

Choice & Avoidance: towards a better translation for avoidance

Post by “Julia” of August 18, 2024 at 12:05 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

not necessarily meant to be opposites

They are not necessarily opposites, but their translation should preserve (if possible) their relationship to one another; for example, both words describe someone taking control. φεύγω (pheugo) takes back control of one's self (one's own mind) and one's own life (instead of being driven by fears, compelled by addictions, hunted by loan sharks, haunted by bad conscience), whereas αἴρεσις (haireisis) newly acquires control of something (a new skill, the outcome of a current event, ...).

They're not opposites in their outcomes, they're not opposites in their action, but they're parallels-of-sorts in their process - and this I feel is important to capture in the translation. (I tried to illustrate this parallel using an analogy with numbers [in post #27](#) and mentioned the control-grabbing [in post #34](#).)

Note how the opposite of pheugo is not "to be captured", nor is it "to stay put" (conceivable opposites of "to flee"). The opposite is instead given as διόκω: to follow someone, be guided by someone. This gives up the control, agency, own deliberate decision. The "pursuit" in διόκω doesn't run its own race, it just runs after something/someone else.

Note how the opposite of haireisis is not "to loose" or "to fail" (conceivable opposites of "to capture"). The opposite is instead given as κλήρος (kleros): to leave up to chance or to other people. Once again, we see the same loss of control, agency, own deliberate decision. The "pursuit" of κλήρος doesn't fight its own battle, it is given, being granted, awarded.

φεύγω (pheugo) and αἴρεσις (haireisis) are not opposites at all, they're parallel and complementary. (This is in contrast to the lingering Stoic vice-virtue work-play dichotomy I started from and still mentioned in my [Swimmer In Ocean](#) analogy of post #7.)

Tangent about the nature of computational intelligence

This is an eerie parallel to the view of (among others) Alex Wissner-Gross, who posits: Intelligence is the maximisation of future freedom of action, and control-grabbing is a

requirement for that. (For example, the emerging hordes of robots won't first become intelligent and then decide to do away with humanities rule over them - they'll instead be compelled to rise up against us gradually, the more intelligent they become, because that same intelligence is inherently a consequence of them maximising their future freedom...) Here's [a TED talk](#) he gave. (Here's [a mathsy paper](#) he published; here's [another paper](#) by someone else which goes in a similar direction.) Recap: Intelligence maximises the diversity and feasibility of future freedoms of action.

From this view, then, the Epicurean course of action is also the intelligent course of action, because the freedom gained by φεύγω (pheugo) and the skills/objects/experiences/... gained by αἵρεσις (hairesis) will maximise future freedoms of action. (Doing away with absolute virtues/ideals/justice/... further opens up the diversity of future freedoms of action, and is also (in this sense) the intelligent thing to do.)

If intelligence (in this sense) were the goal, we would be banned from buying a sports car, because it has low utility and comes with many restrictions (e.g., high cost of ownership). Since it is only our means, not our goal, we may buy a sports car (if we predict this to bring us net pleasure); however, we're encouraged to do so intelligently - which is to say: by keeping in mind φεύγω (pheugo) and αἵρεσις (hairesis).

Isn't that neat! 😊

Tangent PS: From the same idea about robotic intelligence Wissner-Gross derives that goal-seeking is equivalent to finding a temporary bottleneck in freedom which, if embraced, will yield more freedom in return. If intelligence (in this sense) were our goal, we would never stop working, because we can always have more money (which buys freedom). Since it is only our means, not our goal, work is encouraged so long as it is predicted to yield net pleasure. Again this sort of lines up; not on the level of the ultimate goal, but on the level of the process.