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Utopia and the quest for *autarkeia*¹

The fact that Diogenes of Sinope chooses to depict a utopian society in his *Politeia* is apparently inconsistent with the self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) he habitually claims as a practical ideal. Can this contradiction be solved? The solution may lie in distinguishing different kinds or meanings of self-sufficiency in cynicism, in order to make them compatible with the design of a perfect society, but any such attempt runs the risk of being an artificial means of saving cynicism at all cost². So if the only way to understand its consistency is to make those distinctions, we have to demonstrate the appropriateness of distinguishing different kinds of self-sufficiency, not only in regard to cynicism but also in other contexts.

If we focus on the relationship between *autarkeia* in the individual, as a moral goal elaborated by Greek philosophers and the consequences of that ideal at a political level — especially in the field of philosophical utopias — it seems at first glance that personal self-sufficiency is totally incompatible with the desire to be part of a community. Indeed, to be self-sufficient means to have no needs, either physical or psychological, so that in a perfect world a self-sufficient man or woman could live by him or herself, or in a very small community. It seems that when we look at the notion of self-sufficiency applied to the individual, we have the image of a hermit in mind, or, roughly, a follower of Thoreau. As a result, the man or woman claiming to be an authentic *autarkes* does have to prove it by being able to both desire and bear a solitary life. And, since a utopia is a description of a perfect society, it appears to be in contradiction with personal *autarkeia*. To summarize, as commonly believed, individual *autarkeia* leads to individualism, and the latter is incompatible with utopian thinking.

This meaning of personal *autarkeia* would be sufficient for us,, were it not the case that the two main examples of philosophical utopias in Hellenistic times (namely Plato's and

¹ I'd like to thank the editors of this volume and also John Smith for reading and correcting my english. Any remaining errors are mine.

² For a critique of the distinction of different meanings of *autarkeia* in cynicism see L.-A. Dorion, « L'autarcie et le fondement de la cité », Platon, Diogène et Aristote, in S. Husson-J. Lemaire, *Les trois Républiques, Platon, Diogène, Zénon*, Paris, Vrin, p.78 sq., forthcoming, for the opposite view see S. Husson, *La République de Diogène. Une cité en quête de la nature*, Paris, Vrin, 2011, p. 76-88.

Aristotle's) are written by thinkers, who moreover recommended individual self-sufficiency. So, why, while already convinced that human beings can only attain self-realization as citizens, do they maintain personal *autarkeia* as an ethical goal? Should we assent to the solutions they found for reconciling personal *autarkeia* with perfect citizenship? And if we do, can we transpose their solutions to the problem of *autarkeia* in a cynic utopia?

1. Self-sufficiency in Plato: from God to human

The clearest Platonic instance of self-sufficiency in the individual occurs in the *Timaeus*, when the Demiurge produces the world: we already know that the *kosmos* has to be made of four elements (31b-32c) and that no other body can be left outside of it (32c-33b). The question is now: what optimum form should it take? It needs no eye (it has nothing to look at), neither respiratory nor digestive organs, since there is nothing outside to breathe in or eat:

For nothing went out or came into it from anywhere, since there was nothing: it was designed to feed itself on its own waste and to act and be acted upon entirely by itself and within itself; because its framer thought that it would be better self-sufficient, rather than dependent upon anything else. (Plato, *Timaeus*, 33c-d³)

And the reason why the demiurge deems that it is better for a perceptible being to be self-sufficient is most likely a property of the good. Indeed, the world's maker "was good; and in the good no jealousy in any matter can ever arise », so that « he desired that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself » (29e), that means that « as near as possible » all visible beings should become good.

The *autarkeia* of the good also appears in the *Philebus*, at the beginning of the dialogue, when it comes to the definition of what the human good consists in. As evidenced it cannot contain only pleasure or intelligence but a mixture of them:

³ All the quotations from the *Timaeus* are translated by F.M. Cornford (*Plato's Cosmology. The Timaeus of Plato*, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), for the Eleatic origins of this aspect of Plato's cosmology, see F.M. Cornford, *op. cit.* p. 55-57.

Socrates — Is it the fate of the good to be of necessity in the category of the perfect or of the imperfect?

Protarchus — In that of the most perfect of all, of course.

Socrates - And will the good be something sufficient?

Protarchus — Of course. More so than anything else.

Socrates — One thing about it one cannot readily deny is that everything capable of knowing pursues it, longing to take hold of it and possess it, and they all make no account of anything else unless its accomplishment involves some good. (Plato, *Philebus*, 20d⁴)

Because the good is an end needing no other another goal to be fulfilled, it can be declared the most *ικανόν* (1.3) of all things (that is to say, of all the things we might wish for). Furthermore, in 67a, *autarkeia* is explicitly attributed to it, as it is contrasted with both pleasure and mind.

Οὐκοῦν παντάπασιν ἐν τούτῳ τῷ λόγῳ καὶ νοῦς ἀπήλλακτο καὶ ἡδονὴ μὴ τοι τὰγαθόν γε αὐτὸ μηδ' ἕτερον αὐτοῖν εἶναι, στερομένοιν αὐταρκειᾶς καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἱκανοῦ καὶ τελέου δυνάμεως;

Socrates — So far as this argument is concerned thought and pleasure escape the burden at least of being the good itself, since each lacks self-sufficiency and the capacity to be satisfying and complete. (Plato, *Philebus*, 67a)

As we shall see, man is not a self-sufficient being, but his own good (to the extent that it is the ultimate end) on the contrary is *autarkes*. So between the human condition and human rational purposes there is somehow a discrepancy, which is not found in the most perfect visible living being, namely the cosmic divinity. There, we have a self-sufficient being, continuously attaining a self-sufficient good.

We can find here the philosophical rationalization of the naïve picture of a self-sufficient individual, by which we can learn that this individual doesn't exist, except on a metaphysical level⁵ or, if we take seriously the fact that Plato considers the *Timaeus* as a myth⁶, on a mythical plan.

During his description, Plato characterizes the *autarkeia* of the God Universe at different levels. First, as already seen, he has no physical needs since he feeds himself, in a circular way, with his own wastage, and suffers no external aggression (33c-d). But his self-

⁴ All the quotations from the *Philebus* are translated by JCB Gosling, Oxford : Clarendon Press (1975).

⁵ Because, of course, it's very hard for us to think that there is such a physical God.

⁶ « A likely story », « τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον », *Timaeus*, 29d2, a.

sufficiency has also a psychological side. After the Demiurge has extended the soul throughout the whole world's spherical body, Plato says:

οὐρανὸν ἓνα μόνον ἔρημον κατέστησεν, δι' ἀρετὴν δὲ αὐτὸν αὐτῷ δυνάμενον συγγίγνεσθαι καὶ οὐδενὸς ἑτέρου προσδεόμενον, γνώριμον δὲ καὶ φίλον ἱκανῶς αὐτὸν αὐτῷ. διὰ πάντα δὴ ταῦτα εὐδαίμονα θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐγεννήσατο.

he established one world alone, round and revolving in a circle, solitary but able by reason of its excellence to bear itself company, needing no other acquaintance or friend but sufficient to itself. (Plato, *Timaeus*, 34b)

This explanation implies that there is a specific kind of dependence: when a soul is not able to live without company, that is to say when she fundamentally needs the presence of fellows. So the self-sufficient soul is able to achieve happiness by means of this solipsist friendship. This concept is probably an oxymoron, but, for Plato, insofar as we, dependent beings, need each other's company, an absolute self-sufficient soul would not.

So is the *autarkeia* of the higher physical god, but what happens with humanity? According to Plato, it is clear that human individuals are not self-sufficient, it's even the reason he gives to explain the birth of cities:

The origin of a city lies, I think, in the fact that we are not, any of us, self-sufficient; we have all sorts of needs (τυγχάνει ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οὐκ αὐτάρκης, ἀλλὰ πολλῶν ὧν ἐνδεής). Can you think of any other reason for the foundation of a city? (Plato, *Republic* II, 369b⁷)

So, it seems very clear that humans are not *autarkeis* on a biological level. And, as is well known, the continuation of this text (370d-371e) expounds the *variety* of vital human needs and the need for a division of labour and exchange of products.

On the other hand, it appears that Plato claims a kind of self-sufficiency for the virtuous man. In book II, when he suggests censoring poetry, especially when heroes are shown crying and mourning because of the loss of a dear one, he says:

– Our view is that a good man (ὁ ἐπιεικὴς ἀνὴρ) does not regard it as a disaster when death comes to another good man, his friend.

⁷ All the quotations from the *Republic* are translated by T. Griffith in G. R. F. Ferrari (ed.), T. Griffith (trans.), *Plato : The Republic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

- Yes, that is our view.
- So he certainly wouldn't lament on his friend's account, as if something awful had happened to him.
- No, he wouldn't.
- But we also say that when it comes to living a good life, a good man is the most capable of meeting his own needs, and has less need of other people than anyone else has.
- True.
- So he least of all will regard it as a misfortune to lose a son, or a brother, or some money, or anything like that.
- Yes.
- And he least of all will grieve over the loss. He more than anyone can take it in his stride when an accident of this kind happens to him.
- He can indeed. (Plato, *Republic* III, 387d-e)

In this passage, Plato doesn't mean that the good man doesn't need any friend or close relative to live with. The proof is that, at the end of book III, he forges the *autochthonia* myth, in order to persuade his fellow citizens that they are genuine brothers and that the territory of the city is their mother (414d-415a). In the ideal city brotherhood is a useful, if not indispensable, feeling. And the radical community of life of the guards and rulers in the *Republic* indubitably shows that the aim of the philosophical life is not to imitate God's loneliness.

So, what does the *autarcheia* of the ἐπιεικὴς ἄνθρωπος mean? Since it is not the fact that he could live, like God, without any friends but himself, the good man's self-sufficiency is only the capacity to endure losses without being upset, and, may be, to have limited desires. In any case, this moral self-sufficiency, is a relative (and not absolute) one, for while Plato is careful to highlight that the good man is most of all men sufficient unto himself for a good life and "has less need of other people than anyone else has" he does have needs, and is not absolutely self-sufficient, as the *kosmos* is, but his needs are minimal⁸.

⁸ The question of whether the self-sufficiency of the good man is compatible with philosophical and political friendship remains open, and is clearly asked in an aporetic mode in the *Lysis*, where the good man is said to be both self-sufficient and having friends (215a-c). Without discussing this difficult issue (see for instance T. Penner-C. Rowe, *Plato's Lysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 88-93, where the self-sufficiency of the good man, as interpreted by those two scholars, is nearly the same of the *autarcheia* of the

Consequently three kinds of self-sufficiency have been distinguished in Plato:

- The first one is the *autarkeia* of the Good as *telos*: let us call it a final self-sufficiency [1].

- Secondly the God, in the *Timaeus*, has been characterized as an absolutely physically and psychologically self-sufficient being. Here is an example of absolute ontic self-sufficiency [2]. In this sense, a being is self-sufficient when he is able to attain this final self-sufficiency [1] by himself, which implies having no needs of any kind.

- The third type of self-sufficiency is an ethical one [3], which means a moral ideal that only applies to moral beings who are not ontically self-sufficient and yet in that way want to achieve that final self-sufficiency [1]. Hence the ethical *autarkeia* in the third book of the *Republic*, has only a psychological meaning for Plato; it rather refers to the capacity to suffer the loss of relatives or material possessions. Accordingly, it doesn't imply an intention to rid oneself of economic dependency, or of human affections and relationships.

Two conclusions can be drawn from these differentiations: first of all, although they are not clearly underlined by Plato, there really are different philosophical meanings of *autarkeia* each of which is elaborated in a specific context. After all, if there were just gods i.e. absolute self-sufficient beings, we would not have to distinguish between final [1] and ontic [2] self-sufficiency, because, in that case, every being would have automatically attained that final *autarkeia*. But, precisely, there are human beings and they are not ontically self-sufficient although aspiring to final *autarkeia*: so we have to differentiate the *autarkeia* of the highest Good from ontic and ethical [3] *autarkeia*.

Lastly, for Plato, it may be said that as long as it is not confused with the first two sorts, ethical *autarkeia* is totally compatible with virtuous citizenship in a virtuous state. And it doesn't denote an apathy towards the interests of the state and fellow citizens, but only a capacity to overcome private frustrations. So the same individual can aim at both being as mentally *autarkes* as far as possible, and at becoming an upstanding citizen. Moreover only to the extent that he, as an individual, is *autarkes*, can he exercise political virtue, in as much as

ἐπιεικῆς ἀνὴρ, as it is understood in this paper), we can nevertheless acknowledge that in the *Republic* Plato thinks they are compatible.

his mental *autarkeia* releases him from the desires which would arise from his soul's lower parts and restrict his attention to bodily and private concerns.

B. Aristotle: from intellection to city

Aristotle acknowledges the results of the Platonic theory, and, for instance, distinguishes the self-sufficiency of good as ultimate *telos* [1] from the possible self-sufficiency of the substance attaining that good. Thus, as we read in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that man, while not being self-sufficient unto himself, can attain a self-sufficient good :

[...] the final good is thought to be self-sufficient. Now by self-sufficient we do not mean that which is sufficient for a man by himself, for one who lives a solitary life, but also for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since man is born for citizenship. [...] ; the self-sufficient we now define as that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing; and such we think happiness to be [...]. (I, 7, 1097b7-16⁹)

On the contrary God is self-sufficient: while not described as such in *Metaphysics* book Λ [XII], the fact that the Prime Mover's only activity and essence is self-contemplation¹⁰ shows that the first principle, insofar as it doesn't need anything else to be and act, is perfectly self-sufficient. That's precisely what Aristotle suggests in book XIV, in a difficult passage :

θαυμαστόν δ' εἰ τῷ πρώτῳ καὶ ἀίδίῳ καὶ αὐταρκεστάτῳ τοῦτ' αὐτὸ πρῶτον οὐχ ὡς ἀγαθὸν ὑπάρχει, τὸ αὐταρκες καὶ ἡ σωτηρία. ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐ δι' ἄλλο τι ἄφθαρτον ἢ διότι εἶ ἔχει, οὐδ' αὐταρκες, ὥστε τὸ μὲν φάναι τὴν ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην εἶναι εὐλόγον ἀληθὲς εἶναι.

It would be surprising if what is primary and eternal and most self-sufficient did not possess this very thing – self-sufficiency and self-maintenance – primarily as a good. In fact it cannot be indestructible or self-sufficient because of anything other than being good. So saying that a principle has this character may very well be true. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* N [XIV], 1091b16-21¹¹)

⁹ All the quotations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are translated by D. Ross, in, L. Brown-D. Ross, *Aristotle The Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ [XII] 9, 1074b-1075a.

¹¹ Translation J. Annas in J. Annas, *Aristotle, Metaphysics, Books M and N*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988.

The steps of the argument¹² appear to be that:

1- Whatever is primary and eternal possesses self-sufficiency.

2- The reason why it possesses self-sufficiency can only be the fact that it is a good.

Maybe the second step is implicitly motivated by the self-sufficiency of the good as it is the ultimate end [1]. If the final good as such is self-sufficient, anything or anybody who in any way possesses self-sufficiency in a sense has to possess the good. Indeed, anything or anybody that attained the supreme good, live a “life desirable and lacking in nothing”; conversely, what is “indestructible or self-sufficient”, i.e. what lives a life “lacking in nothing”, may be thought of as a good. However that reasoning is only true when self-sufficiency means “lacking in nothing for good life (εὖ ζῆν)”, and not “lacking in nothing for life (ζῆν¹³)”, that is to say “self maintenance”, since a Manichean metaphysician could forge an indestructible bad principle, that would be both self-sufficient and bad. Accordingly the argument runs the risk of being a *petitio principii*: a self-sufficient principle is good because it lives a good life.

Nevertheless, if we bring that passage and *Metaphysics* Λ [XII] 7 together: to the extent that the prime mover is identified by Aristotle as the good (*Metaphysics* Λ [XII] 7, 1072a27 *sq.*), it has to be self-sufficient, and since it is the highest good, it has to be the most self-sufficient.

But, what can be said about self-sufficiency as an ethical ideal for the individual [3], as we have already seen in Plato? It appears in Aristotle too, and with much more depth because the most self-sufficient and most desirable human activity is contemplation, as demonstrated in *Nicomachean Ethics* (X 7, 1177a12–b26). And precisely a life of contemplation provides the highest self-sufficiency available to men.

And the self-sufficiency that is spoken of must belong most to the contemplative

¹² I mean that this argument, which fits into a discussion challenging Platonism in book N [XIV], should be read independently of the first mover’s goodness demonstration in book Λ [XII] 7. That one, indeed, doesn’t infer the first mover’s goodness from its self-sufficiency, but from its capacity to move while remaining motionless. Here, the second step only appeals to the first principle’s self-sufficiency as such (which is not referred to as a principle of movement but of motionless beings), to infer from that that it is good.

¹³ See below p. XXX.

activity. For while a philosopher, as well as a just man or one possessing any other virtue, needs the necessaries of life, when they are sufficiently equipped with things of that sort the just man needs people towards whom and with whom he shall act justly, and the temperate man, the brave man, and each of the others is in the same case, but the philosopher, even when by himself, can contemplate truth, and the better the wiser he is; he can perhaps do so better if he has fellow workers, but still he is the most self-sufficient. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, X 7, 1177a27–b1)

As we have said, that doesn't mean that the philosopher is, in all respects and at all times, self-sufficient: as a living being he relies on others and on the division of labour for the "necessaries of life"; when practicing moral virtues like justice, temperance or courage he needs external circumstances and human relationships; but at the very moment he contemplates, he only needs his own intellect. So perfect philosophical activity exemplifies the most self-sufficient life and the individual who succeeds in living a philosophical life is the most *autarkes*.

As a matter of fact, this consequence of Aristotle's noetic theory is troublesome, because, even though philosophical life is restricted to a small circle in the state, it identifies the climax of virtue and happiness with a solitary episode of intellectual activity. There is a risk that solitude would appear to be the horizon of perfection, which contradicts the political nature of man.

But, actually, as is well known, solitude is not a moral choice for men, but a rather unnatural option:

ἐκ τούτων οὖν φανερόν ὅτι τῶν φύσει ἡ πόλις ἐστὶ, καὶ ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον, καὶ ὁ ἄπολις διὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐ διὰ τύχην ἤτοι φαῦλός ἐστιν, ἢ κρείττων ἢ ἄνθρωπος·

From these things therefore it is clear that

the city-state is a natural growth, and that man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it. (Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1, 1253a2-5¹⁴),

¹⁴ All the quotations from the *Politics* are translated by H. Rackham in H. Rackham (trans.), *Aristotle, Politics*, London/Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1932.

To seek solitude, even in contemplation, would divert man from his social nature, maybe that's why Aristotle seems to hesitate in saying that the sage can perhaps contemplate "better if he has fellow workers ». At some level, even contemplation, requires a community, maybe to make it easier, since continual activities are easier when performed in company¹⁵.

In summary, while practicing intellection, the philosopher doesn't need anything or anybody else, but since he is not a mere intellect, he has to perform ethical virtues, like generosity or justice for which the presence of others is needed. Thus, even though his activity is *autarkes* he remains dependent, not only at the physical level but at the ethical too. Therefore, self-sufficiency of intellection is intercoupled with political dependence.

But Aristotle goes a step further, since the individual's political dependence is supposed to lead to a kind of *autarkeia*, by itself. While the end of the state is good living (εὖ ζῆν), and the good, as has been shown, implying some kind of *autarkeia*, is it possible, for an individual, to be *autarkes* at the very time that he fulfils himself as a citizen, that is to say at the point where his action focuses on others?

The solution to this difficulty is to ascribe self-sufficiency to the state:

ἡ δ' ἐκ πλείονων κωμῶν κοινωνία τέλειος πόλις, ἤδη πάσης ἔχουσα πέρας τῆς αὐταρκειᾶς ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, γινομένη μὲν τοῦ ζῆν ἕνεκεν, οὐσα δὲ τοῦ εὖ ζῆν [...] ἔτι τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα καὶ τὸ τέλος βέλτιστον· ἡ δ' αὐτάρκεια καὶ τέλος καὶ βέλτιστον.

The partnership finally composed of several villages is the city-state; it has at last attained the limit of virtually complete self-sufficiency, and thus, while it comes into existence for the sake of life, it exists for the good life. [...] Again, the object for which a thing exists, its end, is its chief good; and self-sufficiency is an end, and a chief good. (Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 2, 1252b27-1253a1)

The self-sufficiency of the state is not only a matter of physical needs to ensure the simple act of living, (ζῆν); those are already met within the framework of the family and village. This political *autarkeia* is a more complex type and apparently has moral aspects which enable us not only to live, but also to live well¹⁶.

¹⁵ Cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.*, IX, 9, 1170a5-6.

¹⁶ Cf. R. F. Stalley- E. Barker, *Aristotle. Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 320.

So, if we summarize, for Aristotle, the individual aims at self-sufficiency [1], to the extent that the good is self-sufficient as *telos*.

In addition, scientific enquiry towards the first principle leads to knowledge of a self-sufficient substance, performing an absolutely self-sufficient activity: the Prime Mover, which is an instance of ontic self-sufficiency [2].

The individual man is neither physically nor morally self-sufficient, nevertheless he can aim at a self-sufficient activity like intellection, thereby defining a new kind of self-sufficiency [4], the one concerning activity.

He also aims to be an accomplished citizen and take an active part in a self-sufficient community, resulting in a political self-sufficiency [5].

Like Plato, Aristotle has not expressly clarified all these different meanings of self-sufficiency, but he was more aware than his master of the need to do it¹⁷, and these differentiations are required for reasons of consistency. Furthermore, it may be added that, since the meanings of being are as diverse as the categories, self-sufficiency may be polysemic too, for instance the self-sufficiency of a substance [2] like the Prime Mover is not the same as the self-sufficiency of action [4] (in intellection).

But more generally, there is a real difficulty for both Plato and Aristotle, (a) the Good (I mean the ultimate end) is understood as self-sufficient and at the same time, (b) the divinity is also thought of as self-sufficient, and finally (c) human moral or intellectual perfection is thought of as a kind of imitation of God. Part of the solution they gave is to note that the imitation is never the same as the paradigm, so man (I mean the individual) isn't expected to be perfectly or "divinely" self-sufficient, but only according to his own capacity. Nevertheless, despite that specification, political life doesn't work very well within that framework, because it runs the risk of appearing only as only a second choice good, which is totally inconceivable for both thinkers and for utopian thinking. Aware of that difficulty Aristotle designed the accomplished state as self-sufficient.

C. The Cynics: economic *autarkeia* and human relationships

¹⁷ For example in *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 7, 1097b7-16, cf. supra XXXXXXXX, where final self-sufficiency is distinguished from the ontic one.

So, what then is the situation regarding cynicism? God's *autarkeia* [2]; human moral good as an imitation of God and an approximation of his self-sufficiency are all included in the sentence attributed to Diogenes:

ὁς ἔφασκε θεῶν μὲν ἴδιον εἶναι μηδενὸς δεῖσθαι, τῶν δὲ θεοῖς ὁμοίων τὸ ὀλίγων χρήζειν.

who used to say that it was the privilege of the gods to need nothing and of god-like men to want but little (Diogenes Laertius, VI, 104¹⁸)

The problem is that they claimed, in a practical way, to be not only morally but economically self-sufficient and that was one of the meanings of their asceticism and renunciation of unnatural desires. The Cynics were supposed to constrain their desires to the point where the spontaneous fruits of nature could meet all their needs, and claimed that that way of life is the natural condition of mankind¹⁹.

This implies a denial of the need for a division of labour, since each adult can satisfy his own needs, by collecting natural resources, day by day. And since, the division of labour explains the birth of the state for Plato, there might well be a contradiction between cynic self-sufficiency and the theoretical level of building a perfect community of cynic sages, as expounded in Diogenes' *Politeia* or in the Crates' poem "Pera" (the bag).

There is a city Pera in the midst of wine-dark vapour,
Fair, fruitful, passing squalid, owning nought,
Into which sails nor fool nor parasite
Nor glutton, slave of sensual appetite,
But thyme it bears, garlic, and figs and loaves,
For which things' sake men fight not each with other,
Nor stand to arms for money or for fame. (Diogenes Laertius, VI, 85)

If the origin of the state is, as in Plato's *Republic*, the individual's inability to meet his needs, we might be tempted to say that there is no logical need for the Cynics to live in cities or to imagine perfect cynic cities. After all:

¹⁸ All the quotations from Diogenes Laertius are from R.D. Hicks in R.D. Hicks *Diogenes Laertius*. Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume II, Books 6-10, London/New York, Heinemann/Putnam (Loeb Classical Library No. 185), 1925.

¹⁹ Cf. D.L. VI 44 (SSR VB322), and Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, VI, 26-28 (SSR VB583).

All the curses of tragedy, he used to say, had lighted upon him. At all events he was
Without city, nor house, lacking of homeland
A beggar, a wanderer, living from day to day.
ἄπολις, ἄοικος, πατρίδος ἐστερημένος,
πτωχός, πλανήτης, βίον ἔχων τοῦφ' ἡμέραν. (Diogenes Laertius, VI, 38²⁰)

In proclaiming himself ἄπολις, did Diogenes dismiss every sort of political life, or only the empirical cities of his time? Since he also wrote a *Politeia*, we are led to choose the second solution. But how can this be made logically coherent?

The Cynics claimed to be self-sufficient above all on an economic level, but it doesn't mean that they claimed to live solitary lives like Plato's demiurge or Aristotle's first mover. After all, the Cynics, who were not interested in theology²¹, didn't describe solitary gods, sustained by their own wastage, living solipsist lives and friendship, enjoying self-contemplation: those metaphysical speculations were not cynic, so why would they have been the victims of them.

Besides, if we allow Plato and Aristotle to specify various levels of self-sufficiency in order to reconcile political life and their ideal of moral and theoretical perfection, why should we deny the Cynics this solution, and assign to them a monolithic *autarkeia*, incompatible with political life?

So what is cynic self-sufficiency, if it doesn't aim at solitude? Going back to Diogenes Laertius VI 105, we can see that the characterization of the sage's self-sufficiency as an approximation of God's is the conclusion of a passage concerning the cynic's simple life:

They also hold that we should live frugally, eating food for nourishment only and wearing a single garment. Wealth and fame and high birth they despise. Some at all events are vegetarians and drink cold water only and are content with any kind of shelter or tubs, like Diogenes, who used to say that it was the privilege of the gods to need nothing and of god-like men to want but little. (D.L. VI 104)

So, the fact that "god-like men [...] want but little" is chiefly a matter of physical needs. As in Plato's *Euthyphro* (15a), the gods are *autarkeis*, because they do not need help to

²⁰ Nauck, T.G.F.², Adesp. 284. Trans. R.D. Hicks modified.

²¹ Cf. D.L. VI 103 (SSR VB368).

meet their needs, or maybe they have no bodily needs, but that doesn't imply that they live solitary lives, i.e. that they are self-sufficient at a psychological level²²: these gods who "need nothing", are many, so there is no reason why they wouldn't form a community. Similarly, "god-like men", despite the fact that they do have bodily needs, are able to minimize them to the point of not requiring other men to fulfil them. The *autarkeia* is an economic one [6], or, to be more specific, it's the denial of economy itself as a management of earthly resources by men, and is replaced by nature.

As we have already seen, this economical self-sufficiency is made possible through asceticism and a self-restriction of desires, which match roughly with the ethical *autarkeia* [3] encountered in Plato, although the cynic moral ideal encompasses, not only the capacity to endure losses, but far more, the abandonment of all desires for the things one can lose.

In addition, cynic self-sufficiency results in freedom from all social conventional links and values, like political domination, prestige and wealth. But, contempt for ordinary social norms like "wealth and fame" shouldn't be taken to mean a global rejection of all human relationships. The Cynic can bear loneliness, but that is not his aim, that's why Diogenes is looking for a man with a lit lantern in broad daylight²³. He intends to live a human relationship coherent with economic *autarkeia* and moral liberty, that's the reason why utopias like Diogene's *Politeia* or Crates' *Pera*, were written: they outline what a perfect society would be if it were not based on economic dependence, irrational desires and political subordination.

Hence, because economic and moral *autarkeia* don't involve psychological self-sufficiency and solitude, utopian thought is not contradictory with cynicism.

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²² Like the Demiurge or the Prime Mover.

²³ Cf. SSR VB272-279.

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Abstract:

The cynic claim to be self-sufficient is not, by itself, contradictory with utopian designing of a perfect community of sages (in Diogene's *Politeia*): indeed other Hellenistic philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle faced the same problem and came to distinguish different meanings and levels of self-sufficiency, in order to solve it. For instance, three kinds of self-sufficiency can be found in Plato: the structural self-sufficiency of the good as telos in the *Philebus* (67a) ; the ontological self-sufficiency of a solitary God in the *Timeus* (33b-34c), and the moral self-sufficiency of the virtuous soul in the Republic (III 387 d-e), and even although the individual is not economically self-sufficient, he can aim at moral self-sufficiency, while being a perfect citizen and part of his community. Similar distinctions can be found in Aristotle: and furthermore, the virtuous citizen achieves moral self-sufficiency in a self-sufficient state (*Politics*, I, 2, 1252b27-1253a1). So while cynics similarly claimed to be self-sufficient, particularly on an economic level, that doesn't logically imply a solitary life.

