Discussion Plan For Chapter 10 "The New Freedom" (Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus And His Philosophy")

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CHAPTER X - THE NEW FREEDOM

1. Introduction:
    1. **Remember the context in which Epicurus was writing:** "No doctrine of a divine and benevolent creator was current in the time of Epicurus, and for this reason there was no thought of human equality or the rights of man. So far was any belief from prevailing that man was born for freedom that the Greeks thought of the greater part of mankind as born for slavery. Neither was the determining context for Epicurus of a political nature but rather social and ethical. He believed it the teaching of Nature that pleasure or happiness was the goal and consummation of living. It did not follow from this that happiness was a natural right of man; happiness was rather a prize which it was the part of wisdom to strive after with foresight and diligence."
    2. **Freedom is a necessary requirement for happiness**: "To achieve happiness, however, it was necessary to be free and consequently it became necessary first to make an achievement of freedom. To employ the terminology of pragmatism, the individual must plan at all times to retain control of his experience."
2. Choosing And Avoiding
    1. **Epicurus and the Greeks thought in terms of the choice of doing and not doing a thing**; they did not think in terms of "will" or "will power" as has been the fashion in recent centuries. "Will" and "will power" are abstractions that obscure the issue of freedom as Epicurus would have seen it.
    2. Commentary: Is there really a difference? Issue is where does ability to make a choice come from.
3. The Double Choice
    1. **Epicurus saw two aspects of choosing and avoiding:** (1) the general attitude, and (2) the specific choice: "The first and foremost refinement of the topic in the hands of Epicurus was to draw a clear distinction between choosing an attitude, diathesis, toward action in a given sphere and choosing to do or not to do a given thing within that field."
    2. Other philosophies have the same idea.
4. Freedom And Necessity

1. **Greeks of Epicurus' time thought in terms of Fate. Epicurus rejected Fate totally:** " Letter to Menecous: "It were better to follow the myths concerning the gods than to be a slave to the Necessity of the physicists, for the former presumes some hope of appeasement through worship of the gods while the latter presumes an inexorable Necessity." The crime of the physicists, in his judgment, had been their failure to deal with the problem of freedom, and their offense was at its worst in the case of the atomists, who found the sole cause of motion and change in the universe to be the motion of the atoms."
2. **Fate was replaced by the laws of Nature.** Epicurus, having put the mythologers and the physicists in a single class as teachers of fatalism, wished his disciples to see the new order of his own system as governed by the laws of Nature, foedera naturae, as opposed to the laws of Fate, foedera fati. Consequently the new freedom he was offering to mankind "had been wrested from the Fates," fatis avolsa potestas.
3. Note that last sentence on page 175 about laws of nature restricted to inorganic things should not be read too narrowly.

5. Necessity And Fortune
    1. **Epicurus rejected "Fortune" as a force no less than he rejected "Fate"** - "By the time of Epicurus the ancient and aristocratic cult of Fate or Necessity was finding a vigorous rival in the popular worship of Fortune, Tyche in Greek, the goddess of chance. Epicurus repudiated her as a divinity, "because nothing is done by a god at haphazard," and with equal decisiveness he denied her the Aristotelian status of a fickle cause. It would have been his contention, no doubt, that the hurricane, even though to the agriculturist it appears to be chance and destroys his crops, still follows a law of its own."
    2. Is this more than the gods fighting against each other? Is "Fortune" just the name of another god?
    3. No necessity to live under necessity..... check this discussion on page 177. Planning is how we overcome necessity.
6. Freedom And Fortune
    1. **The attitude recommended by Epicurus toward Fortune was defiance.** "Metrodorus, the favored pupil of Epicurus, strikes the true note when he cries exultingly: "Fortune, I have forestalled thee and barricaded thine every entrance, and neither to thee nor to any other surprise of life will we give ourselves in surrender."
    2. Doctrine 16: "Fortune plays but little part in the life of a wise man and the things that are of most value and consequence are subject to arrangement by rational planning, and throughout the whole extent of life are subject and will be subject to it."
    3. " In none of his ethical teachings and judgments does Epicurus display deeper insight or strike a clearer note than when dealing with this theme of the maintenance of moral independence through all the vicissitudes of life."

4. The best example of all is a passage rarely quoted by Epicurus' detractors. His thesis is that the wise man, and this always means the man whose will remains free, has "no partnership with Fortune": "[Nature] teaches us to appraise as of minor value the gifts of Fortune and to recognize that when fortunate we are unfortunate, and when faring ill not to set great store by faring well, and to accept without emotion the blessings of Fortune, and to remain on guard against the seeming evils from her hand; for everything that to the multitude seems good or bad is but ephemeral and under no circumstances does wisdom enter into partnership with Fortune."

7. Freedom And the Gods
    1. "Epicurus was at no less pains to assert the freedom of the gods than the freedom of man."
    2. "Paradoxical as it may consequently appear, the conclusion seems mandatory that Epicurus had no need to work out his doctrines concerning the gods to their logical effects upon the doctrine of divine providence, and this for the excellent reason that the doctrine as later understood did not yet exist."
    3. "It is not going too far to say that by his physical and ethical teachings he so manifestly anticipated the arguments against the doctrine of divine providence that the formulation of the doctrine became a philosophical necessity for his adversaries. He was perhaps the most provoking of all ancient thinkers."
8. The Necessity of Death
    1. Vatican Saying 31: "Against all other hazards it is possible for us to gain security for ourselves but so far as death is concerned all of us human beings inhabit a city without walls." The immediate effect of this is to invest the present with a pressing urgency and to demand the control of experience with respect to the past, the present, and the future."
    2. "ll thoughts are to be under control: the proper feeling to cultivate toward the past is gratitude, toward the future hope, as will be explained more fully in the chapter on the New Virtues."
    3. Vatican Saying 14: "We are born once and we cannot be born twice but for all time must be no more; and you, thou fool, though not master of the morrow, postpone the hour and each and every one of us goes to death with excuses on his lips."
    4. The originality of Epicurus consisted in lifting this commonplace from the rank of a sentiment to that of a motive of action. In so doing he was in alliance with the Hippocratic physicians, from whom we have the saying, "Life is short, art is long, the occasion urgent."
    5. As a moralist he could not afford to indulge in doubt, hesitation, or pessimism. He was bound to be positive, dogmatic, and hopeful. It was possible to achieve happiness but men must act promptly and vigorously, living sub specie mortalitatis, "in contemplation of mortality."
9. Freedom, Government, And Law
    1. Epicurus was "no anarchist; he knows that a certain degree of legal control over society is a necessity but at the same time he insists that the maximum of liberty

implies a minimum of government. In this respect he is totally opposed to Plato, who recommended a highly regimented state and consequently a maximum of government and a minimum of liberty."

2. Authorized Doctrine 5: "It is impossible to live pleasurably without living according to reason, honor and justice."
3. Authorized Doctrine 31: "The justice of Nature is a covenant of advantage not to injure one another or be injured." The very word covenant implies the democratic process and the free choice of the individual as opposed to the imposition of enactments by the law-giver or the golden few, as in Plato's system.
4. The function of government was the protection of the individual along with his property. Epicurus is reported as having said: "Laws are enacted for the sake of the wise, not that they may do wrong but that they may suffer no wrong."
5. He took the attitude, for example, that the religious rites prescribed by law or custom should be observed, even if inconsistent with personal belief: "As for us [Epicureans], let us sacrifice reverently and properly where it is required and let us do everything properly in accordance with the laws, not distressing ourselves over popular opinions in matters regarded as the highest and most solemn."
6. "According to Plato... the regimentation of society is a law of Nature, and this doctrine is important because of the relish and vehemence with which Epicurus revolted against it. [Epicurus] censured Plato for confining his attention to celestial matters and this stricture was not unjust. In the regularity of the heavens Plato discerned what was most worthy of admiration and even worship and, being such, it was worthy of imitation in human society. To imitate it, moreover, it was essential that the behavior of citizens should be reduced to a corresponding regularity and this meant a highly regimented polity. Thus Epicurus and Plato stood at opposite extremes in advocating respectively a minimum and a maximum of government."

10. Freedom And Public Careers
    1. Aristotle discussed "the best life" in his Politics, but the title under which the question standardized itself in literature was Lives. Theophrastus published three books on this topic. He favored the contemplative life, but Dicaearchus of the same age and school preferred the active life. Epicurus limited himself to a single roll on the topic but heightened the heat of the controversy **by rejecting both the political life and the contemplative life as Plato and Aristotle had extolled it**. He would have limited contemplation and research to the study of nature and especially as manifested in terrestrial things, since he scorned mathematics and astronomy. Moreover, the objective of study was limited to peace of mind; knowledge was not, in his view, an end in itself."
    2. As the faithful Diogenes of Oenoanda expressed it, "The secret of happiness is in the diathesis, of which we are sole arbiters."
    3. "The avoidance of political careers for the sake of preserving personal liberty served to separate the Epicureans from the other schools. The court posts, for instance, were left to the Platonists and especially the Stoics, whose pious pretensions qualified them uniquely for the role of chaplains. The miseries and

restrictions of this occupation have been ably described by Lucian in his essay entitled *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*."

11. Control of Environment
    1. The following statement not only demonstrates how carefully the problem had been analyzed but also lays down the general procedure: "The injuries inflicted upon man by man have their origin in hatred or envy or contempt, over which the wise man achieves control by calculation." By calculation is meant a course of conduct rationally planned. It may be added that hatred arises in the competitive life; Aeschines and Demosthenes hated each other. The poor envy the rich or powerful; such men as Miltiades, Themistocles, and Ephialtes paid a bitter penalty for popularity. As for contempt, this was felt for men who defied public opinion by miserliness or other vices, such as Timon the misanthrope."
    2. "Epicurus was not averse to fame provided it came unsought; he really desired a fame that was earned and deserved.48 His warning was against the notoriety that is earned in the public assembly and on the streets. When it is said of him that he remained virtually unknown to the Athenians,49 this does not mean that his name was unknown but rather his face. "
    3. "It is also manifest that he looked chiefly to friendly diplomacy to keep the environment in control. Good will is a catchword of his creed no less than Peace and Safety. It is a precondition of Peace and Safety. He wrote, for instance: "A life of freedom cannot amass great wealth because of success in this being difficult apart from servitude to mobs or monarchs but it does enjoy all things in uninterrupted abundance; if, however, now and then great wealth does fall to its lot, it would gladly disburse this to win the good will of the neighbor."
12. Freedom And The Simple Life
    1. "No one, as Cicero testifies, had more to say about the simple life, and it may be added that no Roman writer had more to say about it than the Epicurean Horace. To Epicurus the simple life meant contentment with little and this was called self-sufficiency, which in turn meant freedom: "Of self-sufficiency the most precious fruit is freedom." That the reference of these words was to food and not to friendship is made clear by the following: "The wise man, when confronted by lack of the necessities, stands by rather to share with others than to have them share with him; so great a reserve of self-sufficiency he discovers."
    2. In this, as in all spheres of conduct, the rule of the two choices holds good. The proper attitude toward the desires, according to Authorized Doctrine 29, is to regard some as "natural and necessary," others as "natural but not necessary," and the rest as "neither natural nor necessary." The first class has reference to food, drink, clothing, and housing, the second to sexual desires; under the third fall the appetite for luxurious viands and the hankering in public life for crowns and statues, the equivalent in modern life of honorary degrees.
    3. The correct basis of choice with reference to the particular desire is furnished by Vatican Saying 71: "To all desires must be applied this question: What will be the result for me if the object of this desire is attained and what if it is not?" This, of

course, is the calculus of advantage in operation, and the correct procedure is defined in Vatican Saying 21: "Human nature is not to be coerced but persuaded, and we shall persuade her by satisfying the necessary desires, and the natural desires if they are not injurious, but relentlessly denying the harmful."

4. Even these details fall short of representing the whole creed of Epicurus touching the simple life. He says that it "creates a better attitude toward expensive foods when they become available after intervals of scarcity" and that "those who feel the least need of luxury have the keenest enjoyment of it." 81 If credence may be allowed to the slurs of his detractors, as well it may, this principle was practiced and the plain diet of the school was replaced on the twentieth of each month by more bountiful repasts. These celebrations marked the high points of the fellowship for which the sect was notorious."
5. "Epicurus discerned no merit in the creed of such a man as Diogenes the Cynic, who eschewed the comforts of life while scorning civilized society; neither did he see merit in the ascetic, who eschewed the comforts without scorning society. His estimate of the proper attitude was based upon a keener analysis: the sole merit lay in the control of experience, which signified freedom. His considered judgment is as follows: "We judge self-sufficiency to be a great good, not meaning that we should live on little under all circumstances but that we may be content with little when we do not have plenty." He does not fail to mention that the simple diet conduces to health but the greater gain is discerned in the feeling of security: it renders the individual "unshrinking before the inevitable vicissitudes of life" and "fearless in the face of Fortune."

13. Control Of Desires
    1. "[Epicurus] sees evil not in desires but only in the consequences that follow their gratification."
    2. "[Epicurus] avoids the terminology of both Plato and Aristotle. He has **nothing to say about harmony between the parts of the soul nor anything about the mean in virtues.** The new context which he sets up for the component ideas has already been mentioned in other connections. Happiness is the natural consummation of life; to be happy man must possess freedom. Freedom, however, is not a right but an achievement; it consists in maintaining and retaining control of experience under all circumstances."
    3. Vatican Saying 59: "People say 'The stomach is insatiable' but it is not the stomach that is insatiable; they have a false opinion about the limitless quantity required to fill the stomach." To emancipate one's self from this servitude to false opinion and to make every act an act of choice is made possible through the practical reason.
    4. The first step in this process is to choose the diathesis, which consists in believing that of the desires "some are natural and necessary, some are natural but not necessary and others are neither natural nor necessary." The second step is to make the choice in respect of the particular desire, Vatican Saying 71: "What will be the result for me if the object of this desire is fulfilled and what if it is not fulfilled?" This is the calculus of advantage in operation. It is plain pragmatism, the control of

experience for the sake of happiness.

5. Advice on Anger: Be Loveable:
    1. "Into this same context of doctrines it is easy to fit the passion of anger. It is the right diathesis to consider "an outburst of temper a brief madness," as Horace states it; Epicurus himself is on record as saying, "Unbridled anger begets insanity." The false opinion would consist in believing that any worth-while satisfaction comes from revenge.
    2. It is easy also to find place in this context for the calculus of advantage. Anger is a turmoil in the soul and as such is destructive of serenity or ataraxy. There is more to be said, however: angry reprisals invite reprisals and would be destructive of that peace and safety which Epicureans raised to the rank of a practical objective. As a sect, Cicero informs us, "they were to the least degree malicious." They were not revengeful; even while attacking them Plutarch ascribes to them the saying "Let this too meet with forgiveness." With the Greeks and Romans the topic of anger was associated with the treatment of slaves, whose revenges could be dreadful. Hence it is not surprising that Laertius speaks of "his gentleness toward household slaves" when praising Epicurus.70 Lucian in his encomium makes mention of "the mildness of his disposition, his considerateness, the unruffled calm of his life and his tactfulness toward those who lived with him."
6. It may be said by the way that the perfect Epicurean approximates closely to our prolepsis or natural preconception of the true gentleman and that those who committed themselves even partially to the practice of his philosophy have proved to be especially likable. The names of Horace and Virgil and even Petronius will suggest themselves. The Stoics whose writings are best known do not elicit affection. Seneca is felt to be insincere, Epictetus a bit priggish, and Marcus Aurelius rather morbid. All three absorbed some Epicureanism but not enough to make themselves lovable."
    1. Is this correct about Marcus Aurelius? Was he really fatalistic, or did emphasize taking action on what we can change?
7. Even as we grow in education toward a sort of perfection that allows us to live as gods, we still do not lose all individual differences:
    1. In this association of fire with anger and the assumption of varying proportions of component elements in things there is nothing unknown to previous thinkers. The rest of the explanation is peculiar to Epicureanism. It is assumed that for some men education can result in perfection; there is such a thing as a perfectus or politus Epicureus. This perfection is attained by actually dislodging from the soul the excess of those atoms which are the causes of faults of character. The text of Lucretius is explicit: "In these matters I do seem able to make this assertion, that so infinitesimal are the residual traces of natural faults which reason cannot eradicate from the educated that nothing hinders them from passing a life worthy of the gods."

2. It is further assumed that such men as attain this perfection through education will resemble one another. Nevertheless, the dislodgment of the evil atoms is not total; traces of the original disposition are left and under suitable circumstances the hot-tempered man will once more give way to anger. Analogous statements may be made of the cowardly, the lustful, and the rest. Thus those whom the perfection of education has raised to a kind of uniformity may still find themselves on occasion differing from one another.