

Discussion Plan For Chapter 12 "The New Hedonism" (Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus And His Philosophy")

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Discussion Plan For Chapter 12 "The New Hedonism" (Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus And His Philosophy") (Needs Completion)

CHAPTER XII - THE NEW HEDONISM

1. The "Summum Bonum" Fallacy - What Is The Meaning of "Highest Good"?

1. In Cicero's "On Ends," the discussion is framed in terms of a "greatest good" or "summum bonum." There is an ambiguity here - do we mean our "greatest good" in terms of that which is most valuable for us to have, or the "end" in terms of a "goal" which we should use as a "guide" in determining what we choose and avoid at any particular time? DeWitt says that every end presumes life, and so in that sense "life" is the "greatest good" while the "goal" or the "guide" is pleasure.
2. "The first step toward understanding rightly the new hedonism of Epicurus is to discern and eliminate this summum bonum fallacy. Since the Latin language lacks the definite article, the Romans were unable to say "the good," which is in Greek an alternative way of denoting the end or telos of an art or activity. Neither could the word finis be equated with telos, because it means end in the sense of limit or termination and not in the sense of fulfillment or consummation. Consequently the Romans were forced to adopt a makeshift, which happened to be summum bonum. Only by convention was this employed to denote the telos, but so inveterate did the convention become that the ambiguity of summum bonum was overlooked. Literally it means the highest or greatest good but this was not necessarily the telos. To Epicurus pleasure was the telos and life itself was the greatest good."
3. Vatican Saying 42: "The same span of time includes both beginning and termination of the greatest good."
4. While this quoted statement is first-hand evidence of the Epicurean attitude, the syllogistic approach is also known from an extant text, of which the significance has been overlooked. The major premise is the assumption that the greatest good must be associated with the most powerful emotions, that is, the worst of all fears and the greatest of all joys. Now the worst of all fears is that of a violent death and the greatest of all joys is escape from the same. The supporting text runs as follows: "That which occasions unsurpassable joy is the bare escape from some dreadful calamity; and this is the nature of 'good,' if one apprehend it rightly and then stand by his finding, and not go on walking round and round and harping uselessly on the

meaning of 'good'." 2 This passage marks the summary cutting of a Gordian knot, the meaning of "good," upon which Plato had harped so tediously. Epicurus finds a quick solution by appealing to the Feelings, that is to Nature, as the criterion; it is their verdict that the supreme good is life itself, because the strongest emotions are occasioned by the threat of losing it or the prospect of saving it

2. Pleasure Identified As the Telos

1. "When once the summum bonum fallacy has been detected and the difference clearly discerned between the greatest good, which is life itself, and the end or telos, the next step is to apprehend clearly by what procedure the end or telos is identified as pleasure. The nature of this procedure and of the attitude which determined it was one thing in the time of Cicero and quite another in the time of Epicurus himself. In the space of the two centuries between these two men the study of formal logic had been forced into a dominating position in the curriculum through the aggressive genius of the Stoic Chrysippus, and after his time the incessant needling of Stoic adversaries had shaken the confidence of many Epicureans in the word of their founder.³ The faith of Epicurus himself had pinned itself upon Nature as the norm, not upon Reason. The faith of the Stoic, on the contrary, and of those Epicureans who wavered in their faith, while ostensibly pinned upon Reason, may more correctly be said to have been pinned upon argumentation and disputation."
2. "At any rate the declaration of Epicurus, as reported by Cicero, runs as follows: "Every living creature, the moment it is born, reaches out for pleasure and rejoices in it as the highest good, shrinks from pain as the greatest evil, and, so far as it is able, averts it from itself." In the evaluation of this text the important words are "the moment it is born." By narrowing the field of observation to the newborn creature Epicurus was eliminating all differences between rational and irrational creatures. In infancy even the creatures that by courtesy we call rational are as yet irrational. By narrowing the field to the newborn Epicurus was also reducing animate life to its minimum value, because at the moment of birth even some of the senses have not yet begun to function. Consequently, as Cicero says in the same context, "since nothing is left of a human being when the senses are eliminated, the question, what is according to Nature or contrary to Nature, is of necessity being judged by Nature herself."

3. The True Nature of Pleasure

1. Pleasure, Epicurus declares, is cognate and connate with us, and by this he means not only that the interconnection between life and pleasure manifests itself simultaneously with birth and by actions that precede the capacity to choose and understand; he means also that pleasure is of one nature with normal life, an ingredient or component of it, and not an appendage that may be attached and detached; it is a normal accompaniment of life in the same sense that pain and disease are abnormal.

2. It follows from this that pleasure is not to be opposed to pain on the ground alone that all creatures pursue the one and avoid the other; the two are true opposites because they stand in the same relation as health which preserves and disease which destroys. It is for this reason that the one is good and the other is evil, Vatican Saying 37: "Human nature is vulnerable to evil, not to the good, because it is preserved by pleasures, destroyed by pains." This may be taken to mean that pleasure, as it were, is nutriment to the human being, as food is, and that human nature reaches out for it just as each living thing by some natural impulse seeks its appropriate food.

4. The Dualistic Good - Pleasure of Mind and Pleasure of Body

1. When once the association of pleasure with health and pain with disease has been established, the next step is to recognize the good as dualistic, being concerned with soul and body alike.
2. From such materialistic reasoning arose the famous Epicurean doctrine of the dualistic good, health of body and health of mind. Even if no longer citable in so many words from the extant remains, it is abundantly assumed; it was absorbed anonymously into the stream of Western culture and survives in thought and literature down to our day. In Rome, where Epicurean teaching under Augustus was forced into anonymity, this ideal was publicized by the poet Horace, though verbally concealed with such painstaking felicity in a mosaic of diction that recognition escapes the commentators: *frui paratis et valido mihi, Latoe, donec, at precor Integra cum mente*. "I have made preparations for my old age. Grant me, child of Leto, health to enjoy them, and I beseech you, also with soundness of mind." The same dualism presents itself again in the famous satire of the incomparable Petronius: *bonam mentem bonamque valetudinem sibi optarunt*, "they wished one another health of mind and health of body." It also furnished a memorable finale for the famous satire of Juvenal: *mens sana in corpore sano*

5. The Natural Ceilings Of Pleasure

1. Having established body and soul upon a parity, equal partners in life, Epicurus next proceeded to propound a number of paradoxes: first, that limits of pleasure were set by Nature, beyond which no increase was possible; second, that pleasure was one and not many; and third, that continuous pleasure was possible. The contrary doctrines had been sponsored by Plato and his followers, who in this instance agreed for the most part with the multitude.
 1. The first paradox is part of Authorized Doctrine 3, and by this position its prime importance is revealed: "The removal of all pain is the limit of the magnitude of pleasures." The meaning is plain if the pleasure of eating be taken as an example. Nature is the teacher, as usual, and sets the norm. Hunger is a desire of the first category according to Epicurus: it is both natural and necessary. Where this natural and necessary desire for food exists, the pleasure of satisfying it cannot be exceeded. Cicero cites the

example of the first Ptolemy of Egypt, who, it was reported, had never been genuinely hungry until on a certain occasion he was parted from his escort and received the gift of coarse bread in a cabin; it seemed to him that nothing had ever been more delicious than that bread.¹⁸ This testimony is the more telling for two reasons: first, because Cicero quotes it in an explicitly Epicurean context; second, because it was this Ptolemy to whom Colotes of Lampsacus, a charter member of the sect, dedicated his satire on earlier philosophers.

Thirst, of course, belongs in the same category with hunger, and Cicero in the same paragraph cites the example of that Dareius who fled before Alexander the Great: in his extremity he drank filthy water polluted with corpses and declared he had never drunk with greater pleasure. This example is contemporary with Epicurus and little doubt can exist that Cicero drew from it the same text as the story of Ptolemy, possibly the book *On the End*, which was in his hands at the time.

2. Cicero says "the pleasure can be *variari* *distinguique* but not increased." The first of the verbs italicized applies properly to color and the second to needlework, as may be gleaned in the lexicon. Lucretius confirms this: "It hurts us not a whit to lack the garment bright with purple and gold and embroidered with striking designs, provided there still be a plain cloak to fend off the cold."

When once the meaning of *poikillo* has been fixed as "embellish" and applicable alike to diet, clothing, and housing, the doctrine can be extended with precision. The function of walls is to afford protection from the weather; the enjoyment of this is a basic pleasure, and, being basic, cannot be increased. If the walls are decorated, the enjoyment of them is merely a decorative pleasure. Similarly, the function of a garment is to avert the pain arising from cold and the resulting pleasure is basic and, being such, cannot be increased but is merely embellished if the cloth is gaily colored or brocaded.

The case is not different in respect of diet. The satisfaction of natural hunger is the basic pleasure, which is not increased but merely embellished by richness of diet. Epicurus is recorded by a late doxographer as saying: "I am gorged with pleasure in this poor body of mine living on bread and water." Porphyry records him as saying: "It is better for you to lie down upon a cheap cot and be free of fear than to have a gilded bedstead and a luxurious table and be full of trouble."

In the same Authorized Doctrine, 18, in which the ceiling of pleasure for the

flesh is defined, the ceiling of pleasure for the mind is set forth: "As for the mind, its limit of pleasure is begotten by reasoning out these very problems and those akin to these, all that once created the worst fears for the mind." These words need not seem enigmatical: the worst fears are created for the mind through false opinions concerning death and the gods, the topic of Authorized Doctrines 1 and 2. These fears rank in point of importance with false opinions concerning pleasure and pain, the topic of Doctrines 2 and 4. The cure for all these false opinions and the fears they entail was dubbed by detractors the tetrapharmacon, or fourfold remedy.

In the the letter to Menoeceus Epicurus says: "It is for this that we do everything, to be free from pain and fear, and when we succeed in this, all the tempest of the soul is stilled, the creature feeling no need to go farther as to something lacking and to seek something else by which the good of soul and body shall be made perfect." In speaking of "**going farther**" and "**seeking something more**" he refers to the superfluous or merely embellishing pleasures.

6. Pleasure Not Increased By Immortality (the second paradox and contradiction of Plato)

1. PD 19: "Infinite time and finite time are characterized by equal pleasure, if one measures the limits of pleasure by reason." To Christians and Platonists, with their stately, elaborate, and mystical eschatology, it must have seemed like nihilism.

In other places Epicurus maintained that pleasure is not altered in kind by the fact of duration or extension; here he declares that it is not increased in quantity. All pleasures have fixed ceilings and fixed magnitudes. When in the words of the Doctrine he speaks of "measuring the limits of pleasure by reason," he means recognition of the fact that for the body health and the expectation of its continuance is the limit of pleasure, and that for the mind the limit is the emancipation from all fear of the gods or death. The attainment to this state, he now declares, is a condition of one dimension. He seems to think of it as a mountain climber would regard the ascent of an arduous mountain peak. The pleasure would not be increased by remaining on the summit.

7. The Fullness of Pleasure

1. Two bases in logic: the first basis is the infinity of time, from which it is deduced that there can be nothing new. As the Epicurean Ecclesiastes expresses it, 1:9: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." Lucretius reminds us in similar vein "that all things are always the same" and "no new pleasure can be devised." From this it follows that the exhaustion of pleasures is feasible and the fullness of pleasure is attainable.

2. The second basis is the existence of natural ceilings of pleasure, which, being thus limited, could be enjoyed to the full. Out of this comes the metaphor of the aged sage as taking leave of life like a satisfied banqueter. Lucretius has Nature rebuke the complainer because he cannot depart "as a guest who has had his fill of life" or "as one who is full and has had his fill of experience." The wise man, on the contrary, can say *bene vixi*, "I have lived the good life." This is the cry of triumph uttered by old Diogenes of Oenoanda; to quote his own words: "Facing the sunset of life because of my age and on the verge of taking my leave of life with a paean of victory because of the enjoyment of the fullness of all pleasures."
3. This doctrine supplements the doctrine that death is anesthesia. The latter may help to reconcile men to the state of being dead but it fails to compensate for the surrender of immortality. Only the possibility of having enjoyed all pleasures to the full in this life can counterbalance the relinquishment of the hope of enjoying eternal pleasures in the afterlife. This is the "true understanding" of which Epicurus speaks: "Hence the true understanding of the fact that [death is nothing to us](#) renders enjoyable the mortality of existence, not by adding infinite time but by taking away the yearning for immortality." What cancels the yearning for immortality is the conviction that the fullness of pleasure is possible in this mortal life. The ingenuity of this argument is undeniable; it means the victory over death and we have proof of its wide acceptance in the vigor with which St. Paul in his ardent plea to the Corinthians champions the resurrection of the dead as a new means of victory over death.
4. **Note by Cassius: While this understanding takes away the yearning for immortality, it focuses the mind that we need to pursue pleasure while we are alive. Yes we CAN enjoy the fullness of pleasure in this life, but that doesn't mean we will enjoy it unless we act wisely to experience pleasure while we are alive.**

8. The Unity of Pleasure

1. Epicurus discerned that according to Aristippus and Plato no such thing as continuous pleasure was possible; they recognized only peaks of pleasure separated by intervals either devoid of pleasure or neutral or mixed. From this it followed with inevitable logic that the wise man could not be happy at all times. This conclusion was repugnant to Epicurus. This repudiation could be made good only by vindicating for freedom from fear and pain the status of a positive pleasure. This in turn resulted in a doctrine of the unity of all pleasure.

Though we certainly fall short of possessing the whole argument of Epicurus, there is ample evidence upon which to construct the skeleton of a case. The Feelings, as usual, are the criterion. It may be recalled how he proved life itself to be the greatest good by pointing out that the greatest joy is associated with the escape from some dreadful destruction. By a similar argument, even if not extant, it could be shown that the recovery of health is a positive pleasure when the individual has

recently survived a perilous illness. It would be a positive pleasure also to be freshly relieved from the fear of death and the gods through the discovery of the true philosophy.

To substantiate this drift of reasoning it is not impossible to quote a text: "The stable condition of well-being in the flesh and the confident hope of its continuance means the most exquisite and infallible of joys for those who are capable of figuring the problem out." This passage marks a distinct increase of precision in the analysis of pleasure. Its import will become clear if the line of reasoning already adumbrated be properly extended: let it be granted that the escape from a violent death is the greatest of joys and the inference must follow that the possession of life at other times cannot rank greatly lower. Similarly, if the recovery from a dangerous illness be a cause for joy, manifestly the possession of health ought to be a joy at other times. Nevertheless the two pleasures differ from one another and it was in recognition of the difference that Epicurus instituted the distinction between kinetic and static pleasures. The difference is one of intensity or, as Epicurus would have said, of condensation. At one time the pleasure is condensed, at another, extended. In other words the same pleasure may be either kinetic or static. If condensed, it is kinetic; if extended, it is static.

There is a catch to this reasoning, however; it holds good only "for those who are capable of figuring the problem out." This marks Epicurus as a pragmatist, insisting upon the control of experience, including thought. His reasoning about kinetic and static pleasures is sound, but human beings do not automatically reason after this fashion; they fail to reason about the matter at all. Although they would spontaneously admit the keenest joy at recovery from wounds or disease, they forget about the blessing of health at other times. Hence it is that Epicurus insists upon the necessity of being able to reason in this way. Moreover, this reasoning must be confirmed by habituation. The same rule applies here as in the case of "[Death is nothing to us.](#)" It is not enough to master the reasons for so believing; it is also necessary to habituate one's self to so believe. This is pragmatism.

9. The Root of All Good

1. Epicurus had formulated the doctrine of the unity of pleasure at a very early date and it was a chief cause of his conflict with the Platonists of Mytilene.⁴³ The particular belief with which it clashed was that which postulated an ascending series of pleasures, depending upon the organ affected and culminating in the supreme enjoyment of intellectual contemplation. Aristotle, who had founded the Platonic school in Mytilene, was very explicit on the point.⁴⁴ "The sense of sight is superior in purity to the sense of touch, and the senses of hearing and smelling to the sense of taste; in a quite similar way the respective pleasures also differ, both the pleasures of the intellect from those of the senses, and the pleasures in each of these two classes from one another." Obviously, if the truth of this be denied and

the assertion be substituted that goodness can be predicated of the pleasure of the stomach on the same basis that this is predicated of the pleasure of pure reason, it requires no unusual acumen to realize that a doctrine esteemed as sacrosanct was being derided, and one can better understand the fury of the Platonists of Mytilene, who proclaimed a state of riot and dispatched messengers in hot haste for the gymnasiarch.

10. Pleasure Can Be Continuous

1. No philosophy that offered merely intermittent intervals of pleasure would have possessed any broad or cogent appeal for those in quest of the happy life.

The desired logical basis for the continuity of pleasure was afforded by the discovery of natural ceilings of pleasures. From this is derived the division into basic and ornamental or superfluous pleasures, corresponding respectively to natural and necessary desires and those that are neither natural nor necessary. Hunger and thirst exemplify the former class while the desire for rich viands and rare wines belongs to the second class. Correspondingly, the satisfaction of normal hunger and thirst is a basic pleasure while the gratification of abnormal desires for rich foods and drinks is ornamental and superfluous.

This recognition of basic pleasures, in its turn, signified the recognition of a normal state of being, consisting of health of mind and of body and freedom from fears and all unnecessary desires, which was called ataraxy or serenity. This condition was denominated static, but allowance must be made for a certain variation. Hunger and thirst recur and call for satisfaction, which is a moderately kinetic pleasure, whereupon the individual returns to the normal state of absence of pain. Epicurus describes it in one of those reciprocal statements for which he had a preference: "Only then have we need of pleasure when from the absence of pleasure we feel pain, and when we do not feel pain we no longer feel need of pleasure." 52 While these words have reference to the natural desires of the body, the description of the normal state must be understood to include freedom from pain in the body and distress in the mind.

The extension of the name of pleasure to this normal state of being was the major innovation of the new hedonism. It was in the negative form, freedom from pain of body and distress of mind, that it drew the most persistent and vigorous condemnation from adversaries. The contention was that the application of the name of pleasure to this state was unjustified on the ground that two different things were thereby being denominated by one name. Cicero made a great to-do over this argument, but it is really superficial and captious. The fact that the name of pleasure was not customarily applied to the normal or static state did not alter the fact that the name ought to be applied to it; nor that reason justified the application; nor that human beings would be the happier for so reasoning and

believing.

Even at the present day the same objection is raised. For instance, a modern Platonist, ill informed on the true intent of Epicurus, has this to say: "What, in a word, is to be said of a philosophy that begins by regarding pleasure as the only positive good and ends by emptying pleasure of all positive content?" This ignores the fact that this was but one of the definitions of pleasure offered by Epicurus, that he recognized kinetic as well as static pleasures. It ignores also the fact that Epicurus took personal pleasure in public festivals and encouraged his disciples to attend them and that regular banquets were a part of the ritual of the sect. Neither does it take account of the fact that in the judgment of Epicurus those who feel the least need of luxury enjoy it most and that intervals of abstinence enhance the enjoyment of luxury.⁵⁵ Thus the Platonic objector puts upon himself the necessity of denying that the moderation of the rest of the year furnishes additional zest to the enjoyment of the Christmas dinner; he has failed to become aware of the Epicurean zeal for "condensing pleasure."

It would have been strange if this doctrine of continuous happiness were absent from the Authorized Doctrines. Its presence is easily overlooked, because the context of the controversy has become blurred with the lapse of time, but the emphasis derived from prominence of position must have been at one time arresting. It forms part of the famous tetrapharmakon, Doctrine 3. The first part, already quoted, identifies the basic pleasure as freedom from pain, the only kind that could be continuous: "The removal of all pain is the limit of magnitude for pleasures." This rules out the "neutral state" as postulated by Plato; it identifies the neutral state as one of static pleasure. The second part of the Doctrine disposes of Plato's "mixed states": "And wherever the experience of pleasure is present, so long as it prevails, there is no pain or distress or a combination of them." This amounts to denying that pain and pleasure are capable of mixing and of resulting in a state that is different from either. Epicurus implies instead and elsewhere teaches that pain is subtractable from pleasure, leaving a balance of the latter.^{5T} This principle applies either to physical pain or mental distress or to both together. It is essential to the thesis that continuous pleasure is possible.

2. Is the wise man could be happy under all circumstances? The importance of this revealed itself shortly after Plato's demise and showed no abatement for three centuries. In two passages Cicero lists the names of those who gave an affirmative answer — from which the name of Plato is conspicuously absent — and elsewhere he pretends to cite the opinion of Epicurus, misrepresenting him shamelessly and using his name as an excuse for parading a tedious collection of his own translations from Greek tragedy on the topic of pain. What Epicurus is on record as saying is this: "Even if under torture the wise man is happy." Cicero chose to imagine him in the brazen bull of the tyrant Phalaris, in which the victims were

roasted alive, and as saying "How pleasant; how little this torture means to me!" This is a shabby invention and shameless 'quibbling. It ignores the difference between *suavis*, "pleasant" and *beatus*, "happy."

Even Epicurus could not have used pleasure as an invariable synonym for happiness. He died a happy man but in physical agony. His last words, known even beyond his own sect, exhibit the triumph of happiness over pain: "On this blissful day of my life, which is likewise my last, I write these words to you all. The pains of my strangury and dysentery do not abate the excess of their characteristic severity and continue to keep me company, but over against all these I set the joy in my soul at the recollection of the disquisitions composed by you and the rest." 80 He is here exemplifying the subtraction of pain from pleasure, leaving a balance of pleasure, which is happiness. The letter is addressed to Idomeneus but is intended for the whole Lampsacene circle, which made many contributions to the literature of the school. It is the grateful recognition of this service, together with all that it implies, that in this instance is declared to outweigh the physical pains.

It was the discovery of static pleasure, without which continuity of pleasure was impossible, that resulted in the division of pleasures into static and kinetic. There was no call for such a division until the name of pleasure had been extended to denote the possession of health. On this point, however, as on many others, greater precision is possible. The modern use of the word static as opposed to kinetic is Aristotelian in origin. The Epicurean word is *katastematikos*, from *katastema*, explained in the lexicon as "stable condition." It connotes, moreover, change of state, from action to rest. To Epicurus it denotes a normal state of pleasure to which the individual returns after kinetic pleasure, which is activity. For example, it is the comfortable feeling that follows after the satisfaction of hunger and thirst, the relaxed condition that follows after attending the theater, a public festival or a banquet. Exceptionally, it describes the return to normal after the joy of escape from peril of life.

11. Continuous Pain Impossible

1. Authorized Doctrine 4: "Pain does not prevail continuously in the flesh but the peak of it is present for the briefest interval, and the pain that barely exceeds the pleasure in the flesh is not with us many days, while protracted illnesses have an excess of pleasure over pain in the flesh." There is another saying extant which is supplementary to the former: "Acute pains quickly result in death; protracted pains are not marked by acuteness." In protracted suffering the principle of the subtraction of pain from pleasure holds good. Upon this notion depends the so called Calculus of Pleasure. This title is neither ancient nor precise; it is no more a calculus of pleasure than of pain and it might more rightly be called a calculus of advantage. The supporting text runs as follows: "The right way to judge all these

pleasures and pains is by measuring them against each other and by scrutiny of the advantages and disadvantages." Since it is postulated that continuous happiness is possible, it follows that the process is always subtraction. The pain is subtracted from the pleasure.

12. The Relation of Pleasure To Virtue

1. The importance accorded to this problem is demonstrated by its prominent position among the Authorized Doctrines after the famous four. The fifth Doctrine declares in effect that pleasure and virtue are inseparable. They are thought of as being linked to each other like health and pleasure, disease and pain. The reason for this pronouncement becomes manifest if it be recalled that Plato and Aristotle upheld a contrary doctrine. Becoming the victims of a common semantic fallacy, they assumed that pleasure, possessing a name of its own, must be an independent entity, attachable and detachable, which might or might not be combined with a given activity. Aristotle, for example, recognized a pleasure that was proper to the study of geometry, but this pleasure did not always accompany it, as cold experience must have taught him.

This principle, moreover, was assumed to hold good also for the virtues. For example, it was believed that if pleasure should be added to justice or temperance, the value of these goods would be enhanced by the addition, and the same would hold true if any good be added to another; any good would be more desirable when combined with another than when isolated. Aristotle also quotes Plato as denying on this ground that pleasure could be the good "because the good is not made more desirable by the addition of something to it."

In this line of reasoning Epicurus, always on the alert to be exact, would have detected two fallacies. In the first place, he would have denied it correct to put temperance and geometry in the same class and to apply the same reasoning to both. It would not follow from the fact that the study of geometry might or might not be accompanied by pleasure that the practice of temperance might or might not be accompanied by pleasure. The logical procedure here called into question is reasoning by analogy, a tricky kind and valid only among true similars. Geometry and temperance are not true similars. The error will be more unmistakable if modern examples be employed and the study of trigonometry, geology, and chemistry be placed in the same class as the practice of diligence, veracity, and sobriety. While it is not on record that such a criticism was made, it is of a kind in which Epicurus was extraordinarily sharp.

The second fallacy in the reasoning of Plato and Aristotle was expressly urged. The error, according to Epicurus, lay in the assumption that pleasure was an independent entity and capable of being combined with the practice of virtue or

detached from it. His reasoning on the point was similar to his reasoning about pleasure and living; life was the greatest good; it was a pleasure to be alive, even if maimed or in pain. Pleasure is virtually an attribute of life and the principle enunciated by Lucretius holds good, that an essential attribute of a thing is incapable of being removed without destroying the thing itself.⁶⁹ Heat cannot be separated from fire, sweetness from honey, nor whiteness from snow. Pleasure and virtue are similarly inseparable.

In order to apprehend this fifth Doctrine with complete precision the factor of reciprocation must be clearly recognized: A is impossible without B and B- is impossible without A: "It is impossible to live pleasurably without living according to reason, honor, and justice, nor to live according to reason, honor, and justice without living pleasurably." Incidentally, it may be recalled that by reason is meant the practical reason, which guides the individual in every choice between doing and not doing a given thing; by honor is meant the unwritten law that determines the conduct of a gentleman; and by justice is meant obedience to the written laws of the country.

At first glance this reciprocation of pleasure and the virtues may seem to result in placing pleasure and virtue upon a parity of importance, but this inference is readily shown to be illusory. Virtue, unlike pleasure, is not "the first good" nor "the beginning and the end of the happy life." Even if Nature approves of virtue, she first bestows approval upon pleasure, because she links it with life from the moment of birth in advance of volition and intelligence. Pleasure possesses a long precedence over virtue in the growth of the human being; the newborn infant can feel pleasure but cannot practice virtue. By benefit of this priority pleasure becomes a criterion and, when at length the choice to act virtuously or otherwise must be made, this choice must be decided by the criterion that has the priority. Thus virtue is chosen for the sake of pleasure and not the contrary. This reasoning holds good if the genetic approach is admitted to be correct.

In the heat of controversy Epicurus did not shrink from employing strong language: "I spit upon the beautiful and those who unreasonably adore it when it gives no pleasure." When he says "unreasonably" this is more than mere derision; it is fundamental doctrine. Since the only real existences are atoms and void, it follows that no abstractions exist; "justice is nothing by itself"; form cannot exist apart from substance, quality apart from thing, virtue apart from action. This results in a sort of nominalism; virtue becomes an empty name, corresponding to no reality. "You think virtue a mere locution and a stately grove just sticks," wrote Horace; this was alleged to be Epicurean doctrine. The same allegation applied to the saying that passed as the last words of Marcus Brutus: "O unhappy Virtue, so you were just a word after all and I was practicing you as something real."

These judgments of Epicurus were well deliberated and logically based upon his premises. His denial of immortality resulted in the restriction of pleasure to the brief span of mortal life. The reward of virtue could not be postponed but was bound to be immediate and concurrent. This view is explicit in Vatican Saying 27: "In the case of other activities completion is toilsome and the reward comes after it, but in the study of philosophy the pleasure keeps pace with the process of learning and the enjoyment does not follow after learning but is simultaneous with it." There is no hint of despair or self-abandonment; he does not lightly advise "to take the cash and let the credit go" nor "to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die"; his attitude is restrained, logical, realistic, and utilitarian. His studied aim is to discover exactly where immediate pleasure is to be found and to seize it.

The success of Epicurus in his sponsorship of pleasure had the effect of embittering the battle of the schools and of advancing it to a new phase. His versatile contemporary Theophrastus devoted some study to the classification of goods, wealth, health, and the like, and after the death of both men the Peripatetics and Stoics pursued this line of inquiry into great detail. Out of this fetishistic comparison of goods arose the question concerning the identity of the superlative good or summum bonum, which it was falsely presumed must be the telos.

Post by "Cassius" of August 30, 2019 at 4:39 PM

Thank you JAWS!

A SUMMARY OF CHAPTER XII: THE NEW HEDONISM FROM EPICURUS & HIS PHILOSOPHY BY NORMAN WENTWORTH DEWITT

Much of what is discussed here is stated by Epicurus in the middle section of his Letter to Menoeceus. I recommend having a copy of the letter nearby to refer to while reading this summary. The letter to Menoeceus, principle doctrines, and the Vatican sayings can all be found on NewEpicurean.com.

THE "SUMMUM BONUM" FALLACY

It is often misunderstood that Epicurus taught that pleasure was the greatest good. What Epicurus really taught was that life itself is the greatest good and that pleasure is the telos. Telos means end as in fulfillment or culmination rather than termination. DeWitt explains that this misunderstanding stems from limitations of the Latin language. Latin did not have a word that corresponds to telos and thus summum bonum was used to describe the role of pleasure. Summum bonum means the chief good.

Post by "Godfrey" of August 30, 2019 at 9:51 PM

Thanks JAWS! 

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/405-discussion-plan-for-chapter-12-the-new-hedonism-norman-dewitt-s-epicurus-and-his/>