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BOOKS IN BRIEF

ON TRANSLATING THE TORAH

A Review-Essay of Notes on the New Translation of the Torah, by Harry M. Orlinsky

Jeffrey H. Tigay

IN THE HISTORY OF BIBLE TRANSLATION few decades can have been as prolific as that just ended. In English alone we now have the Jewish Publication Society's new translation of *The Torah* (1962)¹ and *The Five Megilloth and Jonah* (1969), the first volumes of *The Anchor Bible* (since 1964), *The Jerusalem Bible* (1966, a version of the French Catholic *La Sainte Bible* [1955]), the American Catholic *Confraternity Bible* (1969, since renamed *The New American Bible*), and the British Protestant *New English Bible* (1970). Now the JPS offers something unique² in this area, a volume by Dr. Harry M. Orlinsky, the editor-in-chief of its translation,³ intended "to account for the significant or interesting departures in the New Jewish Version (NJV) of the Torah from the older version of 1917 (OJV)" (p. 3). The translation itself, with its accuracy and its lucid and contemporary style, is like a breath of fresh air. Comparison of the old version with the new has become a favored pastime among its readers, and such comparison throws the implications of each translation into relief in a way that neither could have done by itself.

In the opening verses of the Torah for example, comparison shows that while the old translation ("In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth") carried implications of creation *ex nihilo* and the beginning of time, the new translation ("When God began to create . . .") implies neither, as the *Notes* point out (p. 51). For numerous passages of equal or lesser importance readers will welcome Dr. Orlinsky's authoritative account of why the translators set aside familiar renditions with all their implica-

1 Second, revised edition, 1967. The *Notes* are based on the second edition but include variations from the forthcoming Hebrew-English edition of the Torah, Haftoroth, and Megilloth (p. 3).

2 On p. 261 of the *Notes* a privately circulated set of notes on the OJV, by its editor, M. L. Margolis, is mentioned.

3 Associated with Dr. Orlinsky were Profs. H. L. Ginsberg and the late E. A. Speiser, co-editors; Rabbis Max Arzt, Bernard J. Bamberger, and Harry Freedman, and, as secretary of the committee, Dr. Solomon Grayzel.

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tions, for new renditions with new implications. At the same time the volume reflects something of the current state of biblical studies and the renascent Jewish contribution to the field.

The introduction opens with a survey of "The Four Great Ages of Bible Translation" and then turns to "The Philosophy of Bible Translation." The latter section describes the origin and history of the literal word-for-word approach which was mostly standard until the *NJV* replaced it with an idiomatic English rendition which recognizes the multiple nuances of Hebrew words and is not bound to Hebrew syntax. We may illustrate the difference by comparing the *OJV* and *NJV* translations of a few verses. At Deut. 8:3:

OJV: And He afflicted thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every thing that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.

NJV: He subjected you to the hardship of hunger and then gave you manna to eat, which neither you nor your fathers had ever known, in order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but that man may live on anything that the Lord decrees.

A fine example of non-literalism appears at Lev. 25:14–16:

OJV: And if thou sell aught unto thy neighbour, or buy of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not wrong one another. According to the number of years after the jubilee thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the crops he shall sell unto thee. According to the multitude of the years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of the years thou shalt diminish the price of it; for the number of crops doth he sell unto thee.

NJV: When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only for the number of years since the jubilee; and in selling to you, he shall charge you only for the remaining crop years: the more such years, the higher the price you pay; the fewer such years, the lower the price; for what he is selling you is a number of harvests.

At times the translation is made to conform to English word order by shifting a word or a phrase a few verses away (but still in the same sentence) from the place it occupies in the Hebrew. In Ex. 35:31–34, which describes the Lord's selection of Bezalel as the chief artisan in constructing the sanctuary, the phrase "placed in his heart" (*NJV* "inspired him") is moved from v. 34 to the beginning of v. 32:

OJV: ³¹ And he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. ³² And to devise

skillful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, ³³ and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of skillful workmanship. ³⁴ And he hath put in his heart that he may teach . . .

NJV: ³¹ *He has endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft ³² and has inspired him to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper, ³³ to cut stones for setting and to carve wood—to work in every kind of designer’s craft—³⁴ and to give directions.*

The older word-for-word method is traced back to the Septuagint. “It is precisely this philosophy of literal, mechanical translation which the NJV has set out to discard” (p. 13). The brevity of the introductory section obscures the fact that the ancient translations, including some parts of the Septuagint, displayed varying degrees of paraphrase. However, there is no question that literalism predominated in the Septuagint.

literal vs. idiomatic translation

WHY THE SEPTUAGINT TRANSLATORS rendered the text as literally as they generally did is an important question for the history of Bible translation. Orlinsky attributes this literalism to the translators’ belief in the divine authorship of the Hebrew text of the Torah. He adds that the translators

knew well the admonition in Deut. 4:2: “you shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it . . .” (cf. 13:1). Indeed, the apocryphal work, the so-called Letter of Aristeas [§§ 310–311], after noting that the Septuagint translation had been officially adopted by the Jewish community of Alexandria . . . proceeds with the statement that the leaders of the Jewish community and the translators “. . . bade that an imprecation should be pronounced, according to their custom, upon any who should revise the text by adding or transposing anything whatever in what had been written down, or by making any excision. . . .” (p. 12).

Now the quotation from *Aristeas* deals with freezing the text of the Septuagint, not translating the Torah, so it shows nothing about a philosophy of translation. A more apt witness for that is Philo’s account of how the translators set about their task (*Life of Moses* II, 34):

Reflecting how great an undertaking it was to make a full version of the laws given by the voice of God, where they could not take away or add or transfer anything, but must keep the original form and shape . . .

However, it seems difficult to establish whether this philosophy was due to an interpretation of Deut. 4:2. It is not inconceivable, but I know of nothing in the subsequent history of interpretation to support it. Philo himself seems unaware of any biblical warrant for the translators’ feeling (his wording is not even in the same order as Deut. 4:2), and in his com-

ment on Deut. 4:2 he, like the rabbis, followed the *peshat* and construed it to forbid adding or subtracting commandments. The verse is not invoked as a proof text for R. Judah's dictum "he who translates a verse literally is a misrepresenter, while he who adds to it [apparently, other than what the Targum adds] is a blasphemer" (*Kiddushin* 49a; *Tosefta Megilla* III, Jerome on literal versus idiomatic translation of the Septuagint. At most, Philo and *Aristeas* may echo the Deuteronomic phraseology, but even this is not necessarily so since, as Orlinsky has noted elsewhere, prohibitions against adding to or subtracting from authoritative texts and teachings are common in ancient Near Eastern sources.⁴

The Septuagint translators actually had no need of a putative biblical injunction to induce them to translate literally; literal translation goes back long before their time in the ancient world and reflects a desire for exactness which is especially appropriate to religious and legal texts whose efficacy depends on punctilious recitation or observance. The relevance of the legal model for the awkward "translation Greek" of the Septuagint was pointed out by Elias Bickerman, who argued that this awkwardness was due to the translators' reverence for the words of God and was as deliberate as the solecisms often found in Greek translations of legal texts.⁵

The question of literal versus idiomatic translation continued to be wrestled with well into the Middle Ages. The Tibbonites, the eleventh-twelfth century family to which we owe so many of our Hebrew translations of Arabic-Jewish literature, produced a "translation Hebrew" (the term used by Salo W. Baron) as literal and awkward as the Septuagint's Greek, and with motives comparable to the latter's. Judah ibn Tibbon, "the father of translators," wrote, in introducing his translation of Bachya's *Duties of the Heart*, of his fear of distorting the author's meaning and thus misleading the reader, and he insisted that whenever possible the translator render the text word for word, neither adding nor subtracting nor shifting the word order, even though this would produce a translation which is inelegant and difficult to understand.

Maimonides had a different view. In a letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon about the latter's then nearly complete translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed* he wrote:

Whoever wishes to translate from one language to another and intends to translate a single word with a single word and to preserve the sentence structure as well, will have great difficulty, and his translation will be extremely doubtful and incorrect . . . and it is not proper to proceed that way. Rather, one who translates from one language to another must first understand the subject and

⁴ *Journal of Biblical Literature* (=JBL) 82 (1963), p. 263, n. 25.

⁵ *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 75 (1944), p. 102.

then render it in a manner in which that subject may be understood in the language. And he will not be able to do this without changing the word order, rendering one word by many and many words by one, and subtracting and adding words, until the matter is so arranged as to be understood in the language into which he is translating.

One could not ask for a statement closer to the NJV's own approach.

effect on interpretation

ONE FEATURE OF THE NJV which is troublesome to rabbis and teachers is the inconsistency that often results from the avoidance of literalism. This can obscure significant and possibly intentional word plays in the text. (At Gen. 22:8 the *Notes* in fact reject one *OJV* rendering which "unnecessarily departed from the literal translation" on these very grounds.) Thus—to cite a case once stressed by Martin Buber in this context—from NJV's "your brother came *with guile* and took away your blessing" (Gen. 27:35) and "I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you *deceive* me?" (29:25), one would never know that the same root (*rmh*) was employed in both places, possibly to suggest that Jacob was punished measure-for-measure for his deception of Isaac; *OJV*'s "with guile" and "beguiled me" at least made the similarity clear (although to today's reader "deceitfully" and "deceived" might convey the meaning best).

At times it is the verbal stimulus for an important midrash which idiomatic translation obscures. Thus the contrast between "Noah walked *with God*" (Gen. 6:9) and God's command to Abram "Walk *before Me*" (*OJV*, literally, at Gen. 17:1), on which the midrash based a distinction between the differing degrees of moral or spiritual independence and initiative of the two men (*Gen. Rabbah* 30:10) is not conveyed by NJV's idiomatic "Walk in My ways" in the latter passage. The role of such recurrent "key words" in expressing Scripture's message was prominent in Umberto Cassuto's commentaries and in Buber's essays on Bible translation.⁶ Attention to such key words is especially helpful to preachers and teachers; they will want to have a copy of the *OJV* handy when it is desired to stress such points.

To what extent a translation, especially a Jewish translation, should serve these interests is a question which a philosophy of translation ought to encompass. Buber and Franz Rosenzweig thought this a major responsibility of the translator. Although their own translation has been criticized

⁶ M. Buber and F. Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (1936), pp. 55-75, 135-167, 211-238, 262-275; three of these essays are now available in Hebrew in Buber's *Darko shel Mikra* (1964), pp. 272-317.

for the barbarisms to which their literalism sometimes led, their essays at least came to grips with the issue and can therefore still be read with profit. In view of the rabbinical representation on the *NJV* translating committee it would be surprising were this question not raised and debated. If it was, the committee quite obviously decided that these considerations could not be paramount. An airing of this discussion and an explanation of the decision would have been a contribution of some interest.

the njv's approach

IN THE SECTION on "The Making of the Old (1917) and New (1962) JPS Versions of the Bible," we are told that the *NJV* set out to embody "(1) intelligibility in diction and (2) the fuller use of both the older commentaries—especially the Jewish but not at all excluding the Christian [in fact no single scholar is cited so often as the durable S. R. Driver]—and the recently discovered extrabiblical materials that had something really pertinent to offer the Bible translator" (p. 17).

In their research the translators regularly consulted the major ancient versions and recent translations, the medieval Jewish commentaries appear in *Miqraot Gedolot*, and most modern commentators, notably Luzzatto and Malbim. A glance at the index will reveal the contributions of nearly a score of lesser-known medieval scholars, and of A. B. Ehrlich, B. Jacob, U. Cassuto, and the Christian scholars S. R. Driver and N. Snaith.

§C, "The New Jewish Version," describes, in twenty-one pages of examples, how the *NJV* has replaced the word-for-word method by using idiomatic English sentence structure and recognizing the multiple nuances of Hebrew words, many of them first noted by earlier Jewish exegetes. For example, since the present form of the chapter and verse division is derived from medieval Christian editions of the Bible, the *NJV* felt free to disregard them where they conflict with the "logical units of meaning" (p. 21). Thus, following Rashi, Gen. 1:1–3 became a single sentence while, with Saadia, Gen. 7:24 was combined with chapter 8.

Several particles have various nuances, including the *waw*, which means not only "and" but also "but; when; then; or"; and *lakhen*, which only rarely means "therefore," but usually, as recognized in the *Mekhilta* of R. Simeon bar Yohai, "assuredly, I swear."

Among nouns and verbs given special nuances are *sha'ar*, literally "gate," but also "(law) court" and "settlement"; *nefesh*, "creature; person; desire; corpse," but never "soul" (well—almost never: see the translation at Deut. 6:5 and 11:13⁷); *shalom*, "well [adverb]; friendship"; *lifne*, literally

⁷ This inconsistency is explained in the *Notes* at Gen. 2:7 as due to "familiar English usage," a confusing lapse in a translation which is otherwise so iconoclastic.

“before,” but also “with the approval of; by the grace of; . . . will of” (p. 226); *torah*, “teaching(s); instructions; ritual,” etc.

Stylistic and grammatical features mentioned in the *Notes* include inceptive verbs (e.g., “were seen” in Gen. 8:5 means “became visible”), hendiadys (e.g. “land and birthplace” [the latter is actually a debatable meaning] means “native land” in Gen. 12:1 and elsewhere), *merismus* (e.g., “heaven and earth” means “universe”), and elimination of a distinctive form of addressing God (“Thou”) since Hebrew made no such distinction.

Unmentioned are earlier discussions on the meaning of the particle *ki* which show a sophisticated philological sense that foreshadows the *NJV*'s. Already in the third century, R. Simeon b. Lakish distinguished four main nuances of *ki*, equivalent to Aramaic particles meaning roughly “if, in case, but rather, because” (*Rosh Hashanah* 3a and *Gittin* 90a). After noting that the Targum sometimes renders *ki* with Aramaic *'are*, Rashi comments: “*'are*, in Aramaic, has all the meanings of *ki* in Hebrew, and if you wish to give it its (proper) nuance (*leshanotho*), you must nuance each according to its context” (Rashi at *Gittin* 90a).

use of earlier exegetes

WHAT EMERGES is the realization that certain features of the more “traditional” translations such as *OJV* are in fact relatively recent developments, while many features of *NJV* which are popularly regarded as new were anticipated by talmudic, medieval, and early modern Jewish exegetes. The *Notes* make clear that the translation owes more to the earlier exegetes than any other resource:

The reader will not fail to note the frequency with which an older Jewish interpretation of a word or phrase or verse anticipated NJV or provided it with an important lead to a new interpretation. The Jewish commentators of ancient, medieval, and more recent times gain our scholarly respect not from a blind acceptance of their views but rather from a critical evaluation of their exposition in the manner that any modern commentator expects from his peers (p. 40).

Most frequently cited are the medieval and early modern Jewish exegetes.⁸ From time to time earlier rabbinic exegesis is adopted, especially

⁸ A number of references need correction, however. Rashi is mistranslated in the notes on Gen. 2:25 and Num. 17:28 (see M. Rosenbaum and A. M. Silbermann, *Pentateuch . . . with Rashi's Commentary* [1946] for the correct translation, as against the interlinear translation of A. Ben Isaiah and B. Sharfman [1950]—on which Orlinsky collaborated—which was followed in these notes). At Gen. 34:25 Rashi is credited with an interpretation which he in fact brands as *midrash aggadah*; at Ex. 20:2 and Num. 5:13 Luzzatto is credited with interpretations which he opposes. At Gen. 44:22 the Targum Onkelos is literal and therefore non-committal; the view credited to ibn Ezra is found only in Ramban's citation of him, while our printings of ibn Ezra consider the question unresolvable. At Ex. 10:13 neither

for legal passages. And here and there rabbinic literature is treated as potentially a *primary* source preserving the language, thought, and customs of the biblical period. Thus the interpretation of *lifne* as “by the direction of” in Gen. 43:33 goes back to a suggestion made by Ehrlich on the basis of rabbinic usage.⁹ The first edition’s “meteor” for *shevet* in Num. 24:17 (retracted in the second edition and *Notes*) was based on talmudic *shavit*. Much of the rabbinic evidence used in this way had already been cited by Ehrlich, Driver, and others, and unfortunately the *Notes* do not go substantially beyond them. Rabbinic evidence for some of *NJV*’s renderings, such as *ben bayit* = “steward” (Gen. 15:3), *baqqesh le . . .* = “be on the verge of” (43:50) and *qanna’* = “impassioned” (Ex. 20:5 and elsewhere; see below) is not mentioned.

Use of evidence from post-biblical Hebrew has been advocated by several scholars in the last hundred years. A. B. Ehrlich justified this procedure on the basis of the cultural continuity between the biblical and rabbinic periods which, though representing separate stages of Jewish cultural history, had a greater affinity to each other than either did to neighboring cultures. Robert Gordis refers to this as the “vertical approach,” in contrast to the “horizontal approach” in biblical studies, and argues that “Parallels from other Semitic languages . . . can establish only a possibility or at best a likelihood for a similar use in Hebrew. On the other hand, evidence from later Hebrew literature should be regarded as at least equally strong proof, if not more so, because it proves the *actual existence* of the usage in Hebrew.”¹⁰

The linguistic continuity between biblical and rabbinic Hebrew, upon which this vertical approach relies, is strikingly illustrated in recent studies which show that many words and phrases occurring in texts from the north Syrian site of Ugarit (fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE) but absent from the Bible (twelfth through second centuries), reappear in post-biblical and mishnaic Hebrew, some twelve to fifteen centuries later than the Ugarit texts.

Some of these studies are cited by Mitchell J. Dahood in the final volume of his controversial Psalms commentary (*Anchor Bible*). To him they legitimate the use of Ugaritic and the other Canaanite dialects to

ibn Ezra nor the *Perush al ibn Ezra* say what the *Notes* claim. At Ex. 23:5 reference to the *Mekhilta* is misleading since the *Notes*’ point is that this verse and Deut. 22:4 are synonymous, while the *Mekhilta* carefully distinguishes between them.

9 II Sam. 24:4 contains another example of the same usage.

10 “Studies in the Relationship of Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew,” in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (1945), p. 175 (reference courtesy of Dr. Stanley Platek). Gordis adds: “One caveat is in order. One must be certain that the late usage is not merely a citation or an imitation of a Biblical passage.”

interpret biblical Hebrew, since Canaanite words and their meanings often survived into (and well beyond) the biblical period. This is a valid argument in principle, whatever one may think of the way and extent to which Dahood applies it; what interests us here, however, is another implication of the same facts: if post-biblical Hebrew preserves words and meanings from the pre-biblical period, then it is even more likely to have preserved them from the biblical period. If something so obvious as this needs to be stated, it is only because the comparative philological (i.e. horizontal) approach which is pre-eminent today assumes the opposite: that in the post-biblical period earlier words or meanings came to be forgotten. No scholar today would be so anachronistic as to deny that this is often true, but here again it is a matter of degree. The *NJV* implies that after two millennia the resources of post-biblical Hebrew still have not yielded all that they have to offer biblical exegesis.

That this is not simply a Jewish conceit is indicated by the advocacy of this position beyond Jewish circles. In his recent critique of current biblical philological studies, James Barr declares that “the study of biblical Hebrew cannot be deemed complete without a satisfactory follow-up into post-biblical Hebrew,” and calls for a dictionary of “the post-biblical interpretation of biblical Hebrew words . . . up to about A.D. 1300 or 1400. Such a work would be far from providing the ‘right’ interpretation of biblical words; but it would provide the setting within which linguistic meaning was transmitted and might thus help us to assess ways in which such meaning had been either preserved or distorted.”¹¹

extrabiblical aids

THE OTHER RESOURCE employed by the translators is “the recently discovered extra-biblical materials.” Their use is not discussed in the introduction, but the translators’ approach can be gathered from various notes. To some extent, translation is influenced by knowledge of ancient social practices. Thus at Gen. 40:19 *tala* is translated “impale” rather than “hang” partly because “it was ‘impaling’ rather than ‘hanging’ that constituted a common manner of execution in the ancient Near East.” The rendering of the old crux *biflilim* in Ex. 21:22 as “based on reckoning,” with a footnote “i.e., the age of the embryo,” goes back to a suggestion—overlooked in the *Notes*—made by Speiser partly on the basis of a parallel Hittite law. In making this suggestion Speiser offered a rationale for this use of ancient Near Eastern materials: “. . . these identical cases from the same general region and approximately contemporary societies may be presumed to have been sub-

11 *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (1968), p. 300.

ject to the same kind of treatment."¹² That this principle is not to be unduly generalized, however, is made clear in Orlinsky's comment at Ex. 21:17. There, in retracting the first edition's "repudiates" for *qallel*, which had been based on a Mesopotamian legal parallel, he holds that "it is not certain . . . that biblical law must conform to Mesopotamian law."

For translational purposes, by far the most important of recent discoveries are those in the field of the comparative philology, especially lexicography, of the Semitic languages. In some respects this is one of the volume's weaker aspects. The note on "God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:19), which cites an alleged Ugaritic *qn 'rs*, "creator of the earth," in support of *NJV*'s "creator" for *qoneh*, is simply confused. Ugaritic has *qnyt 'ilm*, "creatress of the gods," not *qn 'rs*; the latter—but in fuller form, *l qn 'rs*, "El, creator of the earth" (clearly a prototype of Gen. 14:19)—is found in Phoenician, Punic, and Palmyrene Aramaic inscriptions, and probably in Hittite transcription.

Only about thirty notes include reference to other ancient Near Eastern languages. This low percentage does not precisely reflect *NJV*'s actual debt to comparative philology. The comparative evidence in support of such new renderings as "pact" for *'eduth* (Ex. 16:34) and a "fugitive Aramean" for *'arami 'oved* (Deut. 26:5) is not mentioned. In the latter case the *Notes* mistakenly credit the new translation to Ehrlich who actually interprets the phrase as "Arameans who had separated themselves from their tribe." "Fugitive" is based on Akkadian *abatu* = "flee," suggested fifty years ago by D. D. Luckenbill,¹³ who pointed out the nearly identical phrase, "fugitive, runaway Arameans" in an inscription of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. For several of *NJV*'s new renderings, Speiser's commentary on Genesis (in *The Anchor Bible*) gives comparative philological support which the *Notes* omit.¹⁴

But it would be mistaken to conclude that this low percentage is due entirely to omissions. It seems rather that, all of the comparative philological expertise on the committee notwithstanding, its reliance on comparative philology was decidedly reserved by recent standards.¹⁵ The committee's stance was poles apart from the radical comparative approach represented by such scholars as Dahood and S. R. Driver.

¹² *JBL* 82, pp. 302f. Other contributions of Speiser to *NJV* renderings are missed at Ex. 14:20 and Num. 1:2 (see J. J. Finkelstein and M. Greenberg [eds.], *Oriental and Biblical Studies: Collected Writings of E. A. Speiser* [1967], pp. 106–112, 171–186).

¹³ *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 36 (1919–20), pp. 244f.

¹⁴ E.g., Gen. 22:6, 23:10 ("present"), 24:67; 30:8; 37:3; 40:16; 41:34; 42:10.

¹⁵ The committee as a whole adopted comparative philological solutions less often than Speiser. Compare their respective treatments of Gen. 4:7 and 6:3 (see *NJV*²), 15:2; 29:28; at 30:20 *NJV* prefers a different comparative solution to Speiser's.

The difference may be exemplified by various treatments of the injunction "When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden . . . 'azov ta'azov 'immo" (Ex. 23:5). Many have emended the text to read 'azor ta'azor, "you must help. . ." Driver and others translate the verb as "help" *without* emendation, citing an alleged Ethiopic 'azaba with that meaning. Although at least one Ethiopic lexicon considers this meaning uncertain, the interpretation finds support in Rashi's gloss *leshon ezra* and, as pointed out by A. Ahuvia, in *Sanhedrin* 97a where 'asur ve-'azuv (Deut. 32:36 and elsewhere) is interpreted as "supporter or helper." Cassuto, followed by Dahood and W. F. Albright, renders it "arrange" (i.e., the ass's load), citing South Arabic and Ugaritic cognates with similar meanings. The *NJV*, on the other hand, translates it as "you must . . . raise it with him," following, say the *Notes*, the parallel *haqem taqim 'immo* in Deut. 22:4 and Rashi's reference (but not his translation "help") to the root in 'asur ve-'azuv, and in Neh. 3:8,34, where the verb describes the restoration (*NJV* apparently takes it as "raising") of Jerusalem.

The very fact that none of these solutions is entirely unquestionable makes the verse a telling example for scholars' predilections. Here the translators' preference for solutions from within Hebrew is manifest. Given their implicit assumption that Hebrew is the surest guide to Hebrew, the likelihood is high that a solution will be found among, or at least stimulated by, the earlier Jewish exegetes.

This is not the place to inquire whether comparative philology was exploited as much as it might have been by the translation committee. The use of this resource in biblical studies has recently been subjected to a searching critique by Barr in the work quoted above. Barr acknowledges that comparative philology has made valid contributions but holds that it has been employed far too much, and often irresponsibly. It is too early to tell whether his strictures will have a moderating effect on the discipline, but it is clear (note the quotation above) that many of his views are akin to those of the *NJV* translators.

significance of the notes

THE VERSE-BY-VERSE NOTES open with exemplary treatment of Genesis 1:1-3. The now-famous "When God began to create . . ." is traced back to Rashi and justified by grammar and by comparison to other biblical and ancient Near Eastern creation stories; a brief statement of the philosophical implications of the new translation follows. "A wind from (rather than 'the spirit of') God" in Gen. 1:2 is given similarly careful treatment (this is shown to be the dominant view in Jewish exegesis), concluding with a history of its misinterpretation.

The meaning of *nefesh* and its relation to the idea of resurrection (a late development in Jewish thought) is discussed (2:7), as are textual problems in the Cain and Abel and *Akedah* narratives (4:7f.; 22:13).

God's promise to Abram that "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you" (rather than: "in thee . . . shall be blessed") is discussed at 12:3, where Rashi's distinction between the aggadic and the plain meaning is quoted.

At 49:1 *be'aharit ha-yamim* is shown to mean "in days to come" (rather than "in the end of days"), and hence to lack eschatological-messianic overtones.

The discussion of *ushmartem eth ha-matzoth*, "You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread" (Ex. 12:17) includes the exegetical origins of keeping watch over the *matzah* (*matzah shemurah*).

The "Sea of Reeds" (instead of "Red Sea") is explained at Ex. 15:4.

The meaning of the third commandment, "You shall not swear falsely . . ." (the interpretation preferred in the Jewish tradition, rather than "take in vain," Ex. 20:7) is discussed in a note which stands out for its diffidence (it concludes by quoting Ehrlich's confession of uncertainty) no less than for its thoroughness. Similarly thorough is the note on God's "face" (=His self, following Targum Onkelos, Rashi, Rashbam, ibn Ezra, Sforno) in Ex. 33:14.

The exegetical significance of such notes is readily apparent. Theologians will be especially interested in their implications for cosmology (Gen. 1:1-3: the chapter thus stresses the ordering rather than creation of matter), the destiny of the Jewish people (12:3 stresses their enviable future rather than a messianic role), eschatology (49:1), and immortality (2:7). Educators will find stimuli for classroom discussions on these topics, as well as examples of textual corruption and emendation (4:7f.; 22:13), *peshat* and *aggadah* (12:3), relation of the *halakhah* to the biblical text (Ex. 12:17), the meaning of the third commandment (perjury versus blasphemy, Ex. 20:7), and anthropomorphisms in the Bible (33:14). (It goes without saying that none of these texts can be used in isolation from others on the same subjects.)

second thoughts and changes

THE NOTES REGISTERED not only differences between the *OJV* and *NJV*, but between the first, second, and planned third editions of the latter. At times the final choice is substantially identical with *OJV*'s. Thus for the troublesome *la-petah hattath rovetz* (Gen. 4:7) the first edition's "sin is the demon^d at the door," with note^d citing "Akkadian *rabisu*, a type of demon," has been replaced with the second edition's "sin couches at the door,"

precisely *OJV*'s understanding. In several cases (cf. Gen. 1:26; 2:17; 3:5) where the first edition agrees with Speiser's *Genesis*, one can identify his absence from the committee after his death in 1965 as a factor in the change (actually implied in the *Notes* at Gen. 23:10 and Lev. 25:35). Some other changes are explained by factors which the translators "realized subsequently" (Gen. 1:4), or which were pointed out by critics (Num. 24:17 and p. 40).

The changes from edition to edition may be unsettling to some, especially when passages of such importance as Gen. 1:26 ("I shall make man in my image" versus "Let us make man in our image") are involved. But the translators' vacillation is an honest reflection of the nature of biblical scholarship. They did not offer us certainty where none was available. The translation itself frequently informs the reader that "Meaning of Heb. . . . uncertain" or "Heb. obscure." In explaining such notes, Orlinsky wrote elsewhere¹⁶ that "the reader is no longer denied the knowledge of the fact that the translation is not seldom sheer conjecture, based on learned guesswork in the context" (cf. the *Notes* at Gen. 4:7). Continuing this frank approach, the *Notes* abound in admissions of the "elusiveness" of the Hebrew, and the equal plausibility of more than one rendition is often conceded (cf. at Gen. 4:4; Ex. 20:7). Second thoughts even about the most recent renderings are expressed (Gen. 16:12).

critical reservations

THIS DIFFIDENCE encourages the reader to use the translation and the *Notes* critically. Accordingly, we may note the following:

— *Barech*, literally "bless," is often translated as "greet" or "bid farewell," or the like, which is justified in the *Notes* at Gen. 32:1,30; 47:7,10; 49:28. Yet Speiser, at Gen. 26:31,¹⁷ notes that "bless" is "often used in greeting or parting, since pertinent formulas would normally include an appeal to the good will of the deity . . .," in Gen. 24:59f. parting remarks do indeed involve a blessing. By not translating "blessed" *NJV* obscures the custom, a type of distortion which the *Notes* in fact eschew at Ex. 18:12. Underlying this issue is another question of translational philosophy raised by Moshe Greenberg in a review of the translation:¹⁸ whether such interpretive renderings ought not be left to the commentator.

— In one of its more celebrated new renderings, *NJV* has replaced the Decalogue's "jealous God" with "impassioned God" (Ex. 20:5 and Deut.

¹⁶ *JBL* 82, p. 260.

¹⁷ The remark appears misplaced since the word *barech* does not appear in this verse.

¹⁸ *Judaism* 12 (1963), p. 230.

5:9). The root in question, *qn'*, is frequently rendered "be impassioned, wrought up," or the like. The *Notes* cite Luzzatto's discussion at Ex. 20:5 (see also Rashi there and at Num. 11:29 and *Gittin* 7a). No doubt the root does mean this at times (e.g., Zech. 1:14, "I am exceedingly wrought up for Jerusalem and for Zion"), but "jealous" seems equally plausible, if not more so, in passages like Gen. 37:11 (Joseph's brothers' attitude on hearing his dreams [understood as presages] of ruling them), and in the Decalogue (God's attitude toward worship of other gods or images). These contexts involve one party's feelings when another is given the status or reverence due the first. In Num. 5:11-31, which deals with the ritual procedure for a husband who suspects his wife of infidelity, even *NJV* could not resist "(fit of) jealousy" and "(cases of) jealousy" for *qin'a/qena'oth* in vv. 14 and 29f. (cf. 15, 18, 25), but continued to deny this meaning to *qinne'*, the verbal form from the same root, translating it as "is wrought up" in the very same verses!

The *NJV* may be correct in many of these cases, but the point is far from proven. God's "jealousy" and the marital metaphor associated with it is an apt expression of the exclusive loyalty God demanded of Israel under the covenant. If anyone doubts that the Bible considers God jealous, let him consider Isa. 42:8: "I am the Lord, this is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols."

— Deut. 22:28 and Ex. 22:15 are a case where rabbinic exegesis might have been followed profitably. In these verses *NJV*, like its predecessors, takes 'orasa as a participle (as though = *me'orasa*). Thus, at Deut. 22:28: "If a man comes upon a virgin who is not engaged" (this despite the note at Ex. 22:15 that "it is not betrothal (or engagement) that was involved;" at Ex. 22:15 the same phrase is rendered "for whom the bride price has not been paid. . . .") But the verbal form is in the perfect tense and means properly "who had not previously been engaged." In a brief article on these verses¹⁹ David Weiss showed that apparently the only exegetes aware of this problem were the rabbis of the Talmud. Following the lead of Rabbi Jose the Galilean (*Mekhilta* at Ex. 22:15) he argued that "the condition of the laws is . . . that she never has been betrothed, that she has not previously had a fiancé who either died or forsook her. In that case the father of the girl would have already received his *mohar* [bride price], and would therefore not be entitled to a second reimbursement."

— On p. 39 it is asserted that "You shall love your neighbor [projected rendering: fellow] as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) refers to fellow Israelites only,

¹⁹ *JBL* 81 (1962), pp. 67-69.

since *rea'* "strictly speaking, refers to a fellow Israelite rather than to a neighbor (who may or may not be an Israelite)." Orlinsky has treated this subject at greater length elsewhere, in discussing the "nationalistic" rather than "internationalistic" outlook of early Israelite religion.²⁰ One may concede the point about our verse, not because *rea'* must mean "fellow national" (it does not in Ex. 11:2 where it refers to the Israelite slaves' Egyptian neighbors), but because the context of vv. 13–18 is national, and especially because vv. 33f. treat the "stranger" (*ger*, i.e., resident alien) separately: ". . . you shall love him as yourself." However the latter passage itself strongly mitigates the "nationalism" of v. 18! Orlinsky attempted to dispose of this mitigation by arguing that

*It is only because he resides among Israelites in the land of Israel that the non-Israelite receives this status; the same non-Israelite, were he a resident of [any other land] would have no such status, for the non-Israelite outside the land of Israel was outside the scope of the covenant between Israel and God.*²¹

Now it is one thing to stress the national scope of "love your fellow as yourself," but to read the text as if it intended specifically to exclude the foreigner seems arbitrary and little better than the Gospels' allegation "You have heard that they were told, 'You shall love your neighbor but hate your enemy'" (Matt. 5:34). Furthermore, the implication that one is to love the resident alien because he is within the scope of the covenant is not well-founded; Ex. 12:47f., in requiring that the resident alien who wishes to offer a Passover sacrifice must first be circumcised, assumes that resident aliens are not automatically parties to the covenant. Yehezkel Kaufmann, while agreeing that the scope of Lev. 19:18 is national, had this to say about our question:

The law of Leviticus 19:18 was given to and framed for Israelite society. It is not a theoretical maxim, but a practical law. It demands that every man show compassion toward those among whom he lives, and help them; and the Israelite lived among Israelites.

*However, there is no reason to suppose that the Bible intended to exclude other peoples from the basic law of love. That it embraced non-Israelites too is clear from the injunction to love the alien (Lev. 19:34; the *gēr* of the Bible has not necessarily adopted Israelite religion; note the ground of the law: "for you were *gērīm* [surely not proselytes!] in the land of Egypt"). Any alien who lived within Israelite society, then, came under the law of love.*²²

²⁰ *Judaism* 13 (1964), p. 22; H. T. Frank and W. L. Reed (eds.), *Translating the Old Testament* (1970), pp. 208–211.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

²² Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, p. 323, n. 10.

In short, *dibber ha-katuv ba-hove*: scripture mentions those cases which are likely to be of frequent occurrence; what is omitted is not thereby excluded.

— Inevitably, if unintentionally, the *Notes* call attention to the translators' inconsistencies. To cite only a single example, though we are told that *shavath* basically means "cease, stop," with "to rest" only a secondary meaning (Gen. 2:2), the derivative *shabbathon* is translated "day of rest" (Ex. 16:23, 31:15, etc.).

The most disappointing feature of the volume is its incompleteness. Despite the *Notes*' stated purpose, many of *NJV*'s important or interesting departures were not accounted for, including Gen. 1:20, "Let the waters bring forth swarms . . . , and birds that fly" (see *Hullin* 27b; *OJV*: "Let the waters swarm with swarms . . . , and let fowl fly . . .")—whereby the birds are produced by the water; Gen. 15:6, Abram "put his trust in the Lord" (*OJV*'s "believed in" has credal overtones absent in the text); Lev. 23:2 and elsewhere, "(sacred) occasion" (following Rashbam; *OJV*: "[holy] convocation"; but "convocation" is retained at Ex. 12:16!); and the "not by bread alone" passage quoted above.

Other innovations are noted with little explanation: Gen. 2:9, the "tree of knowledge of good and bad" (*OJV*'s "good and evil" has moral overtones denied by Orlinsky), and Lev. 25:36, "advance or accrued interest" for *neshekh ve-tarbit* (this interpretation was known already to R. Eliezer of Beaugency [twelfth century]; *OJV*: "interest or increase"). Even the new translations of the introduction to the Decalogue ("I the Lord am your God" rather than "I am the Lord your God," Ex. 20:2) and the *Shema* (" . . . the Lord is our God, the Lord alone," rather than " . . . the Lord our God, the Lord is one," Deut. 6:5) receive only brief treatment consisting mainly of reference to commentaries. When all this is contrasted with the relatively lengthy treatment accorded less significant passages such as Gen. 19:14–15 (over one-half a page) an impression of serious imbalance is created. This impression is heightened as the notes grow progressively sparser until Deuteronomy receives only thirteen pages to Genesis' ninety-six.

The volume abounds in assertions that *OJV* renderings were mechanical or failed to recognize idioms involved, but often no evidence is offered in support of alleged idioms. That *dabber al lev* (Gen. 24:45), for example, means "pray in the heart" could have been supported with a simple reference to I Sam. 1:13. At other times evidence is offered, but it is not the best available. The assertion at Gen. 24:58 and 29:5f. that biblical Hebrew answers questions affirmatively "by repeating the words in the question

"return this book"

assertively" would have been demonstrated most convincingly by further reference to Haggai 2:12f. where a negative answer, using *lo'*, is followed by a positive answer repeating the key word of the question (compare, however, Gen. 30:34 and the *Notes* there). Frequently the requisite evidence for the *NJV's* renderings can be located handily in the biblical lexicons, and for many points a reference to them would have sufficed.

These reservations and Orlinsky's own diffidence notwithstanding, the *Notes* defend many of the *NJV's* renderings with justifiable confidence. The superiority of the translation itself made this all but inevitable. Even where the *Notes'* account is superficial the reader's own consideration of the alternatives will often suffice to convince him of the *NJV's* correctness.

usefulness

THE ABOVE REMARKS will have indicated the *Notes'* usefulness to many different audiences: rabbis, theologians, adult study groups, professional biblists, and educators. The volume is written in a non-technical style which facilitates comprehension by lay as well as scholarly readers. Educators in particular should appreciate, and will hopefully transmit to their students, some of the intellectual qualities displayed in the volume. Its non-dogmatism is exemplary; and the care with which many passages are investigated helps demonstrate that the "Jewish position(s)" on issues of intellectual and spiritual significance can only be defined on the basis of careful investigation rather than by a personal feeling of what is right and good. Works of primarily linguistic concern such as the *Notes* are naturally only tools for the more important questions of theological, ethical and legal, literary, and historical exegesis. To the extent that the volume provides the solid translation on which alone such exegesis can be based, it will become a standard resource for this purpose, especially if a subsequent edition meets more consistently the high standard set by some of the notes singled out above.

Our own reservations should not detract from the volume's significant achievements. Dr. Orlinsky and his colleagues have sifted two millennia of exegetical tradition on the Torah and come up with countless fascinating and imaginative insights which had long been lost to biblical scholarship. The riches of Jewish exegetical literature are here displayed to the non-Hebrew-reading audience on an almost unprecedented scale. Not least, the *Notes* carry forward the translators' successful undertaking in illuminating once-obscure passages and making the reading of the English text of the Torah a pleasing and meaningful experience.