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Review

G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated with introduction and commentary by Michael Inwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN 978-0-19-879062-4. 544 pages. £90.00 (hbk).

The task of translating philosophical texts shares some challenges with the translation of literature more generally in so far as both are authored texts that demand of the translator consistent use of individual style, terminology and often taxonomy, as well as an understanding of cultural or contemporary references. Readability of the target text and truthfulness to the source text are the two maxims for translations, which Goethe compared to the process of integration of an author from another nation, who has to be made one of our own just as much as a translator has to immerse herself in the other nation's ways of speaking and states of being.

Of course, some challenges inevitably spring from the fact that philosophical texts can be put in closer vicinity to holy texts, insofar as they aim to express universal ideas, for which the author's style may be seen merely as a particular or historically constrained vehicle. Retracing these ideas as a philosopher through interpretation could itself be regarded as a task of translation, even if one stays within the language in which they were written. No doubt, the German of the early 19th century is in many ways different from today's, and while an immersion into Hegel's idiolect will help an effort to get to know the author as a *conditio sine qua non*, a philosophical interpretation needs to supplement it with another line of thought by drawing analogies or attempting to link contemporary debates to Hegel (without reducing him to these). Any *linguistic* translation of a philosophical text from one language into another therefore has to be precise enough to be seen as a translation of the original and attributable to the author, yet open enough to allow the expression of the universal dressed in another particular (the target language).

However, when translating a work of the scope, impact and argumentative weight of the *Phenomenology*, one would be hard-pressed to ignore one of Hegel's key teachings contained therein—namely that the universal 'Idea' is unlikely to remain unchanged if 'dressed' in another particular. The self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, being confronted with numerous particular forms of objectivity, gradually develops a conception of the universal by going through various stages. In other words, our (the reader's) comprehension of the universal evolves and

develops through particular forms, whereby our self-conception undergoes parallel changes, until this development is conceived of as absolute.

Applied to the process of translation, the choice of particular words in the target language is more than a mere 'vehicle'. It is a constant triangulation which a translator faces and it might result in some necessary neologisms, such as Martin Luther's famous *Lockvogel* ('luring bird'—decoy) or the German *empfindsam* as a term for the English 'sentimental', which gave a whole epoch its name.

An additional problem occurs for contemporary translations of texts that have been previously translated. Luther's task can never be repeated for the German Bible. It cannot be un-thought as a work and influence for anyone embarking on a new project of translation. This fact provides constraints for the work of a translator, and it might increase the workload. This is because (i) the product will also have to be compared to other existing translations; (ii) contemporary dictionaries will have to be referenced; and (iii) even translations into *other* languages consulted (such as Jean Hyppolite's translation of Hegel into French). But the task of a new translation can also be liberating and allow itself to focus on aspects neglected by other translations. Within the plurality of German Bible translations of today, for example, we find highly subjective or intentionally single-sided translations, such as *Die Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (*The Bible in Fair Language*), which errs on the side of feminism, while another movement tries to go back to Luther's 'original' and revise modernizing revisions in favour of Luther's own choice of words, implying that with his translation, he has created a new and authored original that is worthy of preservation.

James Baillie, who might be seen as Hegel's Luther for the English-speaking community of readers of the *Phenomenology* (1910), found himself needing to coin phrases and shaped English-speaking discourse on Hegel. His choice of 'mind' for *Geist* was then reversed by Arnold Miller (1977), who opted for 'spirit' instead. Michael Inwood, the translator and commentator of the volume under discussion here, chose to translate Hegel's *Philosophie des Geistes* as 'Philosophy of Mind' (2007)—which might be justified by the pride of place that is given to the subjective side of *Geist* in this work—while opting for 'spirit' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (2018). Both decisions make a great deal of sense. But they also express the assumption that anyone reading Hegel should at least be familiar with the German word *Geist* and know the interpretation that comes with either choice in English. They can thus be seen as a proof of the advance of the philosophical discourse on how best to translate Hegel, which has accepted that the problem of translating a philosophical text is inadequately understood if sketched as the question whether a translation ought to be truthful to the word or truthful to the idea of the text. Rather, the problem is, whether the truthfulness to the universal idea *lies in* the choice of particular words that are chosen on the basis of pre-existing semantic similarities between two languages, the syntax, or related etymologies, or even on

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the basis of a shared history of ideas. In the light of this, reflecting on the choice of 'mind' versus 'spirit' *is* the process of comprehending the universal through the particular.

With this in mind, we can turn to some specific choices in Inwood's translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The biggest advantage of this publication is that it is often not only closer to Hegel's own punctuation and italicization, but also closer to German grammar and syntax and more consistent in its terminology than Miller's translation. We find *sinnliche Gewißheit* translated into 'sensory certainty', keeping the adjective and avoiding a compound noun, but more importantly, Inwood distinguishes more consistently than Miller between very similar Hegelian key terms such as *Wissen* (knowledge) and *Kenntnis* (findings), as well as *Realität* (reality) and *Wirklichkeit* (actuality), and *Individuum* (individual) versus *Einzelnes* (singleton). What makes Inwood's translation more readable is his avoidance of an unnecessary capitalization of nouns, by contrast with the Miller version. Capitalizations are retained, however, for purposes of disambiguation, such as 'thing' for *Ding*, but 'Thing' for *Sache*.

Having said all this, Miller's choice of 'absolute knowing' still strikes me as closer to the German than Inwood's 'absolute knowledge'. The German language allows a verb to be turned into a noun by capitalizing the first letter. As a consequence, the process of doing something comes into view as a whole, but retains its *process* character without the implication of a 'doer'. Additionally, the grammar of the German language does not have a grammatical form for the verb's progressive, but, to compensate for this, it allows the present participle in an adjectival function—e.g., *gesetzgebende Vernunft*/*gesetzprüfende Vernunft*. Judged from the source language, it seems somewhat inconsistent to translate one of these as 'reason as lawgiver' and only the other as 'reason as law-testing'—but the English reader might disagree and opt for readability. However, as far as the purely linguistic translation is concerned, Inwood usually explains his choices in the commentary section, such as the translation of *Vorstellung* in a technical or ordinary sense.

While Hegel did not consider the *Phenomenology* his most important work, it has undoubtedly been his most often internationally read and quoted book, and has stood at the centre of philosophical debate especially during the 20th century. Given this, it seems that the *Phenomenology* has become what Walter Benjamin called a paradigmatically 'translatable' work. (Incidentally, Terry Pinkard published his translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the same year as Inwood.) What Benjamin seems to imply is that it is a misconception to think of a book as a fixed work with its intended message that enters the process of transformation into another language. Rather, the transformation into various languages and interpretations gradually reveals the work and defines its importance within ongoing philosophical debates. In this way, what constitutes the identity of the source text and the translation ultimately is the inherently processual practice of translation.

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Seen from this perspective, translat*ing* is a practice which can neither be understood as a mechanical conversion devoid of active thinking and judgement, ultimately manageable by computers, nor can it stand alone and be separated from other human practices. With Michael Inwood, this edition has a translator of a philosophical text, who is a prolific and established philosopher himself and who has a profound sensitivity to the problem(s) of philosophical interpretation. We are thus not disappointed to find that he is sensitive to the real challenge for a purely *linguistic* translation of a philosophical text into another spoken language: If the act of philosophical understanding as such can be regarded as a translation of the philosophical language of an author into one's own, then it has to provide a product which allows other readers to do the *philosophical* translation or interpretation themselves. A good translation is thus not only a readable translation, but also a work which makes this act of translating transparent to the reader, engaging them to start translating and interpreting the text themselves.

Inwood's commentary section, taking up one third of the book, provides an English to English *philosophical* translation, which naturally supplements the *linguistic* translation from German into English. The comments contain editorial notes, historical contextualizations and justification of translation choices, but most of all they add up to an account of how Inwood understands the paragraphs of the *Phenomenology*. Rather than meticulously listing a comment of equal length, insight and relevance to each and every paragraph, it seems perfectly legitimate to combine exegesis and criticism and allow more lengthy comments wherever one feels more interested or familiar. We would expect nothing less of a conversation with the author who is laying out a philosophical interpretation, given that interpretations are inevitably open to dispute. Together with the 'Editor's Introduction', targeted at a readership not necessarily familiar with Hegel, a glossary, and an admittedly somewhat selective bibliography, this edition can be regarded as a good starting point for engaging with Hegel's philosophy as well as for a more advanced study of particular passages when combined with Inwood's other publications.

If the gold standard for a translation of a book such as Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is whether the reader can be in communication with the translator about the text while reading it and silently engage in a discussion about how best to translate these ideas while continuing the ongoing dialogue of philosophical thinking, there is no doubt that Inwood's work does all this.

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