TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION
Lenn J. Schramm

It is a special privilege and challenge to render into another language a book whose germ is a problem of translation (see Chapter 6) and that concludes with the statement that "translation is always important." The responsibility and challenge are redoubled by the fact that I have worked with a living author (thus able to answer my questions and resolve my perplexities) who is fluent in the target language (and thus able to correct my misreadings and quibble with my lexical choices). And they are raised exponentially by the fact that the French original itself is to a large extent an exposition and exegesis of ancient texts in Hebrew and Aramaic, so that I have had to wrestle with nuances and semantic fields in multiple source languages and superimposed linguistic layers. Not everything that is in the ancient tongues made it into the French, and I confess my inability to render every subtlety of the French into English. As a translator, my advice is that you read Prof. Atlan in French, and the Jewish classics in Hebrew and Aramaic. For those not blessed with this capacity, the present effort will have to do.

This is not to say that there are no advantages to the English version. In particular, the close reading required to produce a good translation led me to discover many small errors in the French (especially source references, but also occasional slips by the author) that have been corrected here, with Prof. Atlan's gracious assistance and consent. In addition, I have inserted clarifications of various points where I hoped my knowledge of Hebrew and the Jewish sources could be of assistance to readers lacking it. Were the "glossed layout" of this volume carried to the end, these would appear in the margins of the margin, or in a different font. In the event, I have encased them in angle brackets.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Several problems of terminology bear special attention.

Vie, *vie*, and *le vivant*

In the French text, Prof. Atlan distinguishes among *Vie* (uppercase), *vie* (lowercase), and *le vivant*. In English, all three are simply "life" in one sense or another.

To begin with, *Vie*, which I have rendered "Life," is (I quote Prof. Atlan's explanation to me) "a metaphysical notion that designates a reality that is essentially different from the mineral world"—the core of Vitalism. It was formerly invoked to explain the properties of living beings that could not be explained in any other way. Contemporary biology, based on the mechanistic model of physics and chemistry, has vanquished the vitalism that depended on this concept of Life. This is the sense of the word in one of the epigrams to this volume, Albert Szent-Györgi's otherwise paradoxical declaration that "Life as such does not exist."

By contrast, *vie*/life (lowercase) refers to life as we live it day to day, and in opposition to death.

Finally, *le vivant* 'the living', a coinage of several French thinkers cited by Prof. Atlan (Jacob, Canguilhem), is the object studied by the biological sciences. The term denotes the sum total of the properties of living organisms that, although they can be observed only in living organisms, must be explained by something (biochemical and biophysical processes) other than Life. In particular, it is not the same as "a living being" (*un vivant*). The fluidity of language makes this category somewhat slippery, however; sometimes *le vivant* does mean "living being" and has been rendered as such.

Sacré and *saint*

For Prof. Atlan, there is a sharp distinction between *le sacré* and *le saint* and their affiliated words. There is no doubt that the difference is not just linguistic: *le saint* denotes an intrinsic property, whereas *le sacré* refers to what is conferred by outside agency (think "consecration"). This distinction is tenable in French and Prof. Atlan holds to it religiously.

(To complicate matters, Hebrew has only one lexical family, *ḳadosh* and its relatives, to express both concepts. But Prof. Atlan always renders it as *le sacré*.)

In English, however, whose Germanic roots have provided a third family, that of *holy*, the simple binary distinction does not exist and idiomatic usage rides roughshod over the real conceptual difference. We may say "Holy Scripture" or "Sacred Scripture" interchangeably (though only the latter in this book, to respect the author's preference), but idiom prefers "holy matrimony" to "sacred matrimony" and we invariably refer to the "sacred precincts" of the "Sanctuary" or "Holy Temple" in Jerusalem and only to the "Holy of Holies."

The procedure adopted here has been to use "sacred" and its congeners whenever this does not offend English idiom. When quoting English works or published translations I have treated the author's or translator's usage as sacred. Readers are asked to bear in mind that in almost every case it is the extrinsic *le sacré* that is meant.

Péché and *faute*

Prof. Atlan never employs the French *le péché* 'sin', which he hears only in its primary, religious and theological sense of an offense against the deity.[1] For him, it is always "only" *une faute*, a word with a vast semantic field, ranging from "lapse," "mistake," or "error" all the way to "misdeed" and "sin." Although this breadth of meaning mitigates the culpability and, for him, washes away any religious connotation, it also means that most readers of the French do not realize that Prof. Atlan does not believe that Adam sinned.

The forthcoming Hebrew version,[2] bound by the biblical text and thousands of years of Hebrew usage, employs *ḥeṭ* 'sin'. This was amenable to the author for two reasons: first, the related verb *ḥeḥṭi'* can mean "miss the mark"; second, according to the Talmud (B *Yoma* 36b), among the several words that designate "sin," *ḥeṭ* refers specifically to "inadvertent omissions."

Prof. Atlan proposed that "transgression" conveys his meaning. I am skeptical that English readers would hear the distinction without constant reminder; nor do I do want to be guilty of sinning against idiomatic usage. Later he suggested "fall" (in the sense of "stumble"), adding that both Spinoza and Maimonides describe the result of what Adam and Eve did as a "fall"— a fall in the quality of their knowledge, not in their moral essence (the strong Christian connotation that makes me uncomfortable with the term). Sometimes, taking my cue from Milton, I have written "disobedience"; sometimes, where the word was apt, "transgression"; sometimes "fall" (which also renders the French *chute*); and sometimes (mea culpa) I have stuck with "sin." Readers are asked to keep in mind that this word is not to be taken as bearing any theological weight.

Elohim

In the history of translation, the Hebrew word *'elohim* has been understood variously as "judges" (e.g., Targum on Exod. 21:6, 22:7–8), "angels" (pseudo-Jonathan and Ibn Ezra on Gen. 35:7), "gods" (e.g., Exod. 18:11), "god," and "God."[3] Although the word is formally a plural and occasionally construed as such (see Rashi on Gen. 20:13 and 35:7, who explains it as the "plural of majesty"), it almost always takes a singular verb.[4] In the biblical corpus, the singular form *'eloah* is found only in poetry and in books that postdate the Babylonian exile (Nehemiah, Daniel, and Chronicles), which strongly suggests that it is a back-formation or Aramaism. In *A Tort et à raison* Prof. Atlan often rendered *'elohim* as "dieux," no matter the context. Yielding to my (philological) discomfort with this, he allowed me to write "god(s)" in the English translation, *Enlightenment to Enlightenment*. In the present work, he adopted my approach and wrote "dieu(x)" in the French, so that I have been able to copy him faithfully in the English.

1. I do not know how he understands "J'estimais que le plus grand péché d'une femme est de n'être pas belle" (Anatole France)!

2. *Niẓoẓot shel ḳeri*, trans. Ora Gringard, ed. Yoav Meirav and Henya Kolumbus (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2011).

3. Cf. "Elohim is a homonym, and denotes God, angels, judges, and the rulers of countries" (Maimonides, *Guide* I.2).

4. For Prof. Atlan's understanding of this issue, see especially Chapter 4, n. 18.

SOURCES

Classical Hebrew and Aramaic texts

Most translations of the Bible, Talmud, midrashim, etc., are my own, directly from the Hebrew or Aramaic, but guided by Prof. Atlan's French renderings thereof and following consultation with standard English versions (notably the New Jewish Publication Society and Revised Standard Version for the Bible and the Soncino translations of the Talmud and Midrash Rabbah). Bible references are to the Masoretic text; variant chapter/verse divisions are indicated in brackets.

For the *Zohar*, I have been able to consult Daniel C. Matt's ongoing translation as far as it goes (nearly to the end of the book of Exodus) and have given page references to this edition whenever relevant. Here too I have often had to (silently) modify the translation to suit Prof. Atlan's exposition of the text.

Spinoza

I have found it convenient to quote Spinoza in the venerable Elwes translation, which I have silently corrected on occasion (mainly in matters of word order and nineteenth-century commas). In difficult passages I consulted the original Latin. Where Elwes was quite unsuitable I have referenced the modern translation (Shirley or Curley) employed.

There are two numberings of Spinoza's letters: those taken from the *Opera Posthuma*, where they are grouped by correspondent; and those based on the Van Vloten–Land edition, which prints them chronologically. Because I have relied on Elwes, who follows the O.P., I give those numbers first, with the other reference in brackets.

Short titles for works cited

The following works are cited frequently and have been credited in the notes by short titles.

- **Works by Henri Atlan**

  Atlan, *Enlightenment* = Henri Atlan, *Enlightenment to Enlightenment: Intercritique of Science and Myth*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

  Atlan, *Entre le cristal et la fumée* = Henri Atlan, *Entre le cristal et la fumée*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1979.

  Atlan, *La fin du "tout-génétique"?* = Henri Atlan, *La fin du "tout-génétique"? Vers de nouveaux paradigmes en biologie*. Paris: INRA, 1999.

  Atlan, *L'Organisation biologique* = Henri Atlan, *L'Organisation biologique et la théorie de l'information*. Paris: Hermann, 1972, 1992, 2006.

  Atlan, preface to *Le Golem* = Henri Atlan, preface to M. Idel, *Le Golem*, trans. C. Aslanoff. Paris: Le Cerf, 1992.

  Atlan, *SR* II = Volume 2 of *The Sparks of Randomness*, forthcoming.

Atlan, *Tout, non, peut-être* = Henri Atlan, *Tout, non, peut-être: Education et vérité*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1991.

- **Works by Spinoza**

  Curley = *Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

  Ethics = *Works of Spinoza*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, vol. 2. London: George Bell & Sons, 1883; repr. New York: Dover, 1955. Cited by Part and Proposition; thus *Ethics* III 4 = Part III, Proposition 4.

  Letters = Ibid.

  Shirley = *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.

  TTP = *Theologico-Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*], in *Works of Spinoza*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, vol. 1. Cited by chapter and page number.

- **Other authors**

  Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedlander. 2nd ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1904; repr. New York: Dover, 1956.

  The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, trans. and comm. Daniel C. Matt. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004–.

TRANSLITERATION OF HEBREW AND ARAMAIC

א	ʾ	ל	l
בּ	b	מ	m
ב	v	נ	n
ג	g	ס	s
ד	d	ע	ʿ
ה	h	פּ	p
ו	v, w	פ	f
ז	z	צ	ẓ
ח	ḥ	ק	ḳ
ט	ṭ	ר	r
י	y, i	שׁ	sh
כּ	k	שׂ	ś
כ	kh	ת	t

Note: Geminated consonants (except for שׁ) are indicated by doubling of the English equivalent.