain and unnecessary to desire a significant amount of material resources more than what poverty can equally offer.

This is why he said that wealth, if not limited, is great poverty.

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2020 at 5:19 AM

[Quote from Mike Anyayahan](#)

As far as I understood, Epicurus seems to be telling us that the equivalent value of pleasure that we can find in a significant amount of material resources can also be found in poverty.

If that is the case, it is vain and unnecessary to desire a significant amount of material resources more than what poverty can equally offer.

I would say that the "can" in the first sentence would need to be "may under certain circumstances" and that the "if that is the case" is the controlling aspect of the second sentence. And also that wealth and poverty are figurative terms, which means that they are relative and not absolute (literal).

Otherwise it is very easy to end up sounding like Epicurus is advising pursuit of only the "bare necessities" of life, which we know from many texts, not the least of which is the list of property which Epicurus left in his, is not the choice that Epicurus made for himself. In fact as far as I know there is not a single recorded instance of an ancient Epicurean being devoted to poverty and living as an ascetic.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 18, 2020 at 7:07 AM

[Cassius](#) Yes. That's the point. A happy person may either be someone who makes do with a living wage or someone who is a high-net-worth individual. But an anxious person may either be the one who is lacking or the one with excesses.

If so, our mindset, which is the product of our relative experience and circumstances, contributes a lot in our prudence.

For instance, a crippled man is happier to have a wheelchair to use than a car to drive, but we can't tell an Olympic runner that a wheelchair is what can truly make him happy.

In other words, everyone has his own need and mindset unique from one another.

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2020 at 7:47 AM

Yes I think that's exactly it Mike. It makes no more sense to shoot for being a cave-dweller than it does to shoot for being a billionaire. Both can be "happy" and both can be miserable. And it's probably much more statistically sound from an Epicurean point of view to draw dividing lines on issues such as "What does the person think about "gods"? or "What does a person think about life after death?" rather than "How much money does the person have in their bank account?"

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 18, 2020 at 9:16 AM

Definitely, it is not how much money that counts but how prudent a person is in recognizing how much is enough for him.

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2020 at 9:32 AM

[Quote from Mike Anyayahan](#)

Definitely, it is not how much money that counts but how prudent a person is in recognizing how much is enough for him.

I think it is pretty clear that that is the case and I would think that most people familiar with Epicurus would agree with that if they think about it long enough.

It's almost a separate subject that takes us back to "virtue" and all the other issues of relative v absolute, but there's a STRONG tendency among people to want to take analysis that is essentially contextual (based on feeling) and want to make out of that analysis a "rules based" bright line that they think that they can apply to everyone.

It would seem to me almost beyond dispute that THAT problem - **the tendency to want to idealize and rationalize into a universal rule** - had to be the explicit reason why it was necessary to state what is stated in VS 63.

I think it would be highly productive to think about ways to dramatize and try to inoculate against that problem, and maybe taking familiar examples of the wrong position "The Bare Necessities" song, would be a good way to do that. [Does Baloo Speak for Epicurus In the Song "Bare Necessities" from "The Jungle Book" Movie?](#)

Mike are you familiar with that song / movie? It would be interesting for me to know how much an American song/movie like that has permeated world culture. Of course that movie is now 40+ years old so maybe it has faded from view or withdrawn from circulation for whatever reason.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 18, 2020 at 9:53 AM

I'm not familiar with the song/movie. But after listening to it from your link, it still sounds Taoist to me. Being one with nature means being as soft as water. This submission means literally relying on nature's bounty. Therefore, bare necessities are part of Yin virtue in Taoism.

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2020 at 11:15 AM

That is very good for me to know Mike! As Elayne is commenting in the other thread, there are multiple things going on in that song and movie, all of which "bear" on what we are discussing. If we treat the song as being about "bear necessities" then we immediately see how the necessities and pleasures are contextual. If we treat the song as being about "bare necessities" then we have a totally different meaning. There's a lot to pull apart here, especially for those of a particular background and age group who are knowledgeable about the movie and have absorbed that song into their consciousness over a lifetime.

Post by “Mike Anyayahan” of February 18, 2020 at 11:31 AM

I remember when I was an existentialist, there was also a debate whether a certain song was existentialist or of Cynics. The song was "Let It Go" which is the soundtrack of Disney's animation movie Frozen. Same here with "Bear Necessities." 😊

Post by “Cassius” of February 18, 2020 at 12:04 PM

Issues arising from popular songs and art is a very fruitful area to discuss. I will eventually move this thread to an "art" section.

Post by “Elli” of February 19, 2020 at 2:46 AM

ES 77. The greatest fruit of self-sufficiency is **freedom**.

Because : «τὸ εὐδαίμον τὸ ἐλεύθερον, τὸ δ' ἐλεύθερον τὸ εὐψυχον κρίναντες». We are **judging** that **bliss** means **freedom**; and **freedom** means **bravery** and they are surely to be esteemed the bravest spirits who, having the **clearest sense both** of the **pains** and **pleasures** of life, do not on that account shrink from danger ...

...And we have invented for ourselves many relaxations from toil; we have regular games and sacrifices throughout the year; our homes are **beautiful** and **elegant**; and the **pleasure** which we **daily feel** in all these things helps to **banish sorrow**. Because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us; so that we **enjoy** the **goods** of other countries as **freely** as our own. (Pericle's Epitaph, by Thucydides).

And for this cause we call pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good.

Sailings on the seas,

Tilling of fields, walls, laws, and arms, and roads,

Dress and the like, all prizes, all delights

Of finer life, poems, pictures, chiseled shapes

Of polished sculptures—all these arts were learned

By practice and the mind's experience,

**As men walked forward step by eager step.
Thus time draws forward each and everything
Little by little into the midst of men,
And reason uplifts it to the shores of light.
For one thing after other did men see
Grow clear by intellect, till with their arts
They've now achieved the supreme pinnacle.**

(DRN- Lucretius book V)

Post by “Elli” of February 27, 2020 at 5:04 AM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXJEooUCrHQ>

I've translated an excerpt from a work by George Kaplanis “on wealth”, and when in 2014 the participation at the symposium of Athens was by some genuine epicureans, and before the raid of the Aristotelian-Stoic academic-professors.

<<...Philodemus teaches the methodology of analysis (the Canon). The second field of epicurean philosophy is the field of Ethics. This work that I will present to you is a part of my initial work which includes both fields. I've presented this initial work at the Thessaloniki's Garden. We present all of our works for the Symposium in the Garden and we're discussing them. And as my friend Panagiotis (Papavassiliou) said : we all together (as a team) wrote them (the works). Thus, the joy of the Symposium, for us from Thessaloniki, begins one and a half months before the Symposium and if we add the discussion/criticism to the works which are another month, that is, the whole story about the Symposium lasts two and a half months.

Anyway, to not make a long story short "on wealth". There are various questions that our friends ask us in everyday life. The katastematic pleasure (with astonishment and irony) does it make us indifferent to wealth? Once we have the katastematic pleasure what else do we want?

The Epicurean philosophy, as we are told, as an "ascetic" philosophy is not hostile to wealth? That is, not only to be indifferent but also to be hostile to wealth. How could someone that deals with something noble as the philosophy is, to deal with the wealth that is something completely banal? That is, engaging in wealth does not kill the spirituality? What is the viewpoint of the epicurean philosophy on wealth?

Here I will make an observation that some religious moralists, for example, the Christians or their descendants who belong to any ideology, but let's speak about Christians now, as they have a clear view on wealth. That is why people also ask us for our opinion. Because the opinion of Christians is clear, it is written in their sacred texts such as: "whoever has wealth will not enter the kingdom of heaven". So Christians and wealth are unrelated things (laughs). Let us the epicureans also say, like them, some blunt words. Philodemus says this: The philosopher must be interested in wealth (laughs). To be concerned with wealth or as Epicurus himself says (κτῆσεως προνοήσεσθαι και του μέλλοντος) that is to say to take care for your properties and provide for the future. Maybe someone is still wondering since Epicurus can be happy only with bread and water, so why do you want wealth? I would personally say that poverty is not the cause of happiness. That is, it is not needed when we seek happiness to go for living in a poor neighborhood.

There is also the view of cynics who say: We limit our needs, we limit our desires so we do not have to worry too much and be bothered in our lives. And we live a tranquil and peaceful life. Of course, Metrodorus, here, in his work on wealth does not accept this and he strongly disagrees. No, he says, this life is not in harmony, this life of cynics i.e. to limit your desires and needs is not harmoniously regulated. A harmonious life is harmonious when it does not predetermine now that there will be later a need to beg and rent ourselves in order to survive. In the ancient era to go and working as an employee it was like a curse.

And while the cynics let the frugality to fall uncontrollably downward, Socrates defines this frugality precisely with an amount, saying that five minas are enough to satisfy the natural and necessary of our lives. We need nothing more than 5 minas. Someone that knows he told me, that the ancient amount of 5 minas is about 500 euros of today. In any case, it is a small stable amount, which you will have as a stable income throughout your life. And you will spend with this stable small income all your life... and you'll be pleased too. Personally, in such a life I would drink the hemlock (laughs).

Of course, I think that this image of the cynics and Socrates that are telling you to sit steady there all your life is a very static image. It is too static for it to be sustained by Epicurean philosophy which is structured to deal with a flowing and constantly changing reality>>.

Post by "Cassius" of February 27, 2020 at 7:58 AM

Thank you Elli!

Post by “Elli” of February 27, 2020 at 8:10 AM

Me thanks Cassius for the nice place here and above all our epicurean friendship ! 😊