

Dead Reddit / The "Isms" Thread

Post by "Eikadistes" of November 26, 2019 at 12:57 AM

On "**Epicureanism**" and "**Epicurean Philosophy**"

I've been researching ancient Greek etymology, and have thought a lot about this over the last few days (*especially with the anticipation that I'll be collaborating with Charles and Hiram, and release the aforementioned meme on **r/Epicurean_Philosophy**, knowing that the 9,000+ members of the **r/Epicureanism** group on Reddit will have questions regarding the differences between our chosen vocabularies*).

Herein, I conclude that "**Epicureanism**" is **NOT** an appropriate expression of our *natural philosophy*, and - especially rendered through modern English - "**Epicureanism**" is **NOT** an appropriate expression of Epicurus' *observations*.

Our Greek friends **Harris Demitiadis** and **Elli** have presented us with valuable insights into the origins of our terminology, thus, providing us with additional tools through which we can examine our discourse. *Admittedly*, I have **NOT** *really* grasped the key nuances of their points (which I *now* believe I have come to understand), so I took it upon myself to deconstruct our terminology with the intention of gaining a fresh perspective toward the natural world.

I'd like to start with an etymological investigation. I hope that this investigation provides insight to my fellow English-**only**-speakers (I, myself, am monolingual), and - **please** - Elli, if I misinterpret the language, re-direct my mistakes!

-ISMS

As Alex Rios once observed, our English suffix, "**-ism**" is - *correctly*, according to **both** common and academic usages in Modern English - employed to mean a distinctive "doctrine", "theory", "attitude", "belief", "practice", "process", "state", "condition", "religion", "system", or - as he has cited, with **fair** reason - "**philosophy**". According to this widespread definition, it is **not** unreasonable to suppose that adding a simple "**-ism**" at the end of "*the philosophy of Epicurus*" should, *appropriately* and *accurately*, render the word "**Epicureanism**", (or even "**Epicurism**").

In more succinct terms, we can visualize "**Epicurean-ism**" as "**Epicurean-philosophy**".

This works for practical purposes, and - as I'm sure you would agree - no one in this thread, or this forum, or this webpage will be misled by my meaning if I replace "**Epicurean-ism**" as "**Epicurean-philosophy**", or vis a versa. **HOWEVER**, in doing so, I propose that we are missing out on an important teaching opportunity that has been lost in translation.

-ISMVS

Our tradition of adding "**-ism**" to the end of words – in which we express distinctive "**philosophies**" – begins in the post-Classical period, corresponding to the *Renaissance*, the cultural "*rebirth*" of systems and ideas from the ancient world, translated through the **Latin** language, using the Roman alphabet, sheathing ancient Greek observations.

(I'm going to call this tradition – in which **ALL** English-speakers partake – the "**Ism-ism**", or, in other words, "the systemic practice of adding '**-ism**' to idea-expressing words". We are **ALL**, necessarily, **Ismists** in some respect.)

From the perspective of the contemporary world, the suffix "**-ismus**" was borrowed from the *Old Latin* language of the Romans, and appropriated by post-Classical (and Modern) peoples when using *New Latin* and *Contemporary Latin*. For centuries, our adherence to **Ismism** has been helped European thinkers minimize the losses that occur in translation. We find an abundance of "**-ism**" and "**-ismus**" in **both** *Romance* and *Germanic* language families, and – as with Latin – they express the meaning of distinctive "doctrines", "theories", "attitudes", "beliefs", and "**philosophies**".

Here, however, is where we note a difference that our Mediterranean friends have often observed: while the **Greek** language, like **Celtic**, and **Indic** languages, has evolved from a common Indo-European root, these languages have **NOT** adopted Latin conventions the same way that have *Romance* and *Germanic* languages. In the unique case of the Greeks, *Latin* was – as I'm sure is **more** than obvious to us all – heavily influenced by the parent of ancient Greek.

-ἴζω | -ίζō | -ize

According to my research, we receive the Latin "**-ismus**" from the ancient Greek "**-ισμός**" ("**-ismós**"), which, *itself*, is a bracketing of two *other* ancient Greek words, those words being "**-ἴζω**" ("**-ízō**") and "**-μός**" ("**-mós**"). We'll start with the former word, first. The suffix "**-ἴζω**" ("**-ízō**") was added to nouns to form new verbs. Let's look at (x3) examples:

1. κανονίζω – kanónízō – canonize

κανων (*kanón*) – literally referred to a "**reed**", and *connotatively* implied a "**measuring rod**" or "**standard**".

+ "**-ἴζω**" ("**-ízō**" or "**-ize**") renders "**κανονίζω**" or "**canonize**", meaning "**to make standard**".

2. ἑλληνίζω – Hállēnízō – Hellenize

Ἑλλην (*Hállēn*) – literally referred to that which is "**Greek**".

+ "**-ἴζω**" ("**-ízō**" or "**-ize**") renders "**ἑλληνίζω**" or "**Hellenize**", meaning "**to make Greek**".

3. συγχρονίζω – súnkhronosízō – synchronize

σύγχρονος (*súnkhronos*) – literally referred to "**synchronous**"

+ "-ἴζω" ("-ízō" or "-ize") renders "συγχρονίζω" or "synchronize", meaning "to make *synchronous*".

The key point with "-ἴζω" ("-ízō") – and our Modern English suffix "-ize" – is that we can turn any word into a verb, or, in more philosophically interesting terms, we can **ACTIVATE** it.

-μός | -μός

The second suffix from which the ancient Greek "-ισμός" ("-ismós") was bracketed is "-μός" ("-μός"). Contrary to the convention of **ACTIVATING** a word that *represents a concept*, adding ("-μός") **ABSTRACTS** an *action*. We can demonstrate this convention through (x3) more examples that translate well into Modern English:

1. σαρκασμός - sarkasmós - sarcasm

σαρκάζω (*sarkázō*) – literally, and **figuratively** meant "tearing apart" or "to tear off the flesh".

+ "-μός" ("-μός") renders "σαρκασμός" or "sarcasm", meaning "**(figuratively) tearing apart**".

2. συλλογισμός - sullogismós - syllogism

συλλογίζομαι (*sullogízomai*) – literally meant "to compute" or "to infer".

+ "-μός" ("-μός") renders "συλλογισμός" or "syllogism", meaning a "computation" or an "inference".

3. κατακλυσμός - kataklusmós - cataclysm

κατακλύζω (*kataklúzō*) – literally meant "to wash away".

+ "-μός" ("-μός") renders "κατακλυσμός" or "cataclysm", meaning a "great flood".

The key point with "-μός" ("-μός") is that the ancient Greeks could turn any **active verb** into a word that expressed an *abstract concept*, or, in other words, it could *systematize* phenomenal activity into an *idea*.

-ισμός | -ismós | -ism

As I have come to understand it, the re-bracketing of the suffix "-μός" ("-μός"), appended with "-ἴζω" ("-ízō") presents us with "-ισμός" ("-ismós") or "-ism", a convention which *systematizes a verb that has been activated from a noun*. I was only able to identify five instances of this in ancient Greek, only (x1) of which provides a suitable example:

σάββατον - sábbaton - literally, the "**Sabbath**" (borrowed from the Hebrew "שַׁבָּת" or "šabbāt")

σαββάτιζω - sabbatízō - meaning "**to make, observe, or keep the Sabbath**"

σαββατισμός - sabbatismós - meaning "**the making, observing, or keeping of the Sabbath**"

As I mentioned before, unlike the "**-ismus**" of Latin, and the "**-ism**" of Modern English, the ancient Greek "**-ismos**" is almost **NEVER** used. The ancient Greeks - whose **tremendous** influence on our own intellectual conventions **cannot** be overstated - do *not* seem to have shared our tradition of **Ismism**.

Here, I'll employ a phrase I first read in a translation of Heidegger's *Being and Time*: that phrase is **originary language**. Based on my above research, it seems to me that the ancient Greeks - when faced with the need to express a **NEW** word with **FRESH** meaning - built the words that would fill their minds and guide their anticipations from *either* (1) the names of people and objects they observed, *or* (2) active forces they experienced, but **NOT** (3) abstract systems.