

Translation: The Ethics of Competence and Effort:

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Why? What for?

knowledge / action

To improve translations? (methodology)

Help navigate relations with employers, clients, etc.? (interpersonal skills)

Determine how we might best educate translators? (teaching)

Some other reason?



Saint Jerome and the Lion: Predella Panel

Fra Filippo Lippi and workshop, 15th century

[The National Gallery](#)

- translation
- research
- teaching

Models of translation ethics

Chesterman (2001)

- representation
 - service
 - communication
 - norm-based ethics
- + ethics of commitment

Proposal for a universal translators' oath

Commit, commitment

Late 14th century, 'to give in charge, entrust', from the Latin *committere* [to unite, connect, combine; to bring together], from *com* [with, together] + *mittere* [to release, let go; send, throw];

1530s, 'trust (oneself) completely to';

1770, 'put or bring into danger by an irrevocable preliminary act';

Commitment: from the 1610s, 'action of officially consigning to the custody of the state', i.e., confining;

'The pledging or engaging of oneself; a pledge, a promise' is attested from 1793.

Competence

1590s, 'rivalry' and also 'adequate supply' (both now obsolete);

1630s, 'sufficiency of means for living at ease', from the French *compétence*, from Latin *competentia* [meeting together, agreement, symmetry], from *competens*, present participle of *competere* [especially in its earlier sense of 'falling or coming together; being convenient or fitting'];

The meaning 'adequate capacity or ability, the state or quality of having sufficient skill, knowledge, and strength to deal with what is at hand' recorded later (18th century);

Interesting legal sense of 'being capable, fit'; 'having authority'.

Effort

‘conscious, laborious attempt; strenuous exertion’, from the French *effort*, from Old French *esforz* [force, impetuosity, strength, power], verbal noun from *esforcier* [force out, exert oneself], from Vulgar Latin **exfortiare* [to show strength], from Latin *ex* [out] + *fortis* [strong]

Tact

1650s, 'sense of touch or feeling', from the Latin *tactus* [a touch, handling; sense of touch], from the root of *tangere* [to touch]. The meaning 'keen sense of discernment in action or conduct; sensitive perception' was recorded later.

tact (intensified) as moral vision? (George Steiner)

"Every act of translation is an act of attentiveness." (Kaplan 2013: 79)

Detail, doubt and uncertainty

The more you look at something (i.e., commit yourself to it), the more you see in it (and in yourself, in relation to it?).

The many and the one

The case of Maureen Freely, translator of five books by Orhan Pamuk:

Turkish terms, e.g., *börek*, *yalı*, *meyhane*

the conjunction 'and'

the semicolon

The success, (some) confusion, and a few misguided assumptions about the translator

On which level do we look for answers?

It is my observation that no answers in a real sense of the word emerge on the level on which the problems appear.



New times, old principles

“As virtuous living, again, for Aristotle, entails the blending of temperance, courage, humility, a sense of justice, self-discipline, generosity, a feeling for action’s consequence, and the capacity for certain kinds of pleasure (including friendship), among other things, so too translational ethics should call for a combination of—among other things—temperance, courage, humility, a sense of justice, self-discipline, generosity, modesty, a feeling for action’s consequence, and the capacity for certain kinds of pleasure (including friendship).”

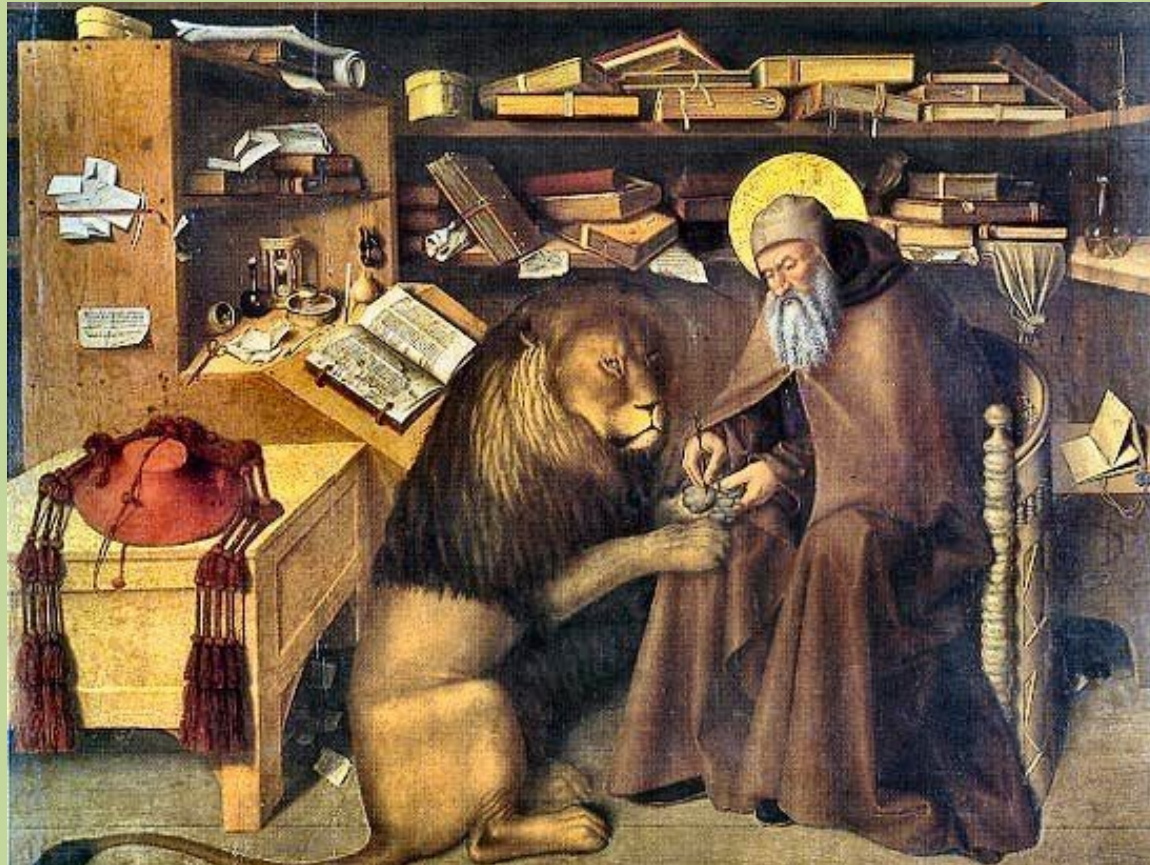
Cole

(2013: 8)

“At the heart of this [...] is the question of character—that Heraclitean determiner of a person’s fate, and if that person happens to translate, of the fate of his translation. For the habits and customs a translator develops in his reading, listening, writing and learning run like nerves and veins toward every syllable he’ll render.”

Cole

(2013: 5)



Saint Jerome in His Study

Niccolò Antonio Colantonio, 15th century

Museo di Capodimonte

Temptation of the moral highground

“Physician, heal thyself”

What makes me think I can say something on a given topic?

That I can implement action? Expect others to act on my suggestions?