

Choice & Avoidance: towards a better translation for avoidance

Post by “Julia” of August 17, 2024 at 7:46 AM

How I currently interpret this

Both words and their opposites-of-sorts can be arranged along the dimension of agency:

1. Not left to chance when going anywhere-but-here: pheugo. You recognise a bad thing and get away from it.
2. Leaving to chance/others: kleros. To have one's things chosen or allotted by chance or others; determination of something, but not by decision.
3. Wanting something specific, but not taking the lead: dioko. Chase after someone, be guided by someone.
4. Wanting something specific, and being on the offence: hairesis. Master, conquer as well as conquer-able, master-able (as in: it wouldn't be in vain to mount an effort towards that goal)

This is to say: There is a middle-ground between flight and conquest, and that middle-ground is characterised by a lack of agency. In case of #2 agency is handed over to chance; in case of #3 it is handed over to whoever is in the lead or is perceived as the teacher/guide/authority. But even if we cannot avoid chance events, we have to make our choices, and even when someone is ahead of us, we have our own race to run. Nobody chooses to have their village burnt by lava, but neither a casual stroll nor packing one's entire possessions will be useful. A choice has to be made, a commitment to engage in flight and take it seriously.

By using pheugo and hairesis, we are to have agency and commitment in our actions, and the choice of words is a call to self-determination. Whichever word one uses in modern English, the aspect of commitment, agency and self-determination should be called and kept in mind (and which word does that best will depend on the person and probably the situation they're in.)

Analogy with numbers: The zero-point of passivity/nonagency is between 2 and 3. Kleros and dioko are close to zero; pheugo and hairesis are far from zero. Pheugo and hairesis only seem far away from each other, because their signs (+/-) are opposite, but really they are actually close relatives, because they both have large nominal values, they're both high-agency words, and the sign merely denotes who gave spark to this burst of agency and commitment: Whether oneself started it or whether the world necessitates it, what counts is having agency in both.

(Personally, I currently like pursue/evade as far as translations are concerned.)