

# Discussion Plan For Chapter 14 "The New Virtues" (Norman DeWitt's "Epicurus And His Philosophy")

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## CHAPTER XIV - THE NEW VIRTUES

### 1. Introduction:

1. Compare Epicurus with Plato: "Plato viewed the topic of ethics within a political context. His four cardinal virtues, Wisdom, Temperance, Courage, and Justice, were defined within the political context and they were meshed alike with the division of citizens into men of gold, silver, and iron and with the tripartite division of the soul as rational, appetitive, and passionate."
2. "While the good Platonist, like the Christian, lived in contemplation of immortality, the Epicurean was taught to live in contemplation of mortality. The chance of achieving happiness was narrowly confined to the interval between birth and death. This had the effect of bestowing great urgency upon the business of living rightly; procrastination became the greater folly. Only the present is within man's control; the future is unpredictable, and to alter the past is beyond the power of Jupiter himself. This way of looking at the problem of living constitutes a matrix of meanings for Patience, Hope, and Gratitude, corresponding respectively to present, future, and past."

### 2. Wisdom

1. "In Plato's psychology Wisdom was associated with the rational part of the soul; its highest activity was the study of mathematics, and in ethical and political investigations its instrument was dialectic. Since Epicurus dethroned Reason and found in Nature the source of ethical and political truth it followed that dialectic became superfluous."
2. "In place of the grandiose notion of Wisdom, identifiable with pure reason and divinity and existing apart from mankind, Epicurus chose to exalt the practical reason, phronesis, which was "the greatest good and the beginning of all the other virtues." An alternative title was "sober calculation," of which it was the function "to search out the reasons for every choice and avoidance and to expel the false opinions, which are the chief cause of turmoil in the souls of men." 2 Its method of procedure was to weigh the advantages against the disadvantages in every contemplated action. In Authorized Doctrine 16 it is declared capable of controlling the whole conduct of life, rendering man independent of Fortune."

### 3. Temperance

1. DeWitt notes the Greek context of this was related to issues of homosexuality and "Platonic love."
2. Says in Epicurus' context: "He also worked out a procedure for developing self-control in his disciples. The working principle, which rather oddly, had its ultimate source in Platonic teaching,<sup>3</sup> was the classification of desires as natural and necessary, natural but not necessary, and neither natural nor necessary. The practical reason was the umpire in every choice and the operation runs as follows, 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?""

#### 4. Courage

1. "In the extant writings of Epicurus not a single mention of Courage is found, but it is clear from Authorized Doctrine 28, which Cicero quotes under the topic of friendship, that Epicurus associated it definitely with enduring torture or dying for a friend. To understand this Doctrine the principle must be carried in mind that "nothing terrible can happen to one while living who has thoroughly grasped the truth that there is nothing terrible in not living." <sup>10</sup> The text, rather curiously worded, runs as follows: "The same argument that assures us of nothing terrible lasting forever or even very long discerns the protection furnished by friendship in this brief life of ours as being the most dependable of all." n If this be kept in mind, it is possible to understand a saying reported of Epicurus at second hand that "Courage comes not by Nature but by a calculation of advantage."

#### 5. Justice

1. "The importance he attached to the topic is indicated by the relatively ample coverage in the Authorized Doctrines, eight items out of forty, and every one anti-Platonic. In respect of the origin of Justice he holds to the theory of the "social contract,"
2. It is very probable that in speaking of wild animals Epicurus was thinking chiefly of elephants. The data gathered by Alexander's scientific staff were promptly reported, and the later work of Megasthenes on the flora and fauna of India was published in 310 B.C., four years before Epicurus settled down in his Cecropian Garden. The belief that elephants would not harm one another proved so fascinating that, as the elder Pliny informs us, King Bocchus of Numidia decided to make a test of it.<sup>17</sup> It was found that even a herd of specially trained beasts refused to attack another herd. In the same context Pliny credits the elephant with "a divination of Justice." This is the Prolepsis or Anticipation of Justice, to which Epicurus refers twice. It is an innate, an embryonic idea, which exists in advance of experience, anticipates experience and predetermines conduct. In the case of human beings it is capable of development by instruction and reflection but its validity as a criterion comes from Nature. Reason is not necessary to discover it. Dialectic is a superfluity.

#### 6. Honesty

1. "The Greek word around which he chose to build up his cardinal virtues was *parresia*, "freedom of speech." The practice of this was a boast of the Athenians in

both public and private life. In the political sphere it signified the right of every citizen to stand up in the public assembly and express his honest opinion. For the contrary vice of shameless assentation the Athenians had developed a special term, sycophancy. It consorted with flattery. During the enforced residence of Epicurus in Lampsacus the Athenian assembly was showering honors upon the Macedonian governor Demetrius Phalereus. After his expulsion it reversed itself and outdid itself in honoring his supplanter."

2. "On this topic of outspokenness Epicurus issued a veritable manifesto, Vatican Saying 29: "As for myself, I should prefer to practice the outspokenness [parresia] demanded by the study of Nature and to issue the kind of oracles that are beneficial for all mankind, even if not a soul shall understand, rather than by falling into step with popular opinions to harvest the lush praise that falls from the favor of the multitude." In this instance, as in many others, it should be borne in mind that by the multitude Epicurus means the people seated in the public assembly. It was his conviction that the democratic political life made dupes of both politicians and people. It was his advice "to avoid publicity."
3. He did not, as editors would have it, exhort the youthful Pythocles "to flee from every form of culture," but rather "to shun the whole program of education." The dialecticians were called "wholesale corrupters."2a Socrates, because of his dishonest affectation of ignorance and his concealment of the deadly weapon of dialectic, was judged guilty of cheating.
4. Epicurus was aiming a sidelong thrust at Socrates when he described the wise man as follows: "The man who has once attained to wisdom never exhibits the opposite diathesis nor does he deliberately simulate it."

## 7. Faith

1. A brief chain argument will show how the doctrine of Faith fits into the new matrix of meanings. As a dogmatist Epicurus believed that truth was discoverable and also that he had discovered it. He called his teachings "true philosophy." Since this philosophy was presented as ultimate truth it demanded of the disciple the will to believe and in the case of junior pupils subjection to indoctrination.
2. "Epicurus was more restrained and stopped short of fanatical trust in his creed. Friendship was subject to planning and began with advantage even if developing into affection and faith. Authorized Doctrine 40: "All those who have best succeeded in building up the ability to feel secure from the attacks of those around them have lived the happiest lives with one another, as having the firmest faith." Thus even faith is in part the result of planning."
3. Epicurus was aware nevertheless of the saving function of faith. He assures his disciples that his account of the soul will result in "the firmest faith,"48 and the sole objective of the study of celestial phenomena is to acquire "tranquillity and a firm faith."
4. It is uncertainty rather than outright disbelief that seemed to Epicurus the opposite of faith. Assuredly uncertainty was deemed more destructive of happiness. Two of the Authorized Doctrines, 12 and 13, bear upon this point: "It is impossible for men

to dispel the fear concerning things of supreme importance not understanding the nature of the whole universe but suspecting there may be some truth in the stories related in the myths. Consequently it is impossible without the knowledge of Nature to enjoy the pleasures unalloyed." "Nothing is gained by building up the feeling of security in our relations with men if the things above our heads and those beneath the earth and in general those in the unseen are matters of suspicion.

#### 8. Love of Mankind

1. "Vain is the word of that philosopher by which no malady of mankind is healed, for just as there is no benefit in the art of medicine unless it expels the diseases of men's bodies, so there is none in philosophy either unless it expels the malady of the soul. - It is on this principle that he denied to Leucippus the right to the name of philosopher and chiefly on the same ground that he broke with Democritus, who seemed in the opinion of his great disciple to impose upon men a paralyzing law of physical necessity.
2. Vatican Saying 52: "Love goes whirling in dance around the whole earth veritably shouting to us all to awake to the blessedness of the happy life.
3. Although Love is said by Epicurus to go whirling in dance around the whole earth, there is no specific command to go into all lands and preach the gospel to every creature. It is true that Epicurus anticipated the apostles in the writing of pastoral epistles, but he did not undertake missionary journeys. Neither did he enjoin this upon others. Each Epicurean household was to become a cell from which the true philosophy should be quietly extended to others. His imperative was "to take advantage of all other intimacies and under no circumstance to slacken in the effort to disseminate the sayings of the true philosophy."

#### 9. Friendship

1. Epicurus was extolled for "his humane feeling toward all men.
2. Authorized Doctrine 27: "Of all the preparations which wisdom makes for the blessedness of the complete life by far the most important is the acquisition of friendship."
3. Vatican Saying 23: "Every friendship is desirable for its own sake but has its beginning in assistance rendered."
4. Epicurus is careful to observe "that the way must be prepared in advance of needs, for we also sow seed in the ground." 59 Upon prospective friends a very discerning eye must be cast. Two sorts will be rejected at the outset, Vatican Saying 39: "Neither is he a true friend who is continually seeking help nor he who on no occasion associates friendship with help, because the former is bartering his gratitude for the tangible return and the latter is cutting off good expectations concerning the future." Caution is recommended against hasty judgments, Vatican Saying 28: "We must not be critical either of those who are quick to make friends or those who are slow but be willing to risk the offer of friendship for the sake of winning friendship." In the end it is asserted "that the tie of friendship knits itself through reciprocity of favors among those who have come to enjoy pleasures to the full." 60

## 10. Suavity

1. St. Augustine, who, like other churchmen of Africa, possessed a good understanding of Epicureanism and but for its denial of immortality would have awarded it the palm, in one passage selected as its watchwords "pleasure, suavity, and peace."
2. It is quite to be expected that in Cicero's sly but genial essay On Friendship, a topic for which Epicurus possessed a moral copyright, we should find it briefly defined as "a certain agreeableness of speech and manners."
3. It connoted both a quality of voice and an expression of countenance, as Nepos makes plain in his characterization of the youthful Atticus.<sup>65</sup> Cicero in his letters knew the value of complimenting Epicurean friends upon the possession of it. Even to the lean and hungry Cassius, hardly sweet of disposition though known to have followed Epicurus, is ascribed "an unlimited fund of sweetness." ee The merry Papirius Paetus deserved better to be told that his letters "overflowed with sweetness." <sup>67</sup> Cicero even claimed the quality for himself, though famed for the acidity of his tongue.<sup>68</sup> It fitted much better the jocular Eutrapelus, whom he addresses as "my sweetest Volumnius."<sup>69</sup> So singular is the usage of the word that it almost ranks as a test for identifying Epicurean correspondents.

## 11. Considerateness

1. the Epicurean "holds in high regard as many people as possible."
2. Vatican Saying 15: "We prize our own characters exactly as we do our private property, whether or not this property be of the best and such as may be coveted by men. In the same way we ought also to respect the characters of our neighbors, if they are considerate."
3. Neighbors who exhibited a lack of consideration were to expect retaliation in kind. The Donatus commentary specifically identifies as an example of *epieikeia* the following sentiment in the prologue of the Phormio of Terence: "Let him reflect that the treatment dealt out to him has been the same as was dealt out by him." The commentary attaches the same label to a threat in the prologue of the Eunuchus: "I warn that man not to make a mistake and to cease provoking me."

## 12. Hope

1. The proper attitude toward the future was diligently studied and set forth with disjunctive lucidity: "It must be remembered that the future is neither altogether within our control nor altogether beyond our control, so that we must not await it as going to be altogether within our control nor despair of it as being altogether beyond our control."
2. the words of Cicero to the merry Epicurean Papirius Paetus: "You, however, as your philosophy teaches, will feel bound to hope for the best, contemplate the worst, and endure whatever shall come."
3. Horace to the unstable Licinius, Odes 2, 10.13-15: *sperat infestis, metuit secundis alteram sortem bene praeparatum pectus*. "The man whose mind is well prepared hopes for a change of fortune in adversity, fears it in prosperity."
4. "What else," he cites him as demanding, "falls more within the province of the soul than the stable well-being of the flesh and the confident expectation concerning the

same ?" 96 This doctrine touching the feasibility of counting upon the continuance of health became such a crux of controversy as to be quoted by pagans and churchmen over the space of five centuries. Cicero makes four references to it, ascribing it to Metrodorus, while three others give it to Epicurus.

5. The core of this dialectic was the doctrine that experience could be controlled and that man could make himself master of his fate. The controlled experience upon which he pinned his hope was chiefly the simple life, independent of wealth and luxury and far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, about which no other had more to say. Vatican Saying 33 must have been a favorite: "The cry of the flesh is not to hunger, not to thirst, not to suffer cold, because, possessing these and expecting to possess them, a man may vie with Zeus himself in respect of happiness." That this attitude may attain the rank of a kinetic pleasure is clear from another saying, the one that is mentioned seven times: "The stable condition of well-being in the flesh and the confident hope concerning this means the height of enjoyment and the greatest certainty of it for those who are capable of figuring the problem out." 88

### 13. Attitude Toward the Present

1. For Epicurus the chief factor of choice was the denial of immortality, which confined the chance of happiness to the here and now. The effect of this was to endow the present with a tremendous urgency as affording the sole opportunity for action.
2. "He that sayeth the hour for putting philosophy into practice is not yet come or has passed by is like unto him that sayeth the hour for happiness is not yet come or is no more."
3. The imperatives of Horace exhibit a contrast of their own, now gaily admonitory, now peremptory: *carpe diem*, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," as it were; *sapere aude, incipe*, "Dare to translate wisdom into action; make a beginning."
4. Vatican Saying 30, ascribed to Metrodorus: "Some men devote life to accumulating the wherewithal of life, failing to realize that the potion mixed for us all at birth is a draught of death." Diverse tones resound in the sharp words of Epicurus himself, Vatican Saying 14: "We are born once and we cannot be born twice but must to all eternity be no more, and fool that you are, though not master of the morrow, you postpone the hour and life is frittered away in procrastination, and each one of us goes on making excuses till he dies."

### 14. Gratitude

1. In relation to happiness, the goal of living, it functioned as a chief coefficient, just as ingratitude was a chief cause of misery. In respect of free will, it represented the proper attitude to be chosen toward the past, though active also in the present. The cultivation of it presumed the feasibility of a total control of experience, including thought itself: "Moreover, it lies in our power to bury, as it were, unhappy memories in everlasting oblivion and to recall happy memories with sweet and agreeable recollection.
2. Vatican Saying 75: "The adage which says, 'Look to the end of a long life,' bespeaks a lack of gratitude for past blessings."

## 15. Gratitude to Teachers

1. DeWitt says Epicurus held: "the greatest good is life itself and the fulfillment of life is found in tranquillity of mind; this in turn depends upon knowing the true way of life; consequently the greatest gratitude is due to the pathfinder who has discovered the true way and sets the feet of the disciple in the road he must follow."
2. The proper relation between teacher and pupils was regarded as identical with that of father to children. Only in the light of this truth is it possible to arrive at a correct translation of an excerpt from a letter of Epicurus to his chief financial supporter, Idomeneus of Lampsacus: "Send us, therefore, your first-fruits for the sustenance of my sacred person and for that of my children, for so it occurs to me to express it."
3. Hippocratic oath: "I will look upon him who has taught me the art as I do my parents and will share with him my livelihood; if he is in need I will give him money"

## 16. Gratitude to Nature

1. "Gratitude is due to blessed Nature because she has made life's necessities easy of acquisition and those things that are difficult of acquisition unnecessary."

## 17. Gratitude To Friends

1. Epicurus published a book to fit the time, entitled *On Gifts and Gratitude*.
2. "Friendship has its origin in human needs. It is necessary, however, to prepare the way for it in advance — for we also sow seed in the ground — but it crystallizes through a reciprocity of benefits among those who have come to enjoy pleasures to the full."
3. Horace, 1.7, addressing Maecenas, who was pressing his rights as patron too rigorously, states his stand as follows: "The good and wise man declares himself willing to assist the deserving and I too shall show myself deserving in proportion to the merit of my benefactor."
4. "The wise man alone will know true gratitude and with respect to friends, whether present or absent, will be of the same mind throughout the whole journey of life."
5. Horace cited above, lines 20-21: "The open-handed fool makes a gift of that in which he sees no use or value. This is a seed-bed that has produced crops of ingrates in the past and will do so for all years to come."

## 18. Fruits Of Gratitude

1. "Unlike the Stoics who came after him, Epicurus entertained no distrust of the emotions. To the wise man he ascribed an exceptional depth of feeling. At the same time he was mindful of expediency. Emotions under proper control contributed to happiness, and happiness was a form of the advantageous."
2. "Both when young and when old one should devote himself to philosophy in order that while growing old he shall be young in blessings through gratitude for what has been."
3. "Forgetting the good that has been, he becomes an old man this very day."
4. We must not spoil the enjoyment of the blessings we have by pining for those we have not but rather reflect that these too are among the things desirable.

5. "It is the ungratefulness in the soul that renders the creature endlessly lickerish of embellishments in diet."
6. Vatican Saying 55: "One should heal his misfortunes by grateful recollection of friends who have passed on and by reflecting that what has once happened cannot be undone."
7. When Epicurus, in Vatican Saying 66, wrote, "Let us show our sympathy with our friends, not by wailing but by taking thought," it was almost certainly meant that comfort should be found in the thought, as Horace expressed it, that Jupiter himself was impotent to cancel the recollection of a happy past.
8. Vatican Saying 47: "When Necessity does remove us, spitting scornfully upon life and those who foolishly cling to it, we shall depart this life with a beauteous paean of victory, raising the refrain that we have lived a good life."