

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.

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 15, 2024 at 3:38 PM

[Quote from Julia](#)

I would like to present for discussion a perspective and (mostly) a choice of words

This sounds like it could be helpful on an individual level, but may not necessarily be helpful for finding agreement or consensus.

I always think it is important to go back to the extant texts, and study various translations. We have the concepts as they are presented in the texts, and then we can expand those specific texts to see how they can apply to modern day situations.

Another aspect is investigating modern psychology and neuroscience in specific situations. When you mention the word "play" that reminds me about something [Don](#) posted (an article or podcast) about including more play in one's life. (I'm not sure where that is located).

I apologize that I'm not being very helpful in discussing language usage which seems to be the direction that post 1 above is going in. ([Cassius](#) maybe can help).

Post by “Julia” of August 15, 2024 at 4:10 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

to go back to the extant texts [...] discussing language usage

Yes, to sum up and rephrase virtually my entire original post:

Is there a *single* verb or noun synonymous with "pursuit of pleasure" either in English, Latin or (Ancient) Greek? Is there such a *single* verb or noun for "avoidance and prevention of pain"?

That's really all I'm wondering about at this time. Things somehow got rather wordy for such a simple question, and maybe this thread belongs into [Translation Issues \(General\)](#) even though I also wonder about English? I should have thought more about my intention behind this thread. Sorry about that...

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2024 at 4:20 PM

Julia that last post #3 does make your question very clear. I was thinking given the title of the thread that your focus was on replacing the word "Choice."

This isn't likely to be satisfactory, but I am tempted to suggest that we might sort of parallel the view that DeWitt suggested - that "life" rather than "pleasure" was Epicurus' greatest good. We might observe that from an Epicurean perspective the meaning of "pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain" comes down to a proper perspective on the verb **"to live!"**

I am reminded of that Latin poem by Catullus which contains "Vivamus mea Lesbia, atque amemus..."

Let us live, my Lesbia, let us love,
and value the rumors of dour old men
at just a single penny.
The sun falls and rises again:
but for us, once falls the paltry light,
ours is a sleep that lasts forever.
Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred,
then another thousand, and a second hundred,
then even another thousand, and a hundred—
then, after so many thousands,
we will throw them in disorder, losing count,
so that no one evil can envy,
knowing the count of our kisses.

I'm easily reminded of it cause I've never gotten it out of my mind after seeing this:

<https://youtu.be/Yzs2Fq1ICZU>

Post by “Julia” of August 15, 2024 at 4:48 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

This isn't likely to be satisfactory, but I am tempted to suggest that we might sort of parallel the view that DeWitt suggested - that "life" rather than "pleasure" was Epicurus' greatest good. We might observe that from an Epicurean perspective the meaning of "pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain" comes down to a proper perspective on the verb "to live!"

I agree, but it's not quite what I meant; I can see where I was unclear now. Allow me rephrase, please:

I am looking for a total of two and only two verbs. Verb #1 shall be synonymous to "pursuit of pleasure" in the Epicurean sense (which means it shall allow for work which yields net pleasure). Verb #2 shall be synonymous to "avoidance & prevention of pain", also in the Epicurean sense. Neither #1 nor #2 shall be a multi-word construct, a paraphrase or fragment of a sentence, such as those which they are to be synonymous with already would be in their own right. In addition, I am looking for a total of two and only two nouns to that same effect.

My play/avoid set of words helps me as a tool for practical everyday life (which is how I ended up in this subforum). With it, I manage to avoid slipping from the correct "pleasure & pain" view back into a wrong "virtue & vice" view, because it forces me to stop thinking in terms of "work versus play". Having two direct words (not paraphrases) helps me stay in the Epicurean mindset with much more consistency and strength.

So...do any such words exist yet? Did I reinvent the wheel? I don't speak Latin or (Ancient) Greek 😞

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I am reminded of that Latin poem by Catullus which contains "Vivamus mea Lesbia, atque amemus..."

[...]

I'm easily reminded of it cause I've never gotten it out of my mind after seeing this:

That's an wonderful poem and a great rendition of it - thank you for them both!

Post by "Cassius" of August 15, 2024 at 5:26 PM

Hopefully some others will have some suggestions - sort of synonyms for "enjoy"

Kind of like we are writing a Pepsi cola commercial 😊

Post by “Julia” of August 15, 2024 at 5:46 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

sort of synonyms for "enjoy"

That's not quite it...? 🤔 To ensure I don't still talk at cross purposes, here is what I'm looking for, expressed using a spontaneous analogy:

I'm a swimmer in the ocean. At any one time I am either swimming towards a life buoy or I am swimming away from a shark. I call life buoys "pleasure". I call sharks "pain". They are my reference points, which makes them important, and so I have a special word for each. But I do *not* have a special word for "currently swimming to a life buoy" (I hence called it: to play). I also do *not* have a special word for "currently swimming away from a shark" (I hence called it: to avoid).

At the same time, another type of swimmer exhibits a total disregard for sharks and life buoys. Instead, their aim is to always swim towards the sun. They call the sun "virtue" and swimming towards it they call "to work". Every other direction they call "vice", and swimming not-towards-the-sun they call "to play". As such, they *do* have a special word for both their two reference points *and* their two directions of swimming in relation to these reference points.

I also want two more special words, one for each of my two directions of swimming!

I promise I'm not being deliberately obtuse here! It's just that words are my units of meaning and I need them so I can make sense of the world... ☐

Post by “Cassius” of August 15, 2024 at 9:18 PM

We need more input from others.... 😊

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 10:58 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

We need more input from others.... 😊

Okay, I'll take the bait...

[Quote from Julia](#)

To move-from pleasure, move-to pain or stay-in pain are not things I should do; let's ignore them in this post.

I wouldn't ignore those as options. We can choose to undergo pain IF it will lead to future greater pleasure. So, move-to pain is an option, and even stay-in (for a defined amount of time) are options; which, by definition mean one is in a move-from pleasure motion by choice to gain greater pleasure.

[Quote from Julia](#)

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.

I'm not sure I agree with this formulation. From my perspective, a goal of Epicurean philosophy is to be able to experience pleasure for as long as possible. If one's life and attitude are structured to experience the joy of existence, "feeling no pain", that seems a desirable state. Various activities can be undertaken and experienced, but the through-line is being able to experience a pleasurable state in as many activities as possible if one feels no pain.

[Quote from Julia](#)

Moving-from pain. I have begun to call this action "to avoid", to call the process "avoidance" and the behaviour "avoiding".

For anyone whose been around here a while, I apologize for jumping on my habitual soapbox/broken record. Personally, I dislike the "avoid/avoidance/avoiding" translation used in the stock phrases "choice and avoidance." The Greek words Epicurus uses are αἵρεσις (haireisis) and φεύγω (pheugo) which literally mean "taking/choice" and "flee/take flight/escape" (avoid is also a definition, but down the list). αἵρεσις (haireisis) evolved later into the word *heresy* as in "someone making a choice... oops! wrong choice, we're going to have to punish you!" φεύγω (pheugo) as "flee/escape" always struck me as more immediate, more urgent, than "avoiding" which always reminds me of "avoiding a mud puddle." I realize that's a tangent, but one I can't "avoid" when it comes up.

[Quote from Julia](#)

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.

Hmm... I *think* I can see where you're going, but moving toward pleasure isn't always "play" unless you're redefining "play." I'm all for play, btw, just to be clear! But moving toward pleasure sometimes means getting rid of fears, superstitions, anxieties, etc. Yes, that's moving away from pain, or jettisoning pain-producing fears, etc. You can certainly assign words to those movements you've described, but I'm not sure playing and avoiding are expansive enough to encompass what can be involved in those "motions."

Since this post is getting long, I'll stop here and start anew...

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 11:01 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Another aspect is investigating modern psychology and neuroscience in specific situations. When you mention the word "play" that reminds me about something Don posted (an article or podcast) about including more play in one's life. (I'm not sure where that is located).

Was it *The Fun Habit: How the Pursuit of Joy and Wonder Can Change Your Life* by Michael Rucker?

Post

[The Fun Habit by Mike Rucker](#)

<https://michaelrucker.com/>

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Fun-...r/9781982159054>

Just started listening to the audiobook and it strikes me as eminently Epicurean!!

Starting this thread to record thoughts of mine or others as my listening continues...



Don

February 15, 2023 at 9:37 AM

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 11:12 PM

[Quote from Julia](#)

Is there a single verb or noun synonymous with "pursuit of pleasure" either in English, Latin or (Ancient) Greek? Is there such a single verb or noun for "avoidance and prevention of pain"?

I'd go back to αἵρεσις (haireisis) and φεύγω (pheugo). αἵρεσις can mean the taking of a town in a battle; choice or election of magistrates. Liddell & Scott write that its opposite in some senses is κλήρος (kleros) which is the casting of lots. So it's the difference between making an informed choice (αἵρεσις) or making a decision by flipping a coin (κλήρος). φεύγω can be thought of as people fleeing that town that's being taken in a battle; they're escaping from their fate; they have agency in fleeing the situation. The opposite of that word is διώκω (dioko) which is defined as pursue, chase, in war or hunting; pursue an object, seek after; or even drive or chase away.

Both αἵρεσις (haireisis) and φεύγω (pheugo), to me, convey agency in whatever direction one heads. It is not a passive activity, but one taken with vigor and purpose.

Post by “Don” of August 15, 2024 at 11:23 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

This isn't likely to be satisfactory, but I am tempted to suggest that we might sort of parallel the view that DeWitt suggested - that "life" rather than "pleasure" was Epicurus' greatest good. We might observe that from an Epicurean perspective the meaning of "pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain" comes down to a proper perspective on the verb "to live!"

Nope, nope, nope. (Another broken record of mine!)

Life *cannot* be the greatest good in the philosophical sense. Sure, life is good compared to the alternative, of course. But the "greatest good" is "that to which everything else points." The greatest good "in the opinion of all philosophers must needs be such that we are bound to *test all things by it*, but the standard itself by nothing." DeWitt's argument, as I remember, hinges on Latin not having a definite article 🙄

That said, I generally agree with your "*pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain*" comes down to a *proper perspective on the verb "to live!"* That "proper perspective" includes (but is not exclusive to) removing those fears, anxieties, empty beliefs, etc., that stand in the way of experience life as pleasurable.

Post by "Godfrey" of August 16, 2024 at 2:36 AM

This idea of simplifying down to two words is intriguing and somewhat alluring. But when I think of it as a response to a Stoic pairing of "work and play" it comes into better focus for me. The Stoic worldview is idealized (made up? maybe that's too harsh...) and so it's really quite simple to come up with simple descriptions and clever exercises. The Epicurean worldview is based on observed reality, which is messy. Therefore I think that trying to adapt Epicurean philosophy to a Stoic-friendly format is ultimately unproductive.

Another example of this mismatch between Stoics and Epicureans is a closer look at "is it in my control or not" and where that fits into a process of choosing and fleeing (with a nod to [Don](#)). Stoics apparently keep this idea firmly in mind at all times. As I think about choosing and fleeing, whether something is under my control or not only comes into play when I fear that something might *not* be under my control, which usually occurs later on in my thought process.

Having said all this, I guess that I'm leaning toward "choosing and fleeing" (or choice and avoidance) because it acknowledges both pleasure and pain. Or "pursuing pleasure." What's important is grasping the wider concepts, the shorthand and outlines are really just reminders of the bigger picture.

Post by "Julia" of August 16, 2024 at 7:23 AM

Quote from [Don](#)

unless you're redefining "play."

I was very much doing that, yes.

[Quote from Don](#)

We can choose to undergo pain IF it will lead to future greater pleasure.

I meant all six (non-)movements in "the way it would make sense in an Epicurean frame (and not a Cyrenaic)". So "move-to pleasure" was meant as "pursuit of pleasure" which may very well entail blood, sweat and tears, as you've correctly pointed out. However, to be in pursuit of pain (I called it: move-to pain), is just not something I should be engaged in. Likewise, to move away from pleasure (for no good reason!) is also something I shouldn't be engaged in.

Maybe I should have just used the word "pursuit" instead of "movement" from the start...

[Quote from Don](#)

the through-line is being able to experience a pleasurable state in as many activities as possible if one feels no pain

Yes, but: Even when I am safe, fed, warm, clean, sheltered, rich, and loved and currently lie in the best bed ever built, I will soon be in pain unless I do something, because after a few hours max, my joints and spine will beg for movement by sending me pain. I will have to at least twist and turn (or ask to be turned) to return to the static pleasure of being perfectly comfortable all around - and even if I were floating in a salt water pool to make my joints/spine happy forever, eventually I'd have to get out because I'll start to shrivel or simply because nature calls! (I've been immobilised in the past, and it stuck with me how very many minute mental and physical processes are involved in what is casually condensed into "I lie in bed and do nothing". It stuck how much activity this "nothing" actually still contains, and also how exhausting, later even excruciating that activity can become.)

From that I learned that I have to *maintain* pleasure, that maintenance will interrupt the state of "not doing or thinking anything while experiencing perfect pleasure"; this interruption is what I meant by "stay-in pleasure doesn't last long". It may be that I enjoy the maintenance task (eg: enjoy turning around in bed), but then I would classify that as "pursuit of pleasure", "move-to pleasure", "[redefined] play" or - now that you told me: Hairesis or Pheugo (depending on the specific situation and also state of mind)

[Quote from Don](#)

φεύγω (pheugo) as "flee/escape" always struck me as more immediate, more urgent, than "avoiding"

I wasn't aware of the original Pheugo meaning. It is indeed much more immediate. While to flee/escape sounds too immediate to me in modern English, "evade" offers a middle-ground, is also active and with agency. If I need a modern English word I might prefer that now. Otherwise, I shall like the Greek words as you described them:

[Quote from Don](#)

I'd go back to αἵρεσις (hairesis) and φεύγω (pheugo). αἵρεσις can mean the taking of a town in a battle; choice or election of magistrates. Liddell & Scott write that its opposite in some senses is κλήρος (kleros) which is the casting of lots. So it's the difference between making an informed choice (αἵρεσις) or making a decision by flipping a coin (κλήρος). φεύγω can be thought of as people fleeing that town that's being taken in a battle; they're escaping from their fate; they have agency in fleeing the situation. The opposite of that word is διώκω (dioko) which is defined as pursue, chase, in war or hunting; pursue an object, seek after; or even drive or chase away.

Both αἵρεσις (hairesis) and φεύγω (pheugo), to me, convey agency in whatever direction one heads. It is not a passive activity, but one taken with vigor and purpose.

With this description, Hairesis and Pheugo appear like what I was looking for! They still feel a bit unfamiliar, because there's no perfect 1-1 translation to English, but that's good, because I'm quite certain English simply lacks the two words as I seek them! (Also, I never thought this is what "choice" was in the sources)

Thank you very much, Don! 😊👍

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

I'm leaning toward "choosing and fleeing" (or choice and avoidance)

After having been professionally schooled on Greek now 😊 I can see the "choosing" in a more agreeable light, but I still sort-of reject it in modern English. A lot still has to happen between choice and action, and we may even make impossible choices. As such, would not "commitment" be better? When I lay in bed and began to be hurting, reaching the choice to turn has always required very little, but solidifying the commitment to now actually do turn myself was hard. At times, it needed a while of pain to move me from choice to commitment. After commitment, the action began without much hold-up.

[Quote from Don](#)

φεύγω can be thought of as people fleeing that town that's being taken in a battle; they're escaping from their fate; they have agency in fleeing the situation. The opposite of that word is διώκω (dioko) which is defined as pursue, chase, in war or hunting; pursue an object, seek after; or even drive or chase away.

Both αἵρεσις (hairesis) and φεύγω (pheugo), to me, convey agency in whatever direction one heads. It is not a passive activity, but one taken with vigor and purpose.

Pheugo only takes agency in actively-leaving-where-I-was, but it does not take agency in going-somewhere-specific, correct? Pheugo is an "anywhere but here" action (as opposed to a "toward somewhere specific" action)?

Offering the antonyms of each helped me much:

"deliberate choice/commitment" vs "leave to chance"

"flight from/evade (avoid)" vs "chase of/after".

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

What's important is grasping the wider concepts, the shorthand and outlines are really just reminders of the bigger picture.

I agree, and also having shorthands adds value in its own right (otherwise we might be speaking in [Toki Pona](#) right now). In my mind, a concept that has no name remains elusive, hard to reflect on, and hard to operate from; it remains a phantom. I have better words now, I am happy 😊

Thank you all for being so patient with me 😊

Post by “Don” of August 16, 2024 at 8:58 AM

I would offer this additional (imperfect) metaphor on φευγω:

Consider that a person is trying to *flee* a burning building. They're trying to carry their full garbage bags, old clothes, half-used toothpaste tubes, etc. They feel this necessary for whatever reason. If they got rid of those, they would have a much better chance of escaping the burning building and getting out into the fresh air and being able to continue living.

Those bags of garbage, etc., are the fears of the gods, anxieties about death, and other disturbances of the mind that hold us back from truly enjoying our existence.

Like I said, "imperfect" but posting for thoughts and improvements.

Post by “Julia” of August 16, 2024 at 9:11 AM

I like that metaphor 👍

Fleeing from fear is conducive of the good life in an "anywhere but here" kind of way: "(Almost) anything is better than burning alive."

Choice of a new house with sprinklers is equally conducive of the good life, but in a "to somewhere specific" kind of way: "Many things might be good; this is the specific good which I choose for myself."



PS: I have just now acquired the Cambridge Greek Lexicon (Diggle, 2021) and looked up the words, which was illuminating. I don't think I'll ever learn Ancient Greek or Latin due to time constraints/life priorities, but looking up special words is both fun and helpful!

The only downside of Epicurean philosophy appears to be the growth rate of one's bookshelf



Post by “Godfrey” of August 16, 2024 at 4:20 PM

Am I correct in understanding that, based on the above, a proper English replacement for choose/avoid would be pursue/flee?

If so, it's much more action-packed 😄

Post by “Don” of August 16, 2024 at 5:18 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Am I correct in understanding that, based on the above, a proper English replacement for choose/avoid would be pursue/flee?

If so, it's much more action-packed 😁

Technically, it's not "pursue" ... Which is weird. αἵρεσις is more take deliberately or choose deliberately, rather than let chance choose for you. But given the squishy nature of English, you could conceivably use "pursue" and "flee" if you wanna. 😊

Post by “Julia” of August 16, 2024 at 5:19 PM

According to the Cambridge Greek Lexicon, both αἵρεσις (haireisis) and φεύγω (pheugo) have a whole range of translations to modern English. After reading the dictionary entries of both words and the adjacent related words, both seemed to me as having three branches of meaning; to be clear: I made those branches of meaning up according to my personal mental structuring of the many possible translations.

In the case of haireisis, there appear to be three branches of meaning: political, military, and reign.

- The political branch ranges from choice in a vote to being a partisan.
- The military branch ranges from overcome all the way to destroy.
- The reign one ranges from figuratively a singer taking up a song or someone capturing another's mind (by choice, not by chance!) all the way to intellectual mastery of skills and physical capture and control of humans.

In the case of pheugo, there also appear to be three branches of meaning: political, physical, and social.

- The political branch ranges from slipping up in terms of what is (in)permissible to say to being driven into and living in exile.
- The physical branch ranges from fish causing other fish to flee to the escape of humans from immediate danger.

- The social one ranges from shrinking from shunning to the taking of refuge in a legal defence.

In addition, it seems like pretty much each of these meanings can be employed figuratively, which causes a little tree of meanings to grow from both words

Post by “Godfrey” of August 16, 2024 at 7:17 PM

This is an excellent case study in the difficulties of translation 🤔

Post by “Don” of August 16, 2024 at 7:54 PM

[Quote from Julia](#)

In addition, it seems like pretty much each of these meanings can be employed figuratively, which causes a little tree of meanings to grow from both words

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

This is an excellent case study in the difficulties of translation 🤔

LOL! Welcome to the wonderful world of translation! 😄

Post by “Cassius” of August 16, 2024 at 9:29 PM

Just gotta say to close the night, I don't like the sound or connotations of "flee" at all! 😊

Post by “Don” of August 16, 2024 at 9:33 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Just gotta say to close the night, I don't like the sound or connotations of "flee" at all!



I am curious to read why.

Take your pick:

1. (*intransitive*) to [flee](#), [run](#) off, [go](#) a certain direction with [haste](#) (*often with prepositions*)
2. (*transitive*) to [flee](#), [escape](#), [avoid](#), [get away](#) from ([danger](#) or [trouble](#))
3. (*transitive or intransitive*) to [leave](#) the [country](#), go into [exile](#)
 1. (*intransitive*) to be [exiled](#), [banished](#), [driven out](#) of the country [*with [ὕπó](#) (hupó, + [genitive](#)) 'by someone'*]
 2. (*intransitive, present and imperfect*) to be in [exile](#), [live](#) in [banishment](#)
4. (*perfect*) to have [escaped](#), be [safe](#) from quotations ▼

I ****much**** prefer "flee" to "avoid". There's nothing wrong with fleeing a dangerous situation, which is what one should literally do when confronting empty desires, anxiety-producing ideas, harmful beliefs, and so on. Flee from them. Escape from them. Get away from them. There's nothing wrong with a strategic retreat. There's nothing wrong with fleeing from or escaping from a city under siege. Avoiding, to me, makes it sound like you're stepping around external threats. The threats are coming from inside the house - unsound beliefs, harmful ideas, empty desires, anxieties, and so on. Leave them behind and flee from them, get as much distance from them as possible.

Post by "Cassius" of August 17, 2024 at 4:11 AM

I am saying that ("fleeing" is not a normally something an Epicurus would do) mainly in the context of coming up with words that are generally useful.

To me, "flee" is something you do when Mt. Vesuvius erupts, and there is absolutely nothing you can do about a horrible danger. But even then, if you are Pliny the Elder, then you run toward the danger - and this is not the Stoic "duty" some will accuse it of being - because you could not live with yourself if you did not make an effort to save your friends, or even (though this is less likely) you want to satisfy your curiosity. It seems to me that for an Epicurean in the normal world, 'fleeing' is something you will rarely have to consider, along the lines of luck rarely intruding on the life of the wise man. "Choosing" and "Avoiding," or similar action words of normal life, seem to me to be the more useful terms that characterize what even the wisest

man will generally be doing.

Post by “Don” of August 17, 2024 at 5:55 AM

[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 ἔσσονται σοι τοῖς λόγοις αἱ πράξεις ἀκόλουθοι.

[PD25](#) literally uses εἴτε [φυγὴν](#) εἴτε [δίωξιν](#) which are the antonyms of each other mentioned above: *flee/escape from* and *pursue/chase*. Saint-Andre chooses to use the traditional "avoid" but that doesn't translate the dichotomy of [φυγὴν](#) and [δίωξιν](#).

Post by “Don” of August 17, 2024 at 7:23 AM

I'll grant you that you have to find English translations that speak to you for the Greek words Epicurus used (or the Latin ones Lucretius used). But I also maintain translation can obfuscate the original meaning, so we all need to be careful.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

"fleeing" is not a normally something an Epicurus would do) mainly in the context of coming up with words that are generally useful.

Well, the words he used are [φυγή](#) (noun) and [φεύγω](#) (verb). Here are the dictionary entries for each, so I encourage everyone to dig into the connotations of each and decide for themselves. Maybe "flee" isn't the best, but I need something with more agency than "avoid":

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

Woodhouse, S. C. (1910) English-Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language[1], London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited.

avoidance

banishment
disappearance
escape
exile
flight
outlawry
proscription
refusal
rejection
repudiation
stampede
transportation

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

Antonyms

(antonym(s) of “to flee, be accused”): διώκω (diōkō, “to pursue, accuse”)

Related to Latin fugio:

[fugio - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

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.)

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 17, 2024 at 8:49 AM

[Quote from Julia](#)

a commitment to engage

I would say (in my opinion) that the only time that an Epicurean makes a "commitment" is when there is a pact or contract that is signed or agreed to between people (marriage, rental agreement, peace treaty, etc.)

For all other actions within oneself, I would see choosing as coming from a natural motivation to well-being and health (it is natural to want to feel good and feel healthy, but perhaps there are bad influences from "civilization" that erode this natural impulse).

Take for instance going on a diet (weight-gain and being overweight is due to unnatural coping strategies)...going on a diet only truly works when you see that not eating the teaspoon of added sugar every morning in your coffee, not buying the ice cream, etc etc, is actually more pleasurable than eating it...because you are imagining the pleasure you will feel in the future and your enjoyment of not having tight clothes and not feeling sluggish, but feeling rejuvenated and healthy. And eating the healthy food (veggies rather than too many carbs) is also thought

and felt as pleasurable for the same reason). So there is no need for "commitment" but instead the "carrot of pleasure" and "the stick of pain" are the true motivators for becoming more healthy.

"Commitment" for me brings up the idea of "duty" and "obligation" based on "virtue" and "doing what is "right" ...but maybe that is just me 🤔.

Post by “Julia” of August 17, 2024 at 10:07 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

"Commitment" for me brings up the idea of "duty" and "obligation" based on "virtue" and "doing what is "right" ...but maybe that is just me

My current understanding of language and of how things are:

A commitment is always with myself. I declare to myself that I will (not) do something, and I make this declaration with full intent to follow through (for now; I may always change my mind on myself, but if I do that for minuscule reasons my intent was never truly *full*). The full intent to follow through is what changes a mere choice/decision into a commitment. A commitment which is fortified by using a 2nd commitment to not change my mind later (even in the light of new information) is called an unwavering commitment.

A promise is a commitment regarding benefits (and less commonly damages/duties) to someone other than myself. A feigned promise is the act of deceiving another with regards to that I do not, in fact, have any internal intent to follow through. (This is why a broken promise is a betrayal, unless the one who broke it did everything reasonably within their power to be true to their word.)

A contract is a promise, which creates legal duties and rights between two entities. A contract based on a feigned promise is made in bad faith. The romantic ideal of marriage was a special type of contract, because it entailed unwavering commitment and a powerful guarantor: the church/state.

I cannot have a contract between myself and "virtue", because it is not a 3rd party, but rather a mere concept within myself. To concepts, I can only be committed, but never obligated. This is called: being committed to a cause or to one's values.

If a contract is nullified, it is declared that one party did not or could not, in fact, develop the intent to follow through: there never was bilateral commitment. Examples might be getting

married while intoxicated or contracts with kids (who cannot enter into contracts because they lack what it takes for informed consent).

If a contract is cancelled, (at least) one party changed their mind, committed to a different path, and now follows through with that new path; but the commitment was legally present at one point. That happens in one of two ways: I declare my change of mind to the other party and our relationship ends ordinarily (eg, I decide on a new mobile plan), or I fail to follow through and the relationship ends "for exceptional reasons" (eg, I failed to pay my bills).

Since I myself am merely a concept to myself, I should accept myself and commit to myself (even though I am not obligated to do so), because by doing so, I have to accept where/what I am now (acceptance), and also have to chose who I want to be (commitment). Without an acceptance of reality as it is, there would be no foundation for aimful/targeted action, and having a commitment always means having a should-be condition. Special case: By declaring the should-be condition to be equal to the current condition, I commit to keep things as they are; but even then, a should-be condition is (implicitly) being declared. The less clear I am about the should-be condition, the less strong my commitment can be. This is why it helps to have concrete goals, even if they change along the way.

People who do not commit are aimless and flakey. A sexual relationship without commitment is a fling.

The difference between choosing to have a good life and being committed to have a good life is in one's intent to actually make it so and follow through, instead of aimlessly wondering around, hoping for chance or fate to come to one's rescue, flaking out as soon as a hint of effort-required arises on the horizon.

In this way, it is not bad to have commitments to virtues: according to PD5 pleasure is kind of primus inter pares with prudence, propriety and justice. (We just need to keep our priorities straight and remember that no virtue is ever absolute or an end in itself.)

Post by “Cassius” of August 17, 2024 at 10:56 AM

[Quote from Julia](#)

People who do not commit are aimless and flakey.

That is the sense in which I use the word "commit" and 'commitment' too. While Kalosyni is correct that it *can* involve improper views of duty and obligations asserted by false abstractions, it's more important meaning (to me, and i would wager to be one of the most

generally-used definition, unless you're specifically talking about sending a crazy person to an asylum, a criminal to prison, or signing a contract) is more like:

an intense emotional drive voluntarily undertaken toward the achievement of some specified and desired goal.

I would not let Stoics or Buddhists or anyone else abscond with the perfectly valid word like "commitment" as if it only arises through "duty." To accept that would be akin to buying into the idea that all intense emotional drive is somehow tainted. Epicurus said that the wise man will feel his emotions MORE intensely than others.

Post by "Julia" of August 17, 2024 at 11:18 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

an intense emotional drive voluntarily undertaken toward the achievement of some specified and desired goal.

Metaphor: Choices and decisions only pile up dry wood; the spark of commitment is required to ignite the flame of action.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I would not let Stoics or Buddhists or anyone else abscond with the perfectly valid word like "commitment" as if it only arises through "duty." To accept that would be akin to buying into the idea that all intense emotional drive is somehow tainted. Epicurus said that the wise man will feel his emotions MORE intensely than others.

Yes! This is why promises made *only* because of a sense of duty aren't worth a grain of salt.

Post by "Cassius" of August 17, 2024 at 11:31 AM

[Quote from Julia](#)

Yes! This is why promises made only because of a sense of duty aren't worth a grain of salt.

Yes. Now of course we are talking about communication and word choices, and different people might use a very different word to express exactly the same thing to which I am referring to as encompassed in "commitment" as "an intense emotional drive voluntarily undertaken toward the achievement of some specified and desired goal." But if I became convinced that someone was "commitment-averse" in a generic sense, I would likely arrive at exactly the conclusion of "flakiness" you mentioned earlier Julia.

And for example I am convinced that it is the "commitment" of Lucretius that comes through as the intensity and value of his poem, and likewise with Diogenes of Oinoanda. If that sense of "commitment" does not come through in a person's writings about Epicurus (at least after a time) then that gives me a pretty good sense that they and I are not at all on the same page. I'm sorry, but I can't take a "disinterested" or "passionless" position on someone I see to be standing up to fight - and almost alone -- against the greatest evils of human life.

Post by “Godfrey” of August 17, 2024 at 7:41 PM

Choosing from the list in post #26 above, I find that "rejection" resides in a nice place. More oomph than "avoid," less action packed than "flee."

Likewise with "commit." So my leanings at the moment are toward commitment/rejection, commit/reject. Is that where this is heading for others?

Post by “Julia” of August 17, 2024 at 8:44 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Choosing from the list in post #26 above, I find that "rejection" resides in a nice place. More oomph than "avoid," less action packed than "flee."

This is not very consistent with the understanding I got from the Cambridge Greek Lexicon (CGL), in so far as rejection does not imply a commitment to action. Rejection is merely the

opposite of selection. Both selection/rejection are a type of decision: the former decides for something specific, the latter decides for everything-but-that-which-is-rejected. These two decision types are mirrored in αἵρεσις (haireisis) and φεύγω (pheugo): The conquest of haireisis is of a specific thing, and the location pheugo flees to is anywhere-but-here. *However:* It is very clear to me from the CGL that both haireisis *and* pheugo have a definite imperative of action, and as I have said in #27 that fits into a semantic frame one can see about those terms. This is to say: They're a type of semantic opposites like attack-defend are in English, and as a matter of fact, attack-defend would be an okay valid translation in some cases.

In English, someone is *taking* charge – and someone is *taking* flight. "Taking" is how this control-grabbing is captured, and it is opposite to "being given". Taking flight is more than being rescued or finding rescue (by chance). Whether someone takes charge or is given charge, the result is the same, but there is an opposite in the process leading to that result. Neglecting this control-grabbing is a trap one shouldn't fall prey to when translating haireisis and pheugo. With that in mind:

Haireisis and pheugo *both* come with an oomph, and not only do I see no way around that, I doubt it was by chance (for example, various better words for various types of "reject" exist in Ancient Greek), and further yet, I see value in recognising and being very clear about that both words describe someone committed to their future and actively taking control of it (as said in #27); i don't think that's something negative.

To me, a rejection has not enough commitment and agency; I recognise that a rejection can be quite active, it can be a pushing-away, a protest, a disowning, a refutation. However, on one hand these would be different Greek words, and on the other, even with these meanings of rejection in English, it remains not very consistent with what I understand upon reading the CGL...

(I'm not suddenly an expert in Ancient Greek, but searching the digital CGL for "reject", et cetera, then reading the various entries it finds does give me what I feel to be a good overall sense of things.)

Post by “Julia” of August 18, 2024 at 10:12 AM

Background: [Young Avestan](#) was originally believed to have been around simultaneously with the Hellenistic period; it is now believed to have been around 1000-500 BCE. (Old Avestan belongs to 500 year period prior to Young Avestan; they're dated as a pair.)

To quote Beekes' Etymological Dictionary Of Greek (published 2009, page 1565) regarding φεύγω (pheugo):

Quote

Less certain (because alternatively derived to *bheug- 'to be useful') is the appurtenance of Young Avestan būjaiamna- '**setting himself free**', Young Avestan būjaṭ '**sets free**'.

Related words in Latin: fuga, fugiō, fūgī (→ to flee)

Related words in [Lithuanian](#): būgstu, būgti, baugùs (→to be frightened)

My commentary:

The connotation of "setting oneself free" is exactly what I miss in words like "to reject / rejection" and also "to avoid / avoidance" (which I had initially chosen myself). It is, in my mind, somewhat present in "evade" (which I chose after). It is strongly present, but also strongly obscured in the modern English "to flee / flight". To translate *the Epicurean sense* of φεύγω (pheugo), "setting oneself free" might actually be the best I've seen so far. It goes along well with the associations of fears and addictions, it has commitment, agency, and a certain urgency without the necessary connotation of immediate danger to life and limb. If I set myself free of something, I also reject it, and If I set myself free of what haunts me, I evade it - but I also do more than that: being free is more than being out of harms way.

This translation seems to have it all! 😊

Post by “Don” of August 18, 2024 at 10:29 AM

[Quote from Julia](#)

My commentary:

The connotation of "setting oneself free" is exactly what I miss in words like "to reject / rejection" and also "to avoid / avoidance" (which I had initially chosen myself). It is, in my mind, somewhat present in "evade" (which I chose after). It is strongly present, but also strongly obscured in the modern English "to flee / flight". To translate the Epicurean sense of φεύγω (pheugo), "setting oneself free" might actually be the best I've seen so far. It goes along well with the associations of fears and addictions, it has commitment, agency, and a certain urgency without the necessary connotation of immediate danger to life and limb. If I set myself free of something, I also reject it. If I set myself free of what haunts me, I evade it.

This translation seems to have it all!

I *think* I like that direction... Although it's not the single word you were looking for initially.

Post by “Julia” of August 18, 2024 at 10:51 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

not the single word you were looking for initially

That's definitely true, but it linguistically so very basic that registers in my mind as if a single verb; it is so simple, that I feel it has its own spot reserved on my inner semantic map, unlike "pursuit of pleasure" which always entails a little mental operation of joining two things.

Analogy:

"operate vehicle" vs "driving"

"ingest nutrition" vs "eating"

The longer forms pull from two more general concepts to make one more specific concept. That's the effect I was seeking to avoid, and in almost all cases, that requires finding a single word. "to set free" seems an exception to that rule.

"to set oneself free from pain" 😊

Post by “Don” of August 18, 2024 at 10:59 AM

One thing to keep in mind, from my perspective, in all this is that αἵρεσις (haireisis) and φεύγω (pheugo) are not necessarily meant to be opposites or antonyms of each other. They describe two different actions that can be taken in relation to desires and courses of action.

αἵρεσις gets at the conscious decision to "choose" a course of action oneself as opposed to flipping a coin or letting chance take its course. I think this is why it came to be used for "heresy" - the heretic had a chance to make the "right" choice and didn't

φεύγω gets at the urgency of jettisoning or getting away from or leaving behind, or "setting one free" if you will, from beliefs or ideas or desires that will, in the long run, be detrimental to one's eudaimonia and the living of a good life. The opposite semantic field in relation to φεύγω is to chase or pursue.

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 αἵρεσις (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 αἵρεσις (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 (haireisis) 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 (haireisis).

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.