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# On Philosophical Translator-Advocates and Linguistic Injustice

*Eric Schliesser*

**Abstract:** This paper argues for the need of philosophical translator-advocates to overcome the (would-be) limitations produced by the linguistic narrowness of analytic philosophy. It draws on a model used to analyze epistemic communities in order to characterize a form of linguistic injustice. In particular it does so by treating language as an epistemic barrier to entry of ideas and people and by treating philosophical translator-advocates as engaged in a form of arbitrage. Along the way I specify some necessary and jointly sufficient characteristics of a philosophical translator-advocate. My argument is illuminated and vivified with examples from the history of analytic philosophy and other episodes from the history of philosophy.

## Introduction

In this paper, I argue for the need of philosophical translator-advocates to overcome the (would-be) limitations produced by the linguistic narrowness of analytic philosophy. Along the way I specify some characteristics of a philosophical translator-advocate (hereafter PTA).

The main structure of my argument draws on economic ideas by way of analogy.<sup>1</sup> In what follows I will grant, for the sake of argument, that a shared natural language is truth-conducive, or at least efficiency enhancing, because (i) it facilitates communication, (ii) expands the market in ideas, (iii) and makes it difficult to shield bad ideas/arguments from scrutiny.<sup>2</sup> I do so not because this is always true.<sup>3</sup> As Kevin Zollman has shown,

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1 I work in the tradition of so-called methodological analytic egalitarianism as developed in Levy and Peart (2009).

2 This is compatible with the idea that mono-cultures may not be very robust. See Šešelja and Straßer, (2014). See also Heesen and Romeijn (2017). For a treatment of linguistic diversity in philosophy and its relationship to epistemic diversity, see an unpublished paper by Gobbo and Russo.

3 Zollman has developed an economic model which shows that sometimes limiting information among scientists can be truth-conducive even if consensus on the truth is slower to emerge. This

modeling suggests ‘there is no “epistemically best” structure for communication that holds across all groups and for all problems’.<sup>4</sup> Rather, I use the idea that a shared language is truth-conducive and efficiency-enhancing as a kind of ideal type in this study.<sup>5</sup> I do so for three reasons: first, I want to grant as much as possible to the person who thinks a linguistic monoculture is unproblematic epistemically or morally; second, we often seem to behave as if the linguistic status quo is efficient; third, I assume that language is a considerable barrier to entry to outsiders and ideas. I treat a PTA as engaged in a kind of arbitrage between different linguistic, philosophical communities.

I also assume that today, English is the *lingua franca* of analytic philosophy, and international science more generally.<sup>6</sup> Even linguistic cultures that have a long history of scholarship, including important contributions to analytic philosophy, are giving way to publication in English language journals (which are thought to instantiate best practices). This is often encouraged by local grant agencies and governments, who wish to encourage ‘internationalization’ of the local academy or wish for its institutions of higher education to be noted on increasingly influential global academic rankings. In the final section I return to offer some reflections on this trend, but for now I treat it as a given.

If there is a linguistic barrier, then there may be epistemic costs to the individual and to the community. In what follows, I offer some examples of such epistemic costs caused by lack of translation or bad translation. In addition, because the academy is a kind of credit economy,<sup>7</sup> a linguistic

suggests that sometimes having linguistic barriers may well be efficient (if efficiency is understood in terms of the probability of successfully reaching the truth). See Zollman (2007). See also Zollman (2012). Zollman’s particular model has been criticized, but the criticism actually strengthens the general point I wish to make: see Rosenstock, Bruner, and O’Connor (2017).  
4 See Zollman (2013).

5 For subtle reservations, inspired by Wittgenstein and Oakeshott, about the limitations of this approach, see Khan (1993).

6 This is actually a controversial claim as I learned from the unpublished paper by Gobbo and Russo, *op. cit.* As it happens, their argument reinforces the conclusion of my own.

7 The idea goes back to Mandeville and Adam Smith. But the modern *locus classicus* is Merton (1969). For recent work see, for example, Bright (2017a) and, esp., Bright (2017b).

barrier can prevent the fair allocation of recognition (credit), regardless of intent. Such lack of credit is a form of academic injustice.<sup>8</sup> In addition, I argue that the community undervalues philosophical translator-advocates and this too, may be unfair to the PTA as well as reinforce the existing epistemic costs and injustices of the linguistic barrier.

One may well question to what degree, these days, language is really a considerable barrier to entry. One objection I received on an earlier draft suggested that language is a negligible barrier to the average would-be analytic philosopher in the first world, who is exposed to English from a relatively early age.<sup>9</sup> Even if this were true (and we can set aside class issues in language acquisition), it is not the case that all would-be analytic philosophers are from the first world.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is not unusual for non-native analytic philosophers to find that there are transition and opportunity costs.<sup>11</sup> (I am familiar with Dutch colleagues, who are immersed in English-language culture from a very young age, who have to use their research budget for editorial/proofing work.) Of course, it is possible that the problem will be solved by technology; thanks to learning algorithms, machine-translation is improving at a very fast rate.<sup>12</sup> Even so, this technology is not perfect yet; a modest experiment will show that if you put this paragraph in Google Translate, the translation (say, into Dutch) will be intelligible but certainly not idiomatic, if not just wrong.

Before I get to my argument here are a few general observations that can serve as an introduction. Analytic philosophy today is, despite its increasing

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8 In earlier work (see Lefevere and Schliesser 2014), I analyzed how one can hold an epistemic community morally responsible for its effects on society even if individual scientists behave appropriately epistemically and morally. This paper develops that argument to consider the moral responsibility of the scientific community on its members (or on other communities' members).

9 I thank the editors of this volume for pressing the objection.

10 In science, linguistic barriers have not disappeared despite English being the lingua franca. See Amano, González-Varo, and Sutherland (2016).

11 These costs involve money, time, and reputation. Gobbo and Russo, *op. cit.*, describe such costs as an 'Academic Non-Native English tax'.

12 LeCun, Bengio, and Hinton (2015).

global reach, linguistically narrow in two senses. First, it is practiced increasingly in English. Those that publish in English rarely cite work that is not in English. (For some quantitative evidence see the paper in this volume by Eric Schwitzgebel, Linus Ta-Lun Huang, Andrew Higgins, and Ivan Gonzalez-Cabrera.) It was not always so. Many central texts in early analytic philosophy were written in German and Polish.

Second, if you want to read most recognized philosophical classics it is sufficient to master Middle Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Chinese, Arabic, Aramaic, French, German, English, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Pali, Korean, Japanese, and maybe a dozen more languages that contain multiple written philosophical classics.<sup>13</sup> A few such languages are not really living anymore. Because I am ignorant of most philosophical traditions, and because the nature of a ‘classic’ and ‘philosophy’ are controversial,<sup>14</sup> I am happy to revise that number upwards (for my Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Russian, and Italian friends). I bet we end up with around 50, or so.

Now consider that ‘of the currently listed 7,099 living languages, 3,866 have a developed writing system’.<sup>15</sup> Let us stipulate that the vast majority of the writings in these writing systems involves accounting and mating/family matters. Even by these conservative calculations, that’s a lot of living writing systems in which people can muse about, say, reality, the point of it all, the nature of value, or social order, or beauty, etc. I feel extremely confident in saying that most of these writing systems and the non-

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13 When I started drafting this sentence, I consulted a few experts because it dawned upon me that I had literally no idea in what language some of the Buddhist and Dao (etc.) classics, whose names I was familiar with, were originally written. It was a moment I allowed myself to recognize my own ignorance about pretty basic facts. And this alerted me to the fact that my normal state of affairs is that my own ignorance about my ignorance is my ordinary state of affairs. I thank Dan Arnold, Bryce Huebner, Chike Jeffers, Michael Onyebuchi Eze, and Aaron Tugendhaft for very helpful feedback.

14 See Schliesser (2016).

15 Simons and Fennig (2017) [online version: <https://www.ethnologue.com/enterprise-faq/how-many-languages-world-are-unwritten-0>, accessed November 23, 2017]. Nothing in my argument turns on the exactitude or accuracy of these numbers; I treat them as rough approximations.

living ones pretty much go un-surveyed by the vast majority of professional philosophers.<sup>16</sup>

That is to say, we behave, by and large, as if we are operating in an efficient market in philosophical ideas, insights, and arguments.<sup>17</sup> For, other than historians of philosophy of a rather narrow range of periods and movements, we have very few practices and institutions devoted to mining, recovering, or reanimating insights and arguments from other languages. Comparative philosophy remains, despite the advocacy of, say, Graham Priest and David Chalmers, a decidedly small niche.<sup>18</sup>

This state of affairs is, while intelligible and even rational in some sense, odd because it is not obvious we are entitled to that assumption of linguistic efficiency. Some of those working in or on philosophical languages and traditions not well represented in today's *lingua franca* sense the oddity of this assumption.<sup>19</sup> Of course, in practice, many trained in non-hegemonic languages but who write in English often understand this as an escape from parochialism, intellectual nepotism, or the (perceived) backwardness of the home culture.

One may imagine that writing in the *lingua franca* facilitates the sense that one has access to all the relevant texts and information. It is not

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16 I am ignoring here the many traditions of so-called 'rustic wisdom' and oral traditions of, say, indigenous peoples. See, for example, Kawagley (2006). For recent reflections on the significance of oral traditions, see, for example Smith (2016); or my pieces, 'On Philosophy's hostility toward the Other—On Giving the Sophists a Second Chance, available at <http://digressionsnimpresions.typepad.com/digressionsnimpresions/2014/04/on-philosophy-hostility-toward-the-other.html> and 'On Inclusiveness & the Disdain of Neglected Human Experience', available at: <http://digressionsnimpresions.typepad.com/digressionsnimpresions/2016/06/on-the-disdain-of-neglected-human-experience.html>. I thank Lisa Shapiro and Kyle White for discussion on this point.

17 Obviously, who counts as 'we' here is a tricky question. Following Nagel (1936a&b), I treat early analytic philosophy as primarily developing out of the Lvov-Warsaw school of logic, the Vienna and Berlin Circles, and Cambridge philosophy. These were grounded in reflection on the legacy of Frege and, more controversially, Sidgwick (in Cambridge). Obviously, this does no justice to the linguistic diversity of those fellow-travelers of analytic philosophy who wrote in some of the other European languages.

18 For discussion, see this exchange: Olberding (2017a); Schliesser (2017); Olberding (2017b).

19 For useful reflections see Wolters (2015). For a broader reflection see Ayala-Lopez (2017).

always so. There are times, when even thinkers in the politically (economically, etc.) dominant cultures are aware that they lack access to crucial texts and material. For example, Ibn Rushd, writing in what we would call Islamic Spain, notes the significance of his lack of access to (a translation of) Aristotle's *Politics*. (It influences his decision, he says, to comment on Plato's *Republic* instead.)<sup>20</sup> Of course, lack of access to a text is not only a linguistic issue: Ibn Rushd's mentor, Ibn Tufayl, presents himself as writing in the cultural periphery of the Islamic world, and as knowing that not all texts of his own intellectual tradition—he mentions Al-Farabi's amongst others—have circulated to his (Western) part of the Islamic world.<sup>21</sup> Even today, in an age of Google, books and journal articles are expensive and not easy to acquire for those on, say, academic salaries and working either in underfunded institutions in many parts of the world or outside academic institutions altogether. So, even leaving aside the fate of (embargoed) sponsored research,<sup>22</sup> one cannot simply assume an efficient market in ideas.

In other times—I am thinking of the philosophical traditions of the European early moderns—the search for occult or hidden knowledge also involved the seeking out of linguistically and temporally distant works.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes (as in the cases of Newton, Locke, etc.) this was relatively narrowly centered on original Hebrew sources that may illuminate the pristine true religion; sometimes (again: Newton, Locke), this was narrowly focused on esoteric, alchemical wisdom (which involves purpose-made codes), but sometimes—Leibniz and Bayle come to mind—one senses an omnivorous hunger that is fueled, in part, by an awareness that there is always more to learn. (These three motives are compatible.) This omnivorous hunger is not part of our professional DNA, because for every Leibniz, there is

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20 Lerner (1974) 4.

21 Ibn Tufayl (2009) 99–100.

22 Embargoed, sponsored research is, of course, less significant in philosophy than in areas of science (and few non-XPHI philosophers have reason to worry about the effects of the replication crisis on their views). But in some areas of formal decision theory and philosophy of mind, the cutting edge of research on, say, learning algorithms is done in corporations. For excellent discussion see Wheeler (2016).

23 Levitin (2015).

somebody, who proudly announces that other traditions are irrelevant and—this is what I find so remarkable—the temptation of willed self-ignorance is at bottom more seductive and alluring.

In the first section, I begin to illustrate the ways in which translation is quietly taken to be insignificant in contemporary analytic philosophy. I do so by way of calling attention to some suggestive examples. I claim that these examples show indifference to accuracy in translation; I treat such indifference as evidence of a lack of interest in overcoming linguistic barriers. In the second section I offer a historical example of what a philosophical *cul-de-sac* due to linguistic barriers might look like in practice. This will set up my treatment of the significance of philosophical translators-advocates. I close with some reflections on the state of play.

### 1. Analytic Philosophy and Translation

One of the peculiarities of the analytic tradition is that if you say, ‘I am interested in translation in analytic philosophy’, people are likely to think you want to talk about Quine (or Davidson).<sup>24</sup> But here I call attention to the fact that many of the works of early analytic philosophy known to us today are taught and read in translation. While the linguistic competence of early analytic philosophers was quite impressive (many were trained in multiple European languages as well as Greek and Latin), they, too, relied on translation. As Glock suggests, with an amusing anecdote about Quine, the Polish logicians became known, first, in German.<sup>25</sup> Leaving aside those writing in English, it is fair to say that the contributions of those early analytic philosophers that were not translated into German (or English) were often forgotten unless they were later translated into English or they themselves (or their students) moved to America.<sup>26</sup>

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24 Quine (1970). See also Quine (2013 [1960]) Ch. 2.

25 Glock (2008) 67. In context, Glock mentions Tarski, who was Polish, and Skolem, who was Norwegian.

26 See, for example, Haaparanta and Niiniluoto (2003). While the Dutch Significs are distinct from analytic philosophy, their indirect contribution to its development is largely unknown. See, for example, Schmitz (1990).



Even if one stipulates that all the forgotten works are inferior in quality to those remembered, it is worth noting that such historical oblivion also generated gendered patterns of exclusion. So, for example, nearly all the female members of the Lvov-Warsaw School (where Twardowski had quite a few such students), many of whom only published in Polish, are forgotten.<sup>27</sup> It is somewhat depressing, for example, that outside Poland, Kokoszyńska, who did publish at least one paper in German, is now primarily known as a bathroom distraction in G.A. Cohen's famous and erudite impersonation of Tarski's lecture on the 'error in Leśniewski's theorem'.<sup>28</sup>

To be sure, I am not claiming that lack of translation is the only or always the main source of historical oblivion.<sup>29</sup> (As I hinted above, those German- and Polish-speaking analytic philosophers that ended up Stateside at top graduate programs obviously increased the chances of the survival in collective memory of the existence of some of their early works.) Analytic philosophy's relationship to its own past is a complex one, after all. But I do claim that without such a translation oblivion is far more likely.

I have twice now hinted at the peculiarity of analytic philosophy's relationship to its own linguistic past. By this I do not mean here the familiar thought that analytic philosophy's history is dispensable as it progresses.<sup>30</sup> To convey what I have in mind, I would like to offer a striking example. The best known polemical sentence in the history of analytic philosophy is the Swiftian sounding 'The Nothing Noths'.<sup>31</sup> In my experience, the sentence is attributed to Carnap, who in context is making fun of, perhaps even quoting, Heidegger. There is quite a bit to be said about what Carnap is

27 Brożek (2017).

28 See G.A. Cohen, 'Alfred Tarski'. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPKS8wsnVw>, accessed 5 February, 2018.

29 I assume that if one is ignored at the time of publication, this increases the chances of oblivion later.

30 A cynic, who has read Kuhn, may suggest that historical forgetting is necessary for the illusion of progress.

31 See also The 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Monads (2012); for the lyrics, see here: [https://the21stcenturymonads.net/lyrics/The\\_Nothing\\_Noths.html](https://the21stcenturymonads.net/lyrics/The_Nothing_Noths.html). I thank Paul Prescott for the reminder.

exactly up to, how he understands Heidegger, and what role this bit of mockery may have.<sup>32</sup> My point here is orthogonal to the usual polemics and their roles in community formation.

Prior to researching this paper, I had always assumed—and informal canvassing among some analytic philosophers and experts in the history of analytic philosophy suggests I was not alone in this—that ‘The Nothing Noths’ was produced by Arthur Pap in his canonical translation of Carnap’s treatment of Heidegger’s *Das Nichts Nichtet*.<sup>33</sup> However, Pap’s translation does not contain ‘The Nothing Noths’, but rather the less memorable ‘The Nothing Nothings’. The earliest source I can find for the former expression is Geach’s (1957) *Mental Acts*. There the phrase is attributed to a ‘British Pupil’ of Heidegger’s, rather than Carnap!<sup>34</sup> (In context, there is no mention of Carnap; Geach is describing how according to him, ‘an attempt to report that somebody judges nonsense is itself nonsense’: 1957, 10). I am unsure how the phrase ended up being associated with Carnap in translation.

The point here is that this episode reveals something more general about our attitude toward translation: despite the fact that Carnap’s debate with Heidegger is crucial to the subsequent self-image of analytic philosophy (and what later came to be known as ‘continental philosophy’), the translated words we use to tell the story do not derive from the canonical translation we assign, but from another source altogether without, it seems, this confusion eliciting any comment.<sup>35</sup>

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32 I warmly recommend Stone (2006). See also Voltolini (2015).

33 Carnap (1959).

34 See Geach (1957) 10. I thank Gary Ostertag, who offered this suggestion in a discussion at my blog: <http://digressionsnimpresions.typepad.com/digressionsnimpresions/2017/09/on-translation-in-analytic-philosophy.html?cid=6a00e54ee247e3883401b7c91f056d970b#comment-6a00e54ee247e3883401b7c91f056d970b>. I also thank Michael Kremer and Rachel Zach for their suggestions.

35 Sometimes translations do generate controversy in analytic philosophy. See, for example: Knott (2017). I thank Michael Kremer for the reference. Because Wittgenstein’s evolving status in the profession is a complex sociological and philosophical matter, I leave it for another occasion to investigate what this controversy signifies.

As it happens, Pap (a student of Ernest Nagel), whose influence on the shaping of analytic philosophy's self-image tends to get ignored, did a bad job on the title of Carnap's text. Pap offers 'The elimination of metaphysics through logical analysis of language' as translation for Carnap's *Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache*.<sup>36</sup> While undoubtedly Carnap was a fierce critic of (much) metaphysics, there is a real distinction between overcoming metaphysics, which would be a straightforward and philosophically resonant translation of Carnap's title, and eliminating it. Overcoming metaphysics resonates with a broadly Kantian enterprise of *Metaphysikkritik*. In German Carnap's title then specifies the special manner in which metaphysics is to be overcome.

By contrast 'the elimination' of metaphysics drops that resonance and turns Carnap's position into something rather militaristic.<sup>37</sup> Even if somebody may argue that the difference is merely symbolic (after all, Carnap really was no friend of metaphysics),<sup>38</sup> the Kantian themes in Carnap seem to have been largely forgotten until Michael Friedman and his student, Alan Richardson, reminded us of the connection.<sup>39</sup> For, by treating Carnap as an empiricist critic of metaphysics, we ignore the ways in which Carnap's philosophy is interested in and embraces constitutive principles. To be sure these principles are, of course, not Kant's *a priori*. I am not claiming the mistranslation caused the historical amnesia, but it may well have contributed to it.

In general Carnap was not blessed in his translators. Another example is how George's *Logical Structure of the World* fails to convey the proper meaning of *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt*.<sup>40</sup> When, as a graduate student,<sup>41</sup> I first saw the title of the book in English, I thought it was a book in the philosophy of

36 Carnap (1931).

37 This is especially unfortunate because Carnap was a pacifist: see Carnap (1967) 9.

38 Price (2009).

39 See Friedman (1991). Richardson (1998). This paper is however not the place to articulate the exact relationship between Kantianism and Carnap's philosophy.

40 See Richardson (1998) *op. cit.*; Carnap (1969).

41 Howard Stein, a student of Carnap's, would teach a graduate seminar on Carnap at the University of Chicago in the 1990s.

physics. That's not all wrong, of course, but also not quite right. *The Logical Construction of the World* (for example) would have better conveyed both the agency and progressivity involved in Carnap's title. In addition, George's translation also drops the resonances with Kantianism.<sup>42</sup>

I suspect what explains this general carelessness and sloppiness is due to the fact that historical truth is irrelevant to the pedagogical roles that early analytic texts play. In fact, it seems increasingly probable to me that in so far as the positions, arguments, and distinctions (etc.) attributed to historical figures play a role in contemporary philosophy, it is generally thought irrelevant if these positions, arguments, and distinctions attributed were really held by these historical figures.<sup>43</sup> Either way, in so far as early analytic texts are assigned to undergrads and graduate students, the English versions have become canonical.<sup>44</sup>

## 2. Linguistic Philosophical *Cul-de-sacs*

In this section, I offer a modest, illustrative example of the effects of philosophical, linguistic *cul-de-sacs*. By this I mean to convey the phenomenon where philosophical work in a linguistically non-influential language is simply never taken up by subsequent philosophical mainstreams. My example is historical. It is inevitable that the example is historical because the existence of such a *cul-de-sac*, which implies the absence of arbitrage by a philosophical translator advocate, only becomes known after the fact. My example relies, in part, on the authority of Evert Beth, who was once quite influential within analytic philosophy.

Bernard Nieuwentyt died in 1718 in Purmerend, then a small town in the Holland countryside north of Amsterdam. Two years later, his *Gronden van*

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42 One wonders if dropping the Kantian resonance was a deliberate act of obfuscation either in Carnap's translators or Carnap.

43 Consider the fate of Humean theories of X or the role 'Carnapian' plays in contemporary metaphysics (see also Price 2009). Analytic philosophers are not alone in such attitudes: something analogous happens with the way 'Cartesian' is used in continental philosophy (e.g. the use of 'Cartesian subjectivity' by Žižek (2000) lff. I thank Stefan Heßbrüggen for the reference.)

44 This is increasingly true even in places, like my very own Netherlands, where proficiency in German could once be assumed, but no longer.

*Zekerheid* (Grounds of Certainty) was published. There are two, equally accurate ways to describe the book: (i) it is the best methodological criticism of Spinoza's *Ethics* published during the eighteenth century, and, in my judgment, among the most insightful since;<sup>45</sup> (ii) it is probably the first, truly free-standing historically informed work in the philosophy of science (or scientific practice) that is not meant to advertise the author's own (purported) scientific achievements or scientific practice and is really about other people's scientific practice.

Nieuwentyt's *Gronden* has attracted modest scholarly attention: in 1950, the Dutch logician and logical positivist, Evert Beth, wrote about it at some length in the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* and *Synthese*,<sup>46</sup> the prolific Belgian scholar, Steffen Ducheyne, has since published several pieces on it.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the Dutch historian of science, Rienk Vermij, did a book-length study of Nieuwentyt.<sup>48</sup> Beth treats Nieuwentyt (somewhat anachronistically) as a uniter of 'rationalism and empiricism',<sup>49</sup> and signals the importance of Nieuwentyt by placing him between his treatment of the Aristotelian and Kantian philosophies of science.

Perhaps I have missed a few more works on Nieuwentyt. But it is safe to say that except for his early, foundational criticism of Leibniz's calculus, his work has been largely ignored by later scholars. We can treat him as a *cul-de-sac* in the history of philosophy. Now, in one sense the neglect of this work by Nieuwentyt is understandable. Because it was written in Dutch it seems to have had relatively little impact on subsequent philosophy (despite Beth's suggestion that there could be a link with Kant). It was written just as French was increasingly becoming the language of intellectual thought in the eighteenth century.

Given the more general stagnation of Dutch intellectual life in the eighteenth century and the increasing orientation toward the intellectual scene

45 See Petry (1979).

46 Beth (1950; 1955).

47 Ducheyne (2007; 2017a; 2017b).

48 Vermij (1991). See also Vermij (2012).

49 Beth (1950).

in Paris it is no surprise that Dutch philosophers did not develop Nieuwentyt's views or kept a memory of him alive. Steffen Ducheyne's work offers some evidence that Nieuwentyt's work was probably known by the so-called Dutch Newtonians and so a few of his views may have been assimilated via Voltaire into the mainstream of European thought without being attributed to him at all. When speculative philosophy recovered in the late nineteenth century in the pragmatic low countries, alongside, but apparently independently of (interestingly enough) a flowering of groundbreaking work in experimental physics (Lorentz, Zeeman, Vanderwaals, Kammerling Onnes, etc.), Spinoza was the center of attention (of idealist and mystic-inclined readers). His fierce critic remained forgotten.

In another sense, the near-total neglect of *Gronden* is a bit inexplicable. Let us leave aside questions of merit. During the eighteenth century Nieuwentyt, who was a foundationalist critic of Leibniz's calculus,<sup>50</sup> was widely read for his (1715) *Het Regt Gebruik der Werelt Beschouwingen, Ter Overtuiginge van Ongodisten en Ongelovigen* [The True Use of World-Concepts, in order to Convince the Atheists and Disbelievers]. This work was translated into English as *The Religious Philosopher, or the Right Use of Contemplating the Works of the Creator* (1718), a popular and sophisticated work in physico-theology and natural religion (which has attracted obligatory footnotes in the history of design arguments and eighteenth-century views on science and religion).<sup>51</sup> The work was also translated in several other European languages. Nieuwentyt was a major European figure, and so it is a bit baffling that his other major philosophical work went neglected. This is especially the case since criticism of Spinoza became a popular genre throughout the eighteenth century.

To be sure, I am not claiming that Nieuwentyt's philosophy still has something to teach us. Most of his genuine insights in the philosophy of scientific practice and the application of mathematics in science—none of them earth-shattering to us now—have been figured out by others since. Even

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50 Vermij (1989).

51 Vermij (1988).

so the lack of attention to him is not merely a matter of historical justice, if such a thing were to exist, or antiquarian interest. His obscurity has come at a historiographic cost: we miss the indirect impact of Spinoza as a (negative) trigger on the development of an independent philosophy of science (long before Duhem or its reincarnation as a species of *Erkenntnistheorie*). We also miss the increasing methodological sophistication in philosophical reflection on the nature of science throughout the eighteenth century (and before the term ‘scientist’ was coined in the modern sense). To what degree such historiographic misconceptions tend to be inscribed in the often tacit self-conceptions of contemporary, working philosophers of science, I leave for another time.

Nieuwentyt’s fate (unknown in his country today; barely known to the relevant scholarly community; largely unstudied, etc.) is not unique in philosophical history (recall the female Polish logicians above). Often such a fate is the product of a certain linguistic isolation. I am not claiming that philosophical *cul-de-sacs* are produced only by linguistic barriers. Another important source to the creation of such *cul-de-sacs* are changes in philosophical fashion and vocabulary such that the now-unknown-philosopher-Y becomes almost incomprehensible to contemporary philosophers and scholars without access to an up-to-date translation of the works by Y. Both these barriers, linguistic and conceptual, must be overcome by a philosophical translator-advocate if a linguistically foreign text is to be made available into a hegemonic philosophical culture. (I am ignoring here the important role of translations from the *lingua franca* into a non-hegemonic language.) In the next section I discuss what I mean by a philosophical translator-advocate.

I conclude this section with the thought that despite the fact that barriers to travel and communication have been reduced since Nieuwentyt’s day, linguistic barriers in space and in time have remained. Unless she retrains in English, a philosopher in a non-hegemonic language does not exist to the outside world without a translator-advocate. So, there is every reason to assume that somewhere, somebody is writing philosophical gems in a language unknown to most of us. Perhaps, she will find—like Kierkegaard

—an audience outside her native tongue through somebody’s enthusiastic mediation. But it is equally possible that she will remain unknown, perhaps even unknown to our scholarly descendants, in whatever language they will be writing.

### 3. On Translator-Advocates as Philosophers

One thing Elizabeth Anscombe (Wittgenstein), J.L. Austin (Frege), John McDowell (Plato), Jan Łukasiewicz (Hume), Martha Nussbaum (Aristotle), W.D. Ross (Aristotle), and Eleanore Stump (Boethius) have in common is that they produced major translations of complex, philosophical works.<sup>52</sup> (When I looked up Łukasiewicz I expected to find translations of Stoic logic texts, but I learned he produced a translation of Hume’s first *Enquiry*.) I believe they did so relatively early in their careers. That they translated is, with the exception perhaps of Ross, not a major part of their ongoing professional identity. But it is notable, nevertheless.

The list of philosopher-translators is, of course, much longer; plenty of trained and professionally employed philosophers devote considerable attention of their scholarly life to producing translations for use in the classroom and scholarship. But this activity is generally not the way we receive and award professional recognition or credit. This is true, I think, even in (at least some) areas of the history of philosophy; when fellow scholars produce major translations, this is not the reason why the rest of us admire their work. If anything, if at a conference dinner we praise the translation too much, we may well, by implicature, be suspected of having a low opinion of their philosophical and scholarly work.<sup>53</sup>

I mentioned a list of influential names for two reasons: first, to alert the reader that the existence of philosophical translator-advocates is, despite the lack of a term and discussion of the subject, not a negligible feature of the

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52 Ross and Smith (1912); McDowell (1973); Frege (1953); Stump (2004); Nussbaum (1985); Hume (1905).

53 I am reporting on my experience in early modern philosophy. It is possible that in other areas of the history of philosophy and in comparative philosophy translation is status enhancing. Full disclosure: I am currently involved in a translation (see Berges, *forthcoming* 2018).



profession.<sup>54</sup> A lot of our peers, even very influential ones, have at one point or another undertaken major translation projects. In some cases (Plato, Aristotle) the status of the translated text was already secure and its contents broadly familiar, but in other cases the translations opened up recognition of its significance and produced new avenues of research. Second, in this section I characterize philosophical translator-advocates.

In particular, when I speak of a philosophical translator-advocate (or advocacy), I mean to be describing a certain type with certain skills.<sup>55</sup> A translation alone is not sufficient to make a linguistically distant text available to readers. It will also require philosophical creativity to articulate the significance of such a work to an audience that may be unclear about the problematic and potentially bewildering conceptual framework, not to mention tacit commitments, of such a text. This requires considerable philosophical acuity on the part of the translator-advocate because one must understand not only the contemporary philosophical scene to some degree, but be able to learn another, potentially alien approach. In addition, such a philosophical translator-advocate has to be able to understand how philosophical issues can get uptake in the contemporary scene.<sup>56</sup> That is, translation is more than the skilled repetition of another's writings in a new language.

I do not mean to suggest that such skills must be all developed prior to the act of translation. As Kate Briggs has argued, in a slightly different context, translation is best not thought of as such an automatic, machine-

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54 To forestall misunderstanding: I am claiming that translation is not a major source of professional credit or status and, so, unimportant in the credit economy of analytic philosophy. This is why I asserted about the influential names that translation is not a major part of their ongoing professional identity. It is an important question how to model the nature of scholarly work that is significant intellectually but not a source of scholarly status.

55 Of course, the tasks of translator-advocate may be divided among more than one person. But the translator will require considerable philosophical skill.

56 I tend to call this latter capacity, skill in 'philosophical politics'. I have offered an example of David Lewis's skill at this here: 'Magnanimous David Lewis, Exemplar', <http://digressionsimpressions.typepad.com/digressionsimpressions/2015/04/magnanimous-david-lewis-exemplar.html>.

like mirroring; rather, translation is more akin to a copying of and thereby mastering of another's dance moves.<sup>57</sup>

Briggs argues persuasively that the process of translation entails an enormous amount of learning prompted by the source text. Some of this learning may well take place before a translation begins, but a lot of it is prompted by the text itself. Here it is important to recognize that what one learns is not just the views expressed in the text ('being taught by the other's writing'). But one also often needs to come to understand a far wider context. Much of this learning may be unanticipated.<sup>58</sup>

Briggs hints, thus, that the practice of translation can transform the practitioner ('a different reader and writer'). This is due not just to being engaged intensely over an extended period with the thoughts of another at an extreme level of detail. But often we also have to be engaged with significant details of the relevant bits of the author's life-world or with the implied world of the text that is to be translated.<sup>59</sup> Being a philosophical translator may transform us philosophically.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, a philosophical translator-advocate must possess or be willing to develop five skills: (i) linguistic competence in at least two languages; (ii)

57 'I would be would be unconvinced by an account of translating that passes too quickly over or fails altogether to notice its chance of learning. The chance it offers of becoming expert, becoming-critical, becoming-intimate, becoming a better—or, if not a better (because are we really getting any better at reading and writing? Is it useful to think of these activities in terms of progress?)—then certainly a different reader and writer. Translations as the chance—a translation projects as a means of giving oneself the chance—of being taught by the other's writing, where answers to the questions of how to be responsible for this writing, and whether or not you or I will be capable of taking responsibility for this writing are, again, in no way given in advance [...] It's rather to offer a view of translation as a site for learning through reading and writing, through testing and researching, through asking and arguing': Briggs (2017) 207–210, emphases in original. Briggs is a translator of Roland Barthes. I thank Petra Van Brabandt for calling my attention to Briggs.

58 I have offered some autobiographical reflections here: 'On Translators-Advocates as Philosophers', <http://digressionsnimpresions.typepad.com/digressionsimpresions/2017/10/on-translators-advocates-as-a-species-of-philosophy.html>.

59 Some philosophy texts efface the life-world of their author(s), but introduce, say, a world of learning that is presupposed by the text or, say, a world of technical allusions and conceptual relations.

60 See Paul (2014) and the literature inspired by it.

conceptual sophistication; (iii) being good at philosophical politics, that is, an understanding of how to attract the interest of the intellectual milieu that shapes and sets the agenda for discussion in the hegemonic philosophical language; (iv) an ability and willingness to allow readers to make up their own mind about the translated text; (v) a willingness to learn new things and be changed along the way. I consider these five skills to be necessary and jointly sufficient to be a potential PTA.

The first skill is, I hope, not controversial. I do not deny one can learn a language, or become much better at it, during the translation. But at some point before completing the translation one must be competent. With the second skill I mean to describe not just a grasp of the philosophy and other elements of the work to be translated, but also, skill at contemporary philosophy. One must be able to convey the translated text such that contemporary readers are not unnecessarily confused by it and are in a position to grasp, say, the implicit conceptual entailments within and resonances of the translated text (recall my examples of Carnap's translations above).

The third skill is all about how a translated work is framed and introduced to a new audience. This is especially important for non-canonical or non-traditional texts which may be off-putting or alienating without a proper framing. This is true even for texts that are centrally located alongside very familiar canonical texts. For example, as Lisa Shapiro argues, Bayle's *Dictionary* 'purports to be a series of expository entries about particular figures and views, but it is also a typesetter's nightmare of footnotes and marginal notations in which some of the most substantive philosophical points are made'.<sup>61</sup> Given that the *Dictionary* is huge, and one may wish to introduce it to a new public by way of a selection, a translator and a publisher need to do some creative stage setting such that the most substantive points are not overlooked or lost in a mass of detail. To do this successfully and effectively, they will have to have some sense of what elements of Bayle's thought may be fruitful to, say, students of contemporary epistemology, metaphysics, or philosophy of religion.

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61 Shapiro (2016) 379.

As the previous paragraph already hints how to frame and introduce the translated text effectively without undermining the reading experience or—this is the fourth skill—the reader’s autonomy is no easy matter. By ‘reader autonomy’ I mean to capture the idea that a good translation preserves the possibility of interpretive differences that accompany many if not all philosophical texts. There are many choices to be made about the nature of the critical apparatus—introduction, footnotes, endnotes, glossary—the amount of anachronism and archaism one is willing to tolerate, and how much guidance is sufficient (etc.). That is, a translator/editor has to calibrate how much guidance to provide; too much guidance may end up imposing a reading on the text. A translation aimed at undergraduates, say, may well decide to focus on readability and accessibility. A translation aimed at scholars may well decide to sacrifice some readability in order to allow the reader to make up her own mind.<sup>62</sup>

The fifth skill point may make translation sound easy. But it cannot be emphasized enough that all translation is an interpretation. Translating complex philosophical texts is much, much harder than figuring out ‘gavagai’. This is so, even if you have written the text yourself and are fluent in both languages. Even if you are not a meaning holist, you will discover that a lot of philosophical jargon and the relations among the concepts are not stable and uniform across cultural and temporal contexts. (Surprisingly enough, this is even true of works in the history of physics.) As the philosopher-translator Naomi Osorio-Kupferblum, reminded me: ‘the scope of meaning of words and phrases is often not congruent between languages.’ So, leaving aside honest mistakes, all translations involve non-trivial judgments and trade-offs, within a complex interplay among writing style, content, jargon, sentence structure, and even argumentative structure (this list is not exhaustive).

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62 I am not suggesting there is always a simple trade-off between readability and reader autonomy. If a translation is incomprehensible (as sometimes happens with a kind of stubborn literalness about word order) readability and autonomy may well both have been sacrificed.

Before I leave the topic of philosophical translator-advocates, I note one important problem related to (iii) and to my previous paragraphs. Sometimes, one decides to adjust the presentation of a text in order to facilitate uptake in the hegemonic language. I have hinted that I suspect something like this happened to Carnap's texts, which seem to have been stripped of reminders of the engagement or resonances with Kantianism. A more shocking example occurred in the eighteenth century. The French *philosophe* André Morellet, 'hath not only transposed every chapter, but every paragraph in the whole book' of Cesare Beccaria's *Essay on Crimes and Punishment*.<sup>63</sup>

Beccaria's book is a classic in the philosophy of law, an important influence on Voltaire and Bentham, and Enlightenment political philosophy more generally.<sup>64</sup> The translation was famous and familiar to d'Alembert, Helvétius, Buffon, d'Holbach, and Hume then living in Paris. The fame of the work only increased when Voltaire attached an appendix to the translation. Judging by the uptake of Beccaria in Enlightenment France, Morellet was an exemplary translator-advocate for Beccaria's work. Now it is impossible to know, counterfactually, whether Morellet's efforts at systematic re-organization actually increased the audience and excitement of the work's reception in France. But his systematic re-arrangement clearly did not hurt the reception—presumably in large part because Morellet accurately discerned that the appearance of systematicity was increasingly central to Enlightenment thought.<sup>65</sup>

The English translator attacks Morellet on moral ('right') and semantic ('perverted his meaning') grounds. It is worth noting that the English translator fails to address the question to what degree Morellet's systematic re-arrangement was necessary to the uptake of Beccaria. Perhaps, and this

63 Here and below in the next few paragraphs, I quote the outraged, anonymous English translator of Cesare Beccaria's *Essay on Crimes and Punishment*. See 'Translator's Introduction' in Bonesana di Beccaria (1764).

64 Bedau and Kelly (2017). See also Foucault (1977). The rest of this paragraph is indebted to Harcourt (2013).

65 See Catana (2008).

may be blasphemy to some purists, the successful uptake justifies the decisions? I do not mean to suggest that the eyeballs and financial rewards, if there were any, justify any changes. But if we care, say, about the epistemic contribution of Beccaria's work to discussions of philosophy of law and political philosophy, then such uptake must count for something. Again, this is not to justify Morellet's decisions, but before we condemn, hard questions must be asked.

The point is not merely of historical interest: for example, Jonathan Bennett's translations of many classic texts are very influential in philosophical pedagogy. The translations in Bennett's *earlymoderntexts.org* take quite some liberty (he makes them 'plainer' and 'more straightforward') to make the original works 'more accessible' to contemporary audiences.<sup>66</sup> This includes considerable abridgment.<sup>67</sup>

It is an open question if systematic re-arrangement transforms the meaning of the text. Morellet's anonymous critic assumes that the arrangement of the text is constitutive of the meaning of the text.<sup>68</sup> Yet, at least sometimes a slavish mimicking of the original arrangement—say word order—may do no justice to the meaning. (Compare any of your favorite translations of Latin with the original.) But it is equally possible that an overly enthusiastic philosophical translator-advocate really ends up changing the intended meaning of the text; it is quite possible that the anonymous English translator of Beccaria, and fierce critic of Morellet, is right to suggest that the initial, French audience of Beccaria never really got to

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66 See <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/faqs/how>.

67 Bennett claims that his abridgments leave 'intact the main arguments, doctrines, and lines of thought'. I have offered evidence this is not always so (for discussion, see 'On using Earlymoderntexts.org in scholarship (with notes on translation)', <http://digressionsimpressions.typepad.com/digressionsimpressions/2014/08/on-using-earlymoderntextsorg-in-scholarship.html>).

68 The English translator treats *ideas* as bearers of what we would call propositional content. So, for her (I cannot say for sure, of course, but so many translators have been women) the question of translation just is the use of language in order to convey the 'arrangement of ideas'. This is not the place to explain the early modern understanding of the relationship between language, ideas, and semantic content.

read Beccaria's ideas/views (unless they knew Italian); but rather that they read a text inspired by Beccaria.

I do not mean to suggest that my discussion here settles the matter. Rather I just wished to call attention to the significance of more complex issues dealing with both the nature of identity between original source and translation,<sup>69</sup> as well as the responsibilities of the translator to the original author and the new would-be-audience in the hegemonic language.<sup>70</sup>

#### 4. Concluding Thoughts

I have used the language of 'markets' to make it tempting to treat philosophical translator-advocates as sources or agents of intellectual arbitrage between the hegemonic linguistic philosophical culture and other philosophical cultures. If it is true that without a PTA even superb philosophical texts written in non-hegemonic languages can become philosophical *cul-de-sacs*, then we have no right to assume an efficient market in ideas.

I have argued there is a lack of interest in the significance of PTAs. I am unfamiliar with philosophical-translation boot-camps or summer schools.<sup>71</sup> Often when there are reading groups centered on translating a text in graduate programs, these are not offered for credit. The general lack of encouragement to reward and incentivize the often time-consuming and challenging efforts and practice of philosophical translation in analytic

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69 Beccaria's anonymous English translator's arguments rely on the idea that slavish mimicry of the printed text is a mistake. She also chose to change the text in light of what she took to be the intended meaning of the text. And she discerns this intended meaning—notice her confidence ('evidently')—by assuming something like a principle of charity. My point here is not to challenge her practice; rather, she recognizes that to grasp the intended meaning may require deviation from printed or even ideational structure. For, and this point is more subtle, even the English translator seems to recognize that the relationship between 'the arrangement of the author's 'ideas' (as presented in the text) and 'the ideas themselves' (one may be tempted to say the propositional content discerned by the author) need not be transparent. See 'Translator's Introduction' in Bonesana di Beccaria (1764).

70 In *This Little Art*, Briggs (2017) is very good at helping her reader see that there is a kind of imaginative leap, I am tempted to say a subtle form of self-deception that comes with reading translations (in which one kind of effaces the fact that one is reading a translation).

71 Of course, this may be a blessing in disguise. One may come to believe mistakenly that translation skills can be acquired in a few months.

philosophy suggests that we do not seek to find wisdom and insight in linguistically hard-to-get or subordinated places.<sup>72</sup> It can, thereby, generate patterns of exclusion that may well reinforce or create injustice (recall the example of the female Polish logicians).<sup>73</sup>

In addition, not every deserving philosopher will have access to an excited and talented PTA.<sup>74</sup> This may be a matter of bad luck but it is also a matter of unfair distribution of material resources and networking opportunities. While not all non-English speaking would-be analytic philosophers are disadvantaged materially, some will be. This will impact their ability to travel, network, and have access to expensive, gated publications. These will then have a difficult time keeping up with the cutting-edge of the so-called research frontier. In addition, it is likely that their work will be ignored and so be left un-credited by those working in the hegemonic language.<sup>75</sup> That is, language is a barrier to entry from the non-hegemonic language into the *lingua-franca* community debating the issue they are contributing to.

For if a linguistic barrier is effective then the academic credit economy cannot function properly. I do not just mean by this cases of fraud and plagiarism.<sup>76</sup> Rather I mean to suggest, that we are then in a position that we will predictably and sincerely fail to acknowledge original insights from the linguistic margins because they are unknown to us working in the linguistic center. We may then be complicit in a form of communal injustice made all the worse not just because the language barrier means we are

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72 This is why one often hears, about translations, that they are a labor of love: Tonkin (2017). See also Briggs (2017) 236.

73 On epistemic harms, see Fricker (2007); Dotson (2011).

74 There is also a question of symmetry. There is quite a bit of ongoing effort, for example, to translate English-language analytic philosophy done by living philosophers into non-hegemonic languages. I have personally benefitted from such efforts. My work has appeared in Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Hebrew, and Dutch through the efforts of dedicated PTAs. There seems to be less effort in the other directions. But this awaits more detailed empirical study.

75 I do not mean to suggest that linguistic access is sufficient to end the unfairness. Often citation patterns track status hierarchy in analytic philosophy.

76 Of course, linguistic barriers and bad refereeing may facilitate fraud. See for a recent example in professional philosophy, Dougherty, Harsting, and Friedman (2009).



likely not to acknowledge its existence, but also because status and income may follow credit, as well as because we tend to associate given credit with merit.

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