

Episode 168 - "Epicurus And His Philosophy" Part 21

- Chapter 10 - The New Freedom 01

Post by "Don" of April 6, 2023 at 4:11 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

During the episode, I expressed my misgivings/frustrations about the stock phrase "choice and avoidance." Avoiding, avoid, and avoidance have always struck me as [milquetoast](#) words. It reminds me of stepping around a mud puddle. "I avoided getting my foot wet."

Epicurus specific words are in the title of the work that laid out his thoughts on these actions: Περὶ αἰρέσεων καὶ φυγῶν. (Peri haireseon kai phugon). First, let's get the LSJ definitions on the table:

[http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...y%3Dai\(%2Fresis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...y%3Dai(%2Fresis)

αἵρεσις (hairesis) does mean "choice" but the connotation for me is much more active than just "choosing": "purpose, course of action or thought" Interestingly enough, it can also refer to the "taking" of a town by an army. It connotes for me an active process, not just a casual "choosing" what one has for dinner. I can live with "choice, choosing" but want to keep that active connotation in mind.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...ntry%3Dfeu%2Fgw>

φεύγω is what I really dislike translated as "avoidance." The first LSJ definition is "flee, take flight." If αἵρεσις is the taking of a town, φεύγω is fleeing or retreating. LSJ states that it is the opposite of δῶκω which it "pursue or chase." *A form of that word shows up in VS46:*

We cast off common customs just as we would do to wicked men who have been causing great harm for a long time.

τὰς φαύλας συνηθείας ὥσπερ ἄνδρας πονηροὺς πολὺν χρόνον μέγα βλάψαντες τελείως ἐκδιώκομεν.

ἐκδιώκομεν in this context means "to chase away, banish." So, φεύγω would refer to those being chased or being banished.

So, in keeping with my active sense of αἵρεσις, I see the same for φεύγω. It's not just a casual avoidance or avoiding, it is an active fleeing, taking flight (as in Gandalf's telling

the Fellowship "Fly, you fools!" as he fell in Moria), or escaping from something. True, LSJ includes "avoid" but down the list and in the context of all those other active words.

So, I much prefer, if I were to translate Epicurus's book Περὶ αἰρέσεων καὶ φυγῶν (and subsequent mentions of the practice) as "Concerning Choice and Flight" or "Choice and Escape" or "Pursuit and Escape" or something more active than "Choice and 'Avoidance'." You'll often see me use "choice or rejection" on the forum, but I would prefer to use one of those other translations.

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Here's a little more on the "choice and avoidance" commentary from above:

Περὶ (+ genitive) = "about, concerning, because of"

αἰρέσεων = genitive plural form of αἵρεσις

φυγῶν = genitive plural form of φυγή

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, φυγή](#)

I find it interesting that αἰρέσεων can refer to the taking of a town in battle, and φυγῶν flight in battle. There's a metaphorical war going on when you make "choices and 'avoidances'" which is why I'm encouraging a more active English word.

Look at other uses of φυγή other than Epicurus in LSJ definition 2. "flight or escape from a thing, avoidance of it":

- Aeschylus, Suppliant Women 395: Chorus: I am determined *to flee to escape* this marriage that offends my soul,...
- Sophocles, Antigone 364: Chorus: From Death alone he shall procure no escape, but from baffling diseases he has devised *flights.*
- Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus 280: Oedipus: But rather consider that they look on the god-fearing man [280] and on the godless, and that never yet has an impious man found *escape.*
- Euripides, Helen 799: Helen: Here, as a suppliant, I am asking for an *escape* from his bed.
- also cites Philodemus in P.Herc.1251.11 (peri haireseon kai phygon, i.e., his book of the same title as Epicurus's); opp. δῶξις, Epicur.Sent.25. (see above for comment on δῶξις)

Here's P.Herc.1251. Column 11 with line numbers:

[] -ca.?- [] ντελο[] -ca.?- []

[] -ca.?- [] ναιτου[] -ca.?- []

πα[.....]α καὶ διὰ τοῦτο δ[ῆ-]

λον [ἔτ]ι τῶν κ[α]κοπραγι[ῶν ἐ-]
5 [κ]είνω[ν] ἔξω κ[ακ]ίστ[ους] εἶν[αι· ὀ]
[διὰ] τὰ π[ε]ρὶ τῶ[ν] τεττάρω[ν εἰ-]
[ρ]ημέγα λέγεται, το[ῦ] τή[ν] περι[-]
ληψιν τὴν περὶ τῶν κυρι[ωτ]ά-
[τ]ων καὶ τὴν μνήνην π[ο]λ-
10 λὰ συμβάλλεσθαι πρὸς τὰς
οὔσας αἰρέσεις καὶ φυγὰς οὐ-
κ ἴσους τιθεμένου, καθάπερ
ἔξεδέξαντό τινες ἀγροί-
κως, τῶι τινὰς ἀναφέρουσ-
15 θαι τῶν αἰρέσεων καὶ φυγῶν
ἐπὶ τὰς περὶ τούτων ἀτα-
ραξίας, ἀλλὰ τῶι κ[α]τορθοῦσ-
θαι μὲν αὐτὰς τοῖς τέλεσι
τοῖς τῆς φύσεως παραμε-
20 τ[ρ]ούντων, πολλὰ δὲ [τ]ῶν
[.]τ[α][.]α[τα]ς[.....]τ[ι].]εν

PS. The Epicur.Sent.25 refers to [PD25](#)...

[PD25](#). If at all critical times you do not connect each of your actions to the natural goal of life, but instead turn too soon to some other kind of goal in thinking whether to ****avoid or pursue**** something, then your thoughts and your actions will not be in harmony.

εἰ μὴ παρὰ πάντα καιρὸν ἐπανοίσεις ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐπὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλὰ προκαταστρέψεις εἴτε ****φυγὴν εἴτε δίωξιν**** ποιούμενος εἰς ἄλλο τι, οὐκ ἔσονταί σοι τοῖς λόγοις αἰ πράξεις ἀκόλουθοι.

Seems to me a better translation there would be "flee or pursue" or "escape or pursue" not milquetoast "avoid" since δίωξιν is the opposite of φυγὴν.