

Choice & Avoidance: towards a better translation for avoidance

Post by “Julia” of August 15, 2024 at 10:29 AM

I would like to present for discussion a perspective and (mostly) **a choice of words**, which seems helpful to me. I do *not* yet know of an Epicurean source for this idea (there might be one; I'm still new here), but I currently consider it to be compatible (with Epicurean philosophy) and helpful (to me and maybe a subset of Epicureans). Okay; here we go:

Premises & initial chain of thought:

1. We agree that only two feelings exist.
2. Regarding any one thing in life, one either moves-towards, moves-away-from or stays-at.
3. That makes two directions (move-to & move-from) and one absence-of-direction.
4. Two feelings times three (non-)directions makes six possible combinations.
5. To move-from pleasure, move-to pain or stay-in pain are not things I should do; let's ignore them in this post.
6. For the sake of this idea, movement/activity/doing includes thinking and similar cognitive action.

This leaves three combinations:

1. To stay-in pleasure. This experience doesn't tend to last long, and it is an absence-of-direction. This means: I can desire it and pursue it, but I cannot do it, because not-doing cannot be done. It can only be engineered to come about, but once it begins, the doing has to stop for the not-doing to be present. Note: not-doing does *not* mean not-experiencing; we always experience, but passively experiencing a pleasure while neither thinking nor moving is not an activity – it is a passivity. It is not a behaviour, but a (momentary) absence of behaviour.
2. Moving-from pain. I have begun to call this action "to avoid", to call the process "avoidance" and the behaviour "avoiding".
3. Moving-to pleasure. I have begun to call this action "to play", to call the process "play" and the behaviour "playing".

Numbers 2 & 3 are what I care about in this post. It was very helpful to categorise everything I feel into pleasure and pain. However, to categorise everything I do by using the semantic relation of "movement/direction + reference-feeling" was too indirect and cumbersome: the "pursuit of pleasure" only does half the trick for me.

However, using special words (to play/to avoid) to encapsulate the same meaning in a single, direct linguistic entity made it *much* easier to shift myself. It seems quite useful to me to categorise my behaviours into avoidance and play, to think of everything I do as either avoiding or playing.

Playing *can* involve trading some pain for more pleasure. During hide and seek the effort of finding a good hiding place or of having to count to 100 is offset by the expectance and experience of fun. During adult life the pain of working is offset by the expectance and experience of things which money will buy. This reduces the harmful effect certain connotations of "to work" have on me.

"To avoid" adds some helpful connotations to "moving-from pain", which I would otherwise miss out on: I don't want to avoid *everything*, don't want to shy away from life, go back under my rock and wait to die - but I also don't want to end up back in Stoic territory of embracing pain. The word "avoidance" seems to hit that sweet spot in the middle, where I know that it's not something to build my life around, but I also know it is healthy to do with regards to pointless pains (those which won't yield net pleasure).

Do *direct* words for these two activities already exist? Other than describing or paraphrasing them, because it seems to *really* hold on to the concept during the course of each day I need an *immediate* verb/noun. Thank you 😊

1. PS: I think the reason why "movement/direction + reference-feeling" as in "pursuit of pleasure" only partially works for me, is because in the city that is my mind the neighbourhood where feelings live and the one where activities reside are still debating the terms of their Good Friday Agreement. Having special words for these two activities with bilaterally agreed-upon definitions appears to facilitate mutual understanding.

2. PS: Upon further reflection, an additional aspect seems important: The Stoic's dichotomy is between work (virtue) and play (vice). By subsuming (sensible) work into play and adding avoidance, the frame shifts and the dichotomy is no longer vice-virtue but pleasure-pain, as it should be. I used to think in terms of "work and play" so much that having equally simple, direct words to reflect the correct foundation (pleasure & pain) was important.