

Choice & Avoidance: towards a better translation for avoidance

Post by “Julia” of August 16, 2024 at 7:23 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

unless you're redefining "play."

I was very much doing that, yes.

[Quote from Don](#)

We can choose to undergo pain IF it will lead to future greater pleasure.

I meant all six (non-)movements in "the way it would make sense in an Epicurean frame (and not a Cyrenaic)". So "move-to pleasure" was meant as "pursuit of pleasure" which may very well entail blood, sweat and tears, as you've correctly pointed out. However, to be in pursuit of pain (I called it: move-to pain), is just not something I should be engaged in. Likewise, to move away from pleasure (for no good reason!) is also something I shouldn't be engaged in.

Maybe I should have just used the word "pursuit" instead of "movement" from the start...

[Quote from Don](#)

the through-line is being able to experience a pleasurable state in as many activities as possible if one feels no pain

Yes, but: Even when I am safe, fed, warm, clean, sheltered, rich, and loved and currently lie in the best bed ever built, I will soon be in pain unless I do something, because after a few hours max, my joints and spine will beg for movement by sending me pain. I will have to at least twist and turn (or ask to be turned) to return to the static pleasure of being perfectly comfortable all around - and even if I were floating in a salt water pool to make my joints/spine happy forever, eventually I'd have to get out because I'll start to shrivel or simply because nature calls! (I've been immobilised in the past, and it stuck with me how very many minute mental and physical processes are involved in what is casually condensed into "I lie in bed and do nothing". It stuck how much activity this "nothing" actually still contains, and also how exhausting, later even excruciating that activity can become.)

From that I learned that I have to *maintain* pleasure, that maintenance will interrupt the state of "not doing or thinking anything while experiencing perfect pleasure"; this interruption is what I meant by "stay-in pleasure doesn't last long". It may be that I enjoy the maintenance task (eg:

enjoy turning around in bed), but then I would classify that as "pursuit of pleasure", "move-to pleasure", "[redefined] play" or – now that you told me: Hairesis or Pheugo (depending on the specific situation and also state of mind)

[Quote from Don](#)

φεύγω (pheugo) as "flee/escape" always struck me as more immediate, more urgent, than "avoiding"

I wasn't aware of the original Pheugo meaning. It is indeed much more immediate. While to flee/escape sounds too immediate to me in modern English, "evade" offers a middle-ground, is also active and with agency. If I need a modern English word I might prefer that now. Otherwise, I shall like the Greek words as you described them:

[Quote from Don](#)

I'd go back to αἵρεσις (hairesis) and φεύγω (pheugo). αἵρεσις can mean the taking of a town in a battle; choice or election of magistrates. Liddell & Scott write that its opposite in some senses is κλήρος (kleros) which is the casting of lots. So it's the difference between making an informed choice (αἵρεσις) or making a decision by flipping a coin (κλήρος). φεύγω can be thought of as people fleeing that town that's being taken in a battle; they're escaping from their fate; they have agency in fleeing the situation. The opposite of that word is διώκω (dioko) which is defined as pursue, chase, in war or hunting; pursue an object, seek after; or even drive or chase away.

Both αἵρεσις (hairesis) and φεύγω (pheugo), to me, convey agency in whatever direction one heads. It is not a passive activity, but one taken with vigor and purpose.

With this description, Hairesis and Pheugo appear like what I was looking for! They still feel a bit unfamiliar, because there's no perfect 1-1 translation to English, but that's good, because I'm quite certain English simply lacks the two words as I seek them! (Also, I never thought this is what "choice" was in the sources)

Thank you very much, Don! 😊👍

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I'm leaning toward "choosing and fleeing" (or choice and avoidance)

After having been professionally schooled on Greek now 😊 I can see the "choosing" in a more agreeable light, but I still sort-of reject it in modern English. A lot still has to happen between choice and action, and we may even make impossible choices. As such, would not "commitment" be better? When I lay in bed and began to be hurting, reaching the choice to turn has always required very little, but solidifying the commitment to now actually do turn

myself was hard. At times, it needed a while of pain to move me from choice to commitment. After commitment, the action began without much hold-up.

[Quote from Don](#)

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Pheugo only takes agency in actively-leaving-where-I-was, but it does not take agency in going-somewhere-specific, correct? Pheugo is an "anywhere but here" action (as opposed to a "toward somewhere specific" action)?

Offering the antonyms of each helped me much:

"deliberate choice/commitment" vs "leave to chance"

"flight from/evade (avoid)" vs "chase of/after".

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

What's important is grasping the wider concepts, the shorthand and outlines are really just reminders of the bigger picture.

I agree, and also having shorthands adds value in its own right (otherwise we might be speaking in [Toki Pona](#) right now). In my mind, a concept that has no name remains elusive, hard to reflect on, and hard to operate from; it remains a phantom. I have better words now, I am happy 😊

Thank you all for being so patient with me 😊