

Tetrapharmakos in Philodemus's On Choices and Rejections

Post by "Don" of October 5, 2024 at 11:14 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Would "readily" work?

No.

Seriously though, "readily" conveys to me something immediately available: "without hesitating; ex., *They readily accepted her advice.*" It *can* be used for "easily" but, to me, it doesn't have the right connotation.

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

Fear not God nor death;
The good is easy to get,
The bad, boldly met.

I like the direction that heads. We don't have to run from pain or hide from pain or try to convince ourselves that pain isn't there. But boldly strikes me as leaning Stoic: teeth-gritting, "virtuously" standing up to show how one sees oneself as being indifferent to pain.

That said, some synonyms/uses of "boldy" are possible: fearless before danger; (obsolete) assured, confident.

We can be "emboldened" by putting "the terrible" in context. If the pain is acknowledged and dealt with, we need not pile mental suffering on top of physical pain or on mental pain, grief, sorrow, etc. I'm an NOT saying that chronic pain is "easily" dealt with, as in "it's no big deal, be stoically indifferent to it." Investigate it, how can you gain perspective on it? How can you put it into context within the larger experience of your life. By Zeus, I count myself fortunate that I do not have any type of chronic pain, but I am convinced that if we belittle anyone who does or say "Pain is easily endured," Epicurus's philosophy loses credibility.

That said, I still contend boldly that the tetrapharmakos is a useful shorthand for those who want to explore the philosophy and a useful shorthand for "veteran Epicureans" to keep the MOST basic tenets of the philosophy at hand.

So, how to deal with the English translation "easily..."? We don't seem to have a problem with the εὐκτητον "easy to get". We don't like the εὐεκκατέρητον "easily *endured*."

I keep coming back to my options in #48 above: "*without undue effort*" or *going smoothly or being able to accomplish something without any impediments or burdens*. In keeping with eu-'s usual "well/good" connotation.

εὖ-κτητον "well/good - acquired, procured" Interestingly, LSJ gives εὖκτητος the [definition of "honestly acquired."](#) One can acquire pleasure *without effort*. It is literally all around you, every minute of the day, if you are willing to recognize it (i.e., everything that does not cause pain). It can be "easily" acquired. There are no impediments to acquiring The Good, only the impediments you put in your own way.

εὐ-εκκατέρητον "well/good" > ἐγκατερῶ "persevere or persist in a thing" To me, persevere or persist has a different feel/connotation than "endure." It's a subtle shade of meaning, but it's there - nagging at my neurons. Endure has a teeth-gritting quality to it. If one "perseveres well" or "persists well"... what could that mean? To me, the word is still saying that we can persevere in the presence of pain IF we don't throw up impediments that are unnecessary. Worrying about worrying. Being anxious about something that has not happened yet. And so on. Keeping PD4 in mind.

NONE of this is "easy" in the sense of "trivial." "Oh, that's SO easy. La de da." No, maybe effortlessly? One synonym is "uncomplicated" for effortless. *Don't complicate* the pursuit of pleasure or the perseverance of pain! Take it easy. Don't fight against the waves. Let the waves of pleasure wash over you. Enjoy them. Don't fight against the waves of pain. Acknowledge them. Embrace the help of friends and family. Accept emotional and medical help for chronic disease pain. Pick your battles. Don't fight needlessly.

So, in the end, I guess there's not a perfect one-word English modifier for a translation of εὖκτητον and εὐεκκατέρητον. Easily, effortlessly, boldly, readily, prudently?? Sensibly, wisely?

καὶ τάγαθὸν μὲν εὖκτητον, - and The Good, on the one hand, is effortlessly acquired

τὸ δὲ δεινὸν εὐεκκατέρητον - while on the other hand, we prudently persevere against The Terrible

Those are convoluted paraphrases, taking the dynamic equivalence approach to translation to a fare-the-well! But that's how I'm beginning to understand those two lines and to make peace with εὖκτητον and εὐεκκατέρητον.