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DILEMMAS OF TRANSLATION
(IN THE MARGIN OF TRANSLATIONS
FROM BIBLICAL HEBREW)

Having accepted Quine's conception of translation, which argues for the necessity of placing the original within the framework of the previously made translation of the ontological theory, within which text functions, the author of this paper defends Searle's principle of expressibility, which is only outwardly undermined by the impossibility of a literal translation of concepts expressed in the three Platonic virtues and three watchwords of the French Revolution into biblical Hebrew. Text is sustained through its sense. However, this sense depending on the ontology implanted in the natural language cannot be – as a relational being – exhausted in the never – completed translation.

The present essay is based on the concept of a three, the uniqueness of which in our culture has been captured in all dictionaries of symbols and highlighted in a very brief yet erudite paper by Quine[1]. Seizing something in a triad is a guarantee of durability, stability and completion and it spins like an eddy in various areas of Mediterranean culture: Judaism – Christianity – Islam, faith – hope – love, language – thought – reality, culture – society – consciousness, birth – life – death, Heaven – Hell – purgatory, reason – will – emotions, the Saint Trinity, three Polish bards, Peire's triadic concept of sign, Popper's three kingdoms etc. Бог тройцу любит. Omne trinum perfectum. Third time lucky. Do trzech razy sztuka.

I shall apply three threes.

The first one is metalinguistic e.g. **expressibility – rationality – charity**

The second one: **good – truth – beauty**

The third one: **freedom – equality – fraternity**

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[1] W.V.O. Quine (1995). *Trójca*, w: *Różności. Słownik prawie filozoficzny*, Warsaw, pp. 206-208.

I suggest that the entire presentation should be a certain intellectual experiment. To me it is a pretext to express some thoughts on the selected translation-related problems. This phenomenon is trapped by a plethora of problems, each of which constitutes a bundle of theoretical deliberations. Hence, it is extremely difficult to take a position on them since, being intricate in itself, they refer to one another by employing different (or the same yet differently interpreted) terminology at the same time.

What I mean by that are such great issues as a particular vision of language, text, sense or the problem of translatability and literality.

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The first of the threes has been developed in philosophical considerations related to translation. Searle's principle of expressibility states that all that has been thought can be expressed and all that has been expressed can be comprehended (interpreted, translated).[2] No ethnic language, though it contains a particular vision of reality and performs its conceptual partition, is a ghetto that one cannot escape from by means of translation procedures. According to the rule of rationality developed by Habermas each linguistic expression must be seen as an indication of rationality characterizing its author.[3] Irrespectively of a type of text *ratio* of interpretandum (translandum) must find its reflection in *ratio* of interpretans (translans). Davidson's principle of charity in turn stresses the necessity of the interpretant's putting an emphatic effort into placing a basic text in situational, cultural and·systemic contextual circles.[4] These three strongly formulated rules would constitute to me the equipment of a translator's "first aid kid", was it for some doubts arising in relation to specific translation situations. Particularly suspicious and "premature" seems to me the first rule.

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In my paper I would like to make a reference to the (im)possibility of locating the Platonic ideas of Good, Beauty and Truth in classical Hebrew and rereading the Hebrew expressions thus translated into Polish language.

Intrinsic to the European culture the Platonic triad of virtues "Good, Beauty and Truth" cannot be legitimised in the Bible for one simple reason. The virtue of both good and beauty is represented by the very same root YTW יטב (from which stems the nominal formation טוב *tow*) that expresses some kind of ethical aestheticism related to utilitarianism. With the poem *Ma'ase bereszit* opening the Bible,

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[2] J. Searle, (1999). *Umysł, język, społeczeństwo*, Warsaw.

[3] J. Habermas, (1999). *Teoria działania komunikacyjnego*, T.1, *Racjonalność działania a racjonalność społeczna*, Warsaw.

[4] R. Davidson, (1995). *Eseje o prawdzie, języku i umyśle*, Warsaw.

God shows not only approval of each and every works created by himself but also admiration. In his view each and every of them is good, beautiful, excellent, dazzling, useful as well as it brings happiness. This opinion has been repeated and semantically reinforced in the summary of the whole poem: *And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very **good**. A Bóg widział, że wszystko, co uczynił, było bardzo **dobre**.* [Gn 1,31 *et passim*].[5] May we add *...and beautiful, marvelous, useful and giving happiness.* Biblical pericopes stress out of necessity once or twice an aspect of meaning: *And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a **goodly** child, she hid him three months.; Ta kobieta poczęła i urodziła syna, a widząc, że jest **piękny**, ukrywała go przez trzy miesiące.* [Ex 2,2]; *And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not **good** at this time.; Chuszaj dał Absalomowi taką odpowiedź: «Rada, jaką tym razem dał Achitofel, nie jest **dobra**».* [2 S 17,7]; *Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee. that it may **be well** with thee?.; Noemi, teściowa Rut, powiedziała do niej: «Moja córko, czyż nie powinnam ci poszukać spokojnego miejsca, w którym byłabyś **szczęśliwa**?* [Ru 3,1] However, in the language of the original it is an inseparable tangle of meanings incorporated in one notion. The notion split in European culture to such a degree that it gave birth to separate scholarly areas: ethics and aesthetics.

Completely different associations are evoked by "Truth" mentioned repeatedly in the Bible. It has been mainly related to the root אמן `MN, which comprises meanings related to truth, truthfulness and confidence, faith, fidelity and trust, reality, stability, constancy, reliability, security, and durability and (grouping theses attributes of a tutor or educator) education and care. Out of the three nominal formations directly referring to this root it is אמת `emet that is the broadest one in terms of meaning. Also, it has the highest frequency. Fore and foremost, it is *truth* (as opposed to falsehood), *fidelity, faith, devotion, constancy, stability, security, honesty, integrity, justice, honesty*; *And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is **truth**.; A wtedy ta kobieta powiedziała do Eliasza: «Teraz już wiem, że naprawdę jesteś mężem Bożym i słowo Pańskie w twoich ustach jest **prawdą**».* [1 K 17,24]; *Thy testimonies are very **sure**: / Holiness becometh thine house, / O Lord, for ever.; Świadectwa Twoje są bardzo **godne wiary**; domowi Twojemu przystoi świętość / po wszystkie dni, o Panie!* [Ps 93,5]; *And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel **was established to be** a prophet of the Lord.; Wszyscy Izraelici od Dan aż do Beer-Szeby poznali, że Samuel stał się **rzeczywiście** prorokiem Pańskim.* [1 S 3,20]; Another formation is represented by אמון `emun – *fidelity, certainty, reliability, truthfulness,* and אמנה `emuna – *constancy, durability,*

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security and the unshakable faith in *keeping promises*: *And wisdom and knowledge shall be the* **stability** *of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure.; I zawita* **trwały pokój** *w jego czasach. / Zasobem sił zbawczych – mądrość i wiedza, / jego skarbem jest bojaźń Pańska.* [Jes 33,6]; *Trust in the Lord, and do good; / So shalt thou dwell in the land, and* **verily** *thou shalt be fed.; Miej ufność w Panu i postępuj dobrze, / mieszkaj w ziemi i zachowaj* **wierność**. [Ps 37,3].

The differences are striking. Still, there exist similarities as well. While the English word 'truth' retains its etymological tie between truth – factuality and truth – credibility, 'prawda' ('truth'), in the Polish language is etymologically associated with (inter alia) "rozprawianie" ((re)debating), "prawo" (law), "poprawa" (improvement), "prawość" (integrity), "sprawdzanie" (verification) and "sprawiedliwość" (justice). Apart form the fact that it is, next to falsehood, a quality of certain phrases and statements, it relativises the world's phenomena by dividing them into real and fictional ones (typ: *To jest prawdziwy brylant* [(type: *This is a genuine diamond*)]. Also, it is a measure of value and intensity (typ: *prawdziwa pobożność, prawdziwe draństwo*) [(type: *real piety, real meanness*)]. Besides, the Polish expression 'prawda' ['truth'] can be negated, interpreted aspectually; it may appear in a plural form and be an etiquette of various cultural phenomena, philosophical and ideological trends. The Polish 'wiara' ['faith'] in turn, is etymologically related to *verum* – truth. The trace of this semantic bond, which is now 'extinct', continued in the Polish language until the 17th century, when the phrase „Na mą wierę" was used as a confirmation of the verity of a statement. In classical Hebrew formations stemmed from root `MN are translated as those belonging either to the semantic field of faith or truth. By means of these formations it would be impossible to render St. Augustine's formula: *Credo ut intelligam*. Nor would it possible to make the mirror one: *Intelligo ut credam*. Based on the same root, they express both, inseparable notions simultaneously. *Fides et ratio* cannot be opposed to each other. Faith has nothing in common with ignorance, whereas knowledge includes faith as its component. It is impossible to imagine a 20th century dispute over whether one notion can amount to the other. Faith is not a flawed knowledge which is impossible to verify and knowledge is not a faith that has gained the opportunity for empirical verification. Also, the Bible says nothing about any relativism of truth. Not only is truth spoken about, extolled and preached, but also unshakable, eternal and JHWH truth persists from one generation to another. Although it can be concealed (Ps 40,11) and shaken (Iz 59,14), it cannot be annihilated. Truth – faith is the object of man's desires, the object of care and protection and it is a prerequisite for man's closeness to God. Man is supposed to live and act in truth, exercise power and make judgments according to it and follow its paths whilst it continues to exist unflinchingly. Incidentally, the traditional translations, fossilized in the so-called biblicisms, such as "Bóg wierny" (Ps 146,4 et passim) or "Wierność Pańska" […] are very awkward, let alone, internally contradictory not only from the point of view of the Christian doctrine but even of the linguistic habit of contemporary Polish. So what or whom

is omniscient God supposed to believe in? Whom is it supposed to be faithful to? In numerous pericopes such as: *Chwalcie Pana, wszystkie narody, / wysławiajcie Go, wszystkie ludy, / bo Jego łaskawość nad nami potężna, / a* **wierność** *Pańska trwa na wieki.* [Ps 117]; *Słowo Twe, Panie, trwa na wieki, niezmienne jak niebiosa.* / **Wierność** *Twoja [trwa,] z pokolenia na pokolenie; / umocniłeś ziemię, i trwa. / Wszystko trwa do dziś według Twoich wyroków, / bo wszystkie rzeczy Ci służą.* [Ps 119,89-91]; *On Skała, dzieło Jego doskonałe, / bo wszystkie drogi Jego są słuszne; / On Bogiem* **wiernym**, *a nie zwodniczym, / On sprawiedliwy i prawy.*, [Dt 32,4] one ought to choose (as one must choose), 'prawda' ['truth'], 'rzeczywistość' ['reality'] or even 'opieka' ['care'] instead of "wierność" ['fidelity']. In the English translation of the Bible a different choice was made in relation to the aforesaid citations, which does not mean that thus modified text is not impoverished. *O praise the Lord, all ye nations: / Praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: And the* **truth** *of the Lord endureth for ever. /* [Ps 117]; *For ever, O Lord, / Thy word is settled in heaven. / Thy* **faithfulness** *is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. /They continue this day according to thine ordinances: / For all are thy servants.* [Ps 119,89-91]; *He is the Rock, his work is perfect: / For all his ways are judgment: / A* **God of truth** *and without iniquity, / Just and right is he.,* [Dt 32,4].

The well-known 'amen' – *"Let it be"*, *,,Niech tak się stanie!"* derives from the very root and it is used in the Bible as an operator of assertion following prayers and anthems as well as blessings and curses. *Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say,* **Amen**.; *«Przeklęty, kto gardzi swoim ojcem lub matką». A cały lud powie: «***Amen***».* [Dt 27, 16, et passim]; *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel / From everlasting, and to everlasting.* **Amen**, *and* **Amen**. *Błogosławiony Pan, Bóg Izraela, / od wieku aż po wiek! /* **Amen, amen**. [Ps 41,14].

I now wish to recall a yet another triad important in European culture, which appeared on the banners of the French Revolution: Liberty – Equality – Fraternity. This triad, in spite of the fact that each element may function on its own, came into being under specific conditions. It evokes, more or less similar/unanimous images and emotions and it is surrounded with a appropriately saturated cultural layer. Let us think for a while if it could be rendered into classical Hebrew. In this language the idea of freedom is conveyed by the root חפש HPŠ *examine, deepen, investigate* as well as two untypical nominal formations: דרור *deror*, which means, first of all, 'swallow', secondly, 'a drop/drops of myrrh', and in the so-called third (lexically), probably figurative meaning – 'freeing somebody.' and חר *hor – somebody of noble birth, wealthy* and then also *hole, opening, hiding place or hideout.* 'Wolność' ['freedom'] itself appears in the Polish Tyniecka Bible merely 21 times. I shall quote the most representative passage on freedom. *This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim* **liberty** *unto them; that every man should let his manservant, and every man*

*his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go **free**; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of the Jew brother. Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every maidservant, go **free**, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed and let them go. But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go **free**, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaid.; Słowo, które Pan skierował do Jeremiasza po zawarciu przez króla Sedecjasza z całym ludem jerozolimskim umowy głoszącej powszechną **wolność**. Każdy miał obdarzyć **wolnością** swego niewolnika Hebrajczyka i niewolnicę Hebrajkę. Nikomu nie wolno było trzymać u siebie brata swego Judejczyka jako niewolnika. Wszyscy dostojnicy i ludzie, którzy zawarli umowę, zgodzili się wypuścić na **wolność** każdy swego niewolnika lub niewolnicę i nie zmuszać ich więcej do służby u siebie. Wyraziwszy zgodę, wypuścili ich na **wolność**. Potem jednak zmienili zdanie i sprowadzili niewolników i niewolnice, których obdarzyli **wolnością**, zmuszając, by się stali znów niewolnikami i niewolnicami.* [Jr 34,8-11]

'Equality' is not present in the Bible at all; dictionaries do not register such a formation. However, in might be coined from two roots שוה ŠWH – *to be similar to, be the same as, equivalent*, whereas in the causative form: *to even out, to make sth. equal, to calm down/to quieten* and ישר YŠR – *to walk straight on, to be appropriate, good, honest* and in causative formations – *to straighten (out), to even out, lead/walk straight on, to direct sth. straight on.*

Fraternity in turn can be derived from אח `aH – *brother* and it has merely merely one biblical realisation: *Then I cut assunder mine other staff, even Blands, that I might break the **brotherhood** between Judah and Israel.; Następnie złamałem moją drugą laskę „Zjednoczenie" na znak zerwania **braterstwa** Judy z Izraelem.* [Sa 11,14] .

It can be noticed then that there exist a formal possibility of translating the sequence *Liberté-Égalité-Fraternité:* חפשה *hufša –* שוה *šawe –* אחוה `*ahawa.* Our imagination will not give us a hint regarding an appropriate biblical context for this sequence. The Hebrew 'wolność' ['freedom'] is primarily understood as an opposite to captivity or bondage. Thus interpreted freedom entails that somebody can be freed, a slave can be granted freedom and a free man can be deprived of it. Obviously, it is not freedom to make one's personal decisions that one has to bear the responsibility for. Nor it is freedom from any dependencies. Out of the question is also freedom of denomination and the preaching of sets of beliefs which are not in compliance with the official theistic ideology. It is the idea of the incessant intervention of the all-powerful YHWH that would not allow to create such a notion. "Equality", if one would like to derive it from the aforementioned roots, would have to be linked with the neutralization of the opposition: familiar/alien (or familiar/strange) that is strongly marked in Israel's hierarchical society and – perhaps be saturated with such positive values as integrity, straightforwardness and lack of any ambitions to assert domination. Furthermore, it would be a notion which is contradictory to the very idea of the chosen nation. 'Fraternity', on

the other hand, entails ties of blood conditioned by common ancestors. To come back to the main thread of these considerations the notions Freedom – Equality – Fraternity prove *summa summarum* to be untranslatable into the language of the theocratic society, where democracy, dictatorship, and any absolutism, which either enjoys recognition or raises objection, are out of the question.

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In the light of the above (and the number of examples is countless), was Searle mistaken and was his rule of expressibility untenable? It does not seem a case to me. The first of the threes should be, by disrupting the assumed composition, complemented by the rule of Quine's ontological involvement. This great theoretician of translation[6] claims that by excluding the so-called observational statements (which can be referred to as literal ones) and which refer to the simplest stimuli and macroscopic objects, all the remaining ought to be translated along with ontological theory under which they are recognised as reasonable ones. Since we are able to speak about differences between languages and cultures, we are also able to transgress them. The truth is that we can explain neither the meaning of the Platonic triad nor the watchwords of the French Revolution to the primary users of classical Hebrew, who would be ideal addressees of the biblical text. Nonetheless, it is still imaginable and the barriers are of different character than that of language. (Historical, ideological, semantic) commentaries would have to be extraordinarily extensive and still they would be satisfactory to each and every of us to a different degree. If so, where does the translator – biblicist's arrogance root from? It is him/her who believes that they have found one cogent and relevant phrase that reflects the meaning of the biblical pericope. There is not "only one" good translation. There are many of those and the awareness of complementary interpretations of the original is the genuine value of translation. Accordingly, language is not only an instrument of describing the familiar world, but it is an instrument enabling one to learn what is unknown. Text is kept in its existence via the sense it includes. Yet, the sense, which depends on the ontology implanted into the natural language, cannot be – as a reference being – exhausted in translation, which is never entirely drawn to a close.

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[6] W.V.O. Quine, (1999). *Słowo i przedmiot*, Warsaw.