RIGHT / JUST / GOOD

FRENCH   *bien, juste, bon*
GERMAN   *gut, wohl, recht*

➤ *DROIT*, *GOOD/EVIL* [GUT], and FAIR, *JUSTICE*, LAW, PRUDENTIAL, TRUTH, UTILITY

The French translator of English terms for "good" is always in danger of being confronted by cases in which the contrast between "right" and "good" seems to be one between *bien* and *bien*. French does not make a sharp distinction between *le bien* and *le bon*, the imperative and the attractive, whereas English has two distinct series that correspond quite clearly to two aspects of the good. Moreover, where French clearly distinguishes between *le bon* and *le juste*, with the former emphasizing individual or collective interest and the latter universal moral law, English is less clear on the distinction between "right" and "just," since "rightness" can mean both *rectitudo* and *justitia*.

I. The Three Meanings of "Just"

First of all, "just" has a cognitive meaning, that of French *juste*, in the sense of "correct," "exact," or "true." Nonetheless, the English noun corresponding to French *justesse* is not "justice" but "rightness," whence the intervention of the Anglo-Saxon lexicon (*recht* / right, straight), which complicates matters. "Right" and "just" are, then, more or less interchangeable with each other and, except for a few nuances, with "good," which also has a cognitive sense (as in French, where a *bonne réponse* is *correcte* or *juste*). In this sense, the antonym of all three words—"good," "right," and "just"—is "wrong," in the sense of "erroneous."

The second sense of "just" is the moral sense, and here again, the distinction from "right" and "good" is imperceptible. The virtue of justice, Latin *rectitudo*, corresponds well to English "rightness," meaning "moral rectitude." "Right" is used chiefly to qualify "good" actions, while "good," like "just," is used more to describe the character of the virtuous agent. But this resemblance is misleading. "Right" has a much broader semantic field and comes to designate not only the conduct of the virtuous man, but also what is good, the moral criterion in general in contrast to the morally wrong. As for "good," it also has a nonmoral sense, the "good" in the sense of what satisfies appetites and natural desires, of happiness and well-being; and the passage from natural properties to moral properties has been, as we know, one of the thorniest debates in moral philosophy ever since Hume. It is at this point that the most serious translation problems arise, because there is no French equivalent for "right" (and especially no noun corresponding to "rightness") with this prescriptive sense. However, the meaning of this distinction as expressed by Henry Sidgwick, who was a disciple of both Kant and Mill, is entirely clear:

> We have regarded this term ["rightness"], and its equivalents in ordinary use, as implying the existence of a dictate or imperative of reason which prescribes certain actions either unconditionally, or with reference to some ulterior end. . . . It is, however, possible to take a view of virtuous action in which . . . the moral ideal [is] presented as attractive rather than imperative . . .

substituting the idea of "goodness" for that of "rightness" of conduct.

(*Methods of Ethics*, bk. 1, chap. 9, §1)

Finally, the semantic fields of "right" and "just" differ completely from one another because a third sense of "just" is "fair," "equitable," a meaning absent in the case of "right." On the other hand, "right" has the meaning of "a just claim or title" (Fr., *droit*), as in the expression "rights and duties." One of the most important debates in English-language moral and political philosophy concerns the relations between right and good (in French, between *le juste* and *le bien*), whence the exemplary difficulties raised by this quotation from Michael Sandel:

> The priority of the right means, first, that individual rights cannot be sacrificed for the sake of the general good (in this it opposes utilitarianism), and, second, that the principles of justice that specify these rights cannot be premised on any particular vision of the good life.

(*Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*)

This can be rendered in French as: "La priorité du juste veut dire, tout d'abord, que les droits individuels ne peuvent être sacrifiés au bien général (en ce sens elle s'oppose à l'utilitarisme) et, ensuite, que les principes de justice qui spécifient ces droits ne peuvent être déduits d'aucune vision particulière de la vie bonne."

II. The Relations between "Right" and "Good"

In the passage quoted above, Sidgwick contrasts the "attractive" meaning of the moral criterion, or "goodness," with its imperative meaning, or "rightness." This distinction seems quite clear. If "right" has to be translated into French as *bien*—for example, in the expression *le critère du bien et du mal*—and not by *juste* or *droit* or *correct*, and if its antonym is clearly "wrong" (Fr., *mal*), that is because it designates what must be done: it conveys the imperative, coercive, aspect of morality, the sense of duty and obligation. In contrast, "good" designates the attractive aspect of morality, what should be desired or wished, *le bon*. It is entirely inadequate to simply add, as one might be tempted to do in French, that "right" designates *le bien* (the "moral" good) and not *le bon*, because for Sidgwick and most other English philosophers, what French calls *bon* is just as moral as what French calls *bien*, but differently. On the other hand, such a distinction within morality is unacceptable if, like Kant, one thinks that "good" in the sense of "desirable" has no place in morality (see GUT):

> "Well-being" [*Wohl*] or "woe" [*Übel*] indicates only a relation to our condition of pleasantness or unpleasantness . . . . But good or evil always indicates a relation to the will so far as it is determined by the law or reason.

(*Critique of Practical Reason*)

It is because the English tradition has always refused to practice this exclusion that it draws the line of demarcation not between *le bien* and *le bon*, but between *le juste* and *le bon*. English "rightness" is thus paradoxically closer to the

German *Gut* in this opposition, and in a French translation of Sidgwick's text, it should be rendered by *le bien*. From this we can conclude that "goodness" and "rightness" can be rendered only by *le bien* in these two cases, which seems to be a good example of untranslatability.

Another way of posing the problem is to say not that "good" designates the attractive, the desirable, but that it must be distinguished from "right" because it leads to a series of questions that are of a different order and are just as constitutive of morality: those that bear on ends in themselves, on what has intrinsic value, independently of the actions and desires of the human subject. The confusion of these two senses of "good" is avoidable if we distinguish between the adjective "good," which has this sense of intrinsic value, and the noun "good," which retains the ordinary sense of French *bon*. This kind of confusion is responsible, according to G. E. Moore, for the "naturalist sophism" that can be attributed to the Utilitarians, who make moral ends dependent on human desires and appetites. On this point, Kant would agree with Moore. Here is how Moore proposes to articulate "right" and "good," which can be translated here only by *bon* and *bien*, respectively, contrary to what Utilitarianism prescribes:

> The word "right" is very commonly appropriated to actions which lead to the attainment of what is "good" . . . . But Bentham's fundamental principle is that the greatest happiness of all concerned is the right and proper end of human action. He applies the word "right" to the end, not only to the means . . . which is a naturalistic fallacy.
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> (*Principia ethica,* §14)

III. "The Priority of the Right over the Good"

The most troublesome case is that of the expression "the priority of the right over the good," which is untranslatable into French, and not solely because French lacks an equivalent for "right," but also because of English's lack of rigor. This expression has acquired two meanings that are related to each other but are still distinct and that have never been clearly explained because of the shifts we have already noted between "right" and "just." The first meaning concerns Rawls's liberal critique of the Utilitarians and their refusal to derive the right from the good. It contrasts "teleological and deontological doctrines" (see Box 1). The other meaning concerns the critique of liberalism made by the "communitarians," the question of the independence of the norms of justice from common values and the "common good," to adopt Habermas's vocabulary. The expression "the priority of the right over the good" thus comes to mean the priority of justice over the good, as in the remarks by Michael Sandel quoted above.

A first meaning is, as we have indicated, that of the priority of duty, of what must be done, over the good or happiness. Above all, it marks the priority of the question of freedom and moral autonomy over submission to the realization of a *summum bonum* given in advance by human nature. In this sense, the priority of *le bien* over the *le bon* is the fundamental thesis of an individualistic morality for which the capacity for individual justification through a social contract is the sole criterion of the validity of norms. This is a position parallel to the definition of the true by consensus and no longer by correspondence to a state of affairs external to judgment. But in what does this priority consist? Is it a logical priority—do we need the concept of "right" to constitute that of the "good"? That would presuppose that if this priority is not respected, there exist behaviors, organizations, etc. that are "good" without being morally right—which is absurd, whereas what is meant is that the imperative sense of the right has priority over the attractive sense of the good.

▪ See Box 1.

IV. The Relations between "Right" and "Just"

The other source of confusion comes from the fact that English seems to slide, without much rigor, from "right" toward "just," from *rectitudo* toward *justitia*. New ambiguities are then created that are sources of confusion but also enrichments. This kind of slide can make it possible to leave the context of the moral analysis of the criterion of good and evil and to operate on a broader playing field, that of distributive

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Teleological theories and deontological theories

Moral theories differ depending on how they articulate *right* and *good*. For teleological theories such as ancient moral theories of happiness (Epicureanism, Stoicism, etc.) or Utilitarianism, the right (the good in the sense of what must be done) is derived from the good that is supposed to be an end, a *telos* given in advance and independently of consciousness, such as pleasure or happiness, that one should seek to maximize. For deontological theories like those of Kant or Rawls, on the contrary, the right is posited independently of the good, since it is impossible to sacrifice the imperatives of duty to those of the individual or general welfare, and the autonomy of the right reflects the autonomy of the individual. However, we must qualify this analysis. According to deontological theories, the existence of a *telos*, a Sovereign Good, necessarily threatens individual freedom, whence this break between *good* and *right*. But this is certainly not the case. For Mill, for instance, it is clear that the right is a collective norm compatible with human freedom and happiness and that this independence of the one from the other is absurd. The *telos*, the good that is to be maximized, is itself dependent on an imperative: the duty to consider impartially the overall good of all the individuals concerned. The distinction between teleological and deontological theories is thus not found primarily in the priority, or not, of the right with respect to the good, as is often said, but rather in the break between moral imperatives and the hypothetical maxims of prudence and happiness, in the independence of the right—that is, of a certain idea of the person, of the person's freedom, in relation to the natural order.

justice, which includes politics and economics. That is the meaning of the well-known debate between liberals and communitarians, that is, between John Rawls, on the one hand, and Taylor, Sandel, and MacIntyre on the other. Contemporary liberal doctrine affirms, with Rawls, the independence of the principles of distributive justice with regard to the conceptions of a society's good. That is the meaning of the remarks by Michael Sandel quoted above.

What is demanded by the communitarian critique of the priority of the right over the good and of procedural ethics, as they are found in both Utilitarianism and Rawlsian theory, is a certain return to Aristotle against Kant, the possibility of restoring a substantial historical and social content to "right" by deriving it from the traditions, the conceptions of the good of a community, and no longer solely from the individual interest. Because of this slide from "right" to "just," the French reader may well not really perceive what is at stake here. The essential point at issue concerns a culturalist and historicist critique of procedural liberalism. The difference between the two senses of *bien* that we have seen above—senses that are conflated in French, but clearly distinguished in English—is that "good" refers to particular conceptions of individual or communal good. But are they good in a universal way, that is, "right" for humanity as a whole? That is why in reality the debate is about universalist justice and local justice, about what is good for me and my group, or about what might constitute a "human right." That is exactly what Rousseau means when he says that "the General Will is always right [*droite*], but it is not always good [*bonne*]" (*Du contrat social*, 2.3). He opposes *le droit* and *le bon*, which would be the best way to translate the conflict between the particularity and self-interest of the individual or the group, on the one hand, and the universality of the rule or the moral criterion, on the other.

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ROMANTIC

FRENCH   *romantique*
GERMAN   *romantisch*

➤ BAROQUE, CLASSIC, DESCRIPTION, DICHTUNG, ERZÄHLEN, *IMAGINATION*, LOVE, MANIERA, MIMÊSIS, NEUZEIT, PERFECTIBILITY

The term "romantic" first appeared in England about 1650; in the form *romantisch* it first established itself in German around 1700 and came into wide use after 1760. *Romantique* entered French in 1776 and was soon adopted by Rousseau. The word owes its morphological homogeneity to a common Latin root. The terms "romantic"/*romantisch*/*romantique* all come from the old French *roman* (or *romanz*), which designated both a particular literary genre and a particular linguistic mode: a verse narrative in a Romance language, that is, in the vernacular, as opposed to Latin. But this homogeneity stops at the formal level. Each passage into a new language gave rise to important shifts in meaning. In its initial English form the term had an essentially aesthetic meaning. "Romantic" is very close to French *romanesque* or *pittoresque* and thereby involves a particular intepretation of the principle of *mimêsis*. In the course of its second wave of diffusion in late eighteenth-century Germany, it added a new historical and critical meaning. Not only is German *Romantisch* related to *romanhaft* and *malerisch*, but it also designated a cultural era, the Middle Ages and Renaissance, a specific intellectual exercise (*romantisieren*), and soon a literary school (*Romantik*). After these multiple European peregrinations the word seemed oddly elusive, which may explain why French writers of the early nineteenth century were reluctant to adopt it.

I. As in a Romance

From the medieval *roman courtois* and *roman de chevalerie*, nourished by the Arthurian legend, down to Honoré d'Urfé's pastoral romance *L'Astrée* (1607–24), the French word *roman* designated a fantastic genre close to the fable. From this semantic matrix the English word "romantic," which appeared about 1650, inherited its first meaning: *romanesque*, that is, invented, imaginary, fictive. Although in England the word rather quickly lost its explicit connection with the world of the *romanesque*, the German term *romantisch* retained it for a long time.

Already present during the first wave of the word's introduction into German, which was carried out especially from Switzerland by J. J. Bodmer and J. J. Breitinger, the synonymous doublet *romantisch/romanhaft* continued to be used until the end of the eighteenth century. C. M. Wieland, who played a central role in the spread of the term *romanhaft*, regularly used the two terms interchangeably. Connected with the fabulous genre of the romance, the word also reflects the latter's aleatory popularity. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when the romance was attacked for its excessive implausibility, the terms "romantic"/*romantisch* usually meant "chimerical, false, fabricated," a negative connotation that disappeared in the course of the eighteenth century with the rehabilitation of new novelistic forms.

Having thus issued from a strictly literary sphere, the word "romantic" was nonetheless soon applied metaphorically to other kinds of experience: the perception of a landscape presented as real, the expression of an intimate feeling (a romantic land, romantic love), all uses that, by