

Born(e) Free: The Ten Commandments in Translation

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Abstract

In “Signature Event Context,” Jacques Derrida writes, “Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written . . . as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion.” This “citational play,” as Derrida might have called it, virtually renders the immediacy and plenitude of meaning a mere illusion. This essay, with special reference to the Ten Commandments in the Bible, aims to appropriate Derrida by arguing that the Ten Commandments, be it in spoken form or written, in its English “original” or Chinese translation and/or transcription, is subject to the play of “general citationality/iterability”—that is, a “force of rupture” that constantly deterritorializes any given context and defies any claim of self-presence of meaning. In short, the meaning of the Ten Commandments is always already open, and any attempted translation of the Ten Commandments will thus become an activity that shows both the possibility **and** the impossibility of translation per se.

Keywords: Derrida, citationality, phonocentrism, the Ten Commandments, Translation

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摘 要

在〈簽名 事件 語境〉一文中，德希達寫道：「任何符號，不論是語言的或非語言的，口語的或書寫的——也不論其組成的大小，都可以放置在引號之間被援引；如此，符號就可以從任何特定語境中脫離，並且以絕對無法飽和的方式，無窮盡地產生新的語境。」這個德希達或許會稱之為「括引活動」的現象，使得任何意義皆無法達成立即且圓滿的全面體現。本篇論文以《聖經》「十誡」為例，挪用德希達的看法，意圖說明「十誡」——無論是以口語的或文字書寫的形式，也不論是在其英文「原文」或中文譯文／音譯裏——持續受制於一種「普遍的重覆／括引性」，因此其意義早已在「意譯」之中不斷開放。任何企圖對十誡所做的翻譯都會遭受自身之內「剝離的力量」的制約，因而不停地在可譯與不可譯的雙重束縛之中產生意義的變化。

關鍵詞：德希達、括引性、語音中心主義、十誡、翻譯

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For the letter killeth . . .

II Corinthians 3: 6

Thou shalt not kill.

Exodus 20: 13

I. In the Beginning: A Play as the Pre-face¹

(in the mountain of God, Ho'reb)

Moses: Ni shi shei?

God: Wo shi shei? Wo shi wo. Wo shi shen.

Moses: (Shei shi shen. Shen shi shei.)

God: Shei shi shen? Wo shi shen! Shen shi shei? Shen shi wo! Wo shi wo.

Shen shi shen.

Moses: . . .

(on the top of Mount Si'nai)

God: Ni men bu ke sha ren.

Moses: "Ni men bu ke sha ren."

God: Shi "ni men" bu ke sha ren, bu shi "wo men" bu ke sha ren.

Moses: (Shi shen cai ke sha ren. Wo men bu ke sha ren.)

God: . . .

(at the foot of Mount Si'nai)

Israelites: Shen shuo le shen me?

Moses: Shen mei shuo "shen me." Shen shuo "ni men bu ke sha ren."

Israelites: Shen mei shuo shen me?! Shen shuo wo men bu ke sha ren?!

¹ In the light of the no nonsense or seriousness with which an academic essay is supposed to be characterized, this essay seems at first glance rather "frivolous," for it falsely begins with a fictitious play of absurdity which violates the norms of academic writing. However, as the essay will demonstrate later, this "faux départ" is not unwarranted because on the one hand it foreshadows the crux of the problem as regards the relationship between speaking and writing and on the other hand it arouses in us a sense of wonder (i.e., *thauma*) by raising a thorny question: why can falsity and fiction still bring about something that is significant enough for no-nonsense discussion? As Barbara Johnson contends that a beginning is always already an activity of difference (1981: xi), the apparently false beginning will nevertheless lead on to its "expectedly unexpected" ending.

Moses: Shen mei shuo “wo men bu ke sha ren.” Shen shuo “ni men bu ke sha ren.”

Israelites: Shen shuo ta men ke sha ren?

Moses: Shen mei shuo ta men ke sha ren. Shen shuo wo men bu ke sha ren.

Israelites: Shen shuo ta men bu ke sha ren?

Moses: Shen mei shuo “ta men bu ke sha ren.” Shen shuo “ni men bu ke sha ren.”

Israelites: Shen shuo ta men ke sha ren?

Moses: Shen mei shuo ta men ke sha ren! Shen mei sha ren!

Israelites: Shei sha ren le?

Moses: Shei mei sha ren! Shen mei sha ren!

Israelites: Shei mei sha ren? Wo men mei sha ren! Shei shuo shen sha ren le?

Moses: Shei mei shuo “shen sha ren le”? Shen mei shuo shei sha ren le!

Israelites: Shen shuo le shen me?

Moses: Shen mei shuo “shen me”?! Shen shuo “ni men bu ke sha ren”?!

Israelites: Wo men mei sha ren. Shen shuo wo men bu ke sha ren.

Moses: Shen mei shuo “wo men bu ke sha ren”?! Shen shuo “ni men bu ke sha ren”?! “Ni men bu ke sha ren”?! Shi “ni men bu ke sha ren”?!

Israelites: Shen me? Shen me? Wo men bu ke sha ren? Moses ke sha ren?

(a voice from Mount Si'nai)

God: Shen me dou bai shuo le!

Israelites: Shei? Shei shuo “shen me dou bai shuo le”?!

Moses: O! Shen ya!!

Israelites: Shen me?! Shen shuo “shen me dou bai shuo le”?!

God: Shei shuo bai shuo le?!

(Logos appearing)

Logos: . . .

II. Speaking and Writing: Theoretical Foreground

The preceding “play,” despite its apparent absurdity that might perplex a “normal” reader, serves two purposes, or better yet, suggests some two-pronged “purposiveness”: first, to invent a parody of a well-known “story” in the Bible so as to defamiliarize our norm-al reading of it, and second, to incite an “accident,” namely, an incident or event of word play in which the difference between speaking and writing might be incarnated to the extent that its ever

elusive trace might somehow be temporarily present and most importantly, its specter effects prolonged. In other words, this play, placed at the beginning of a seemingly theoretical essay that deals with Derridean *différance*, is meant to be a *faux départ* that functions to overturn the very concept of origin. Indeed, how is it possible that a non-origin—that is, ironically, a point of departure in this essay, a fictitious drama of falsehood that aims to pass for the original biblical story—gives rise to a series of quasi- or even pseudo-theological discussions of the “true” meaning of (the sixth of) the Ten Commandments?

As seen, the preceding play is characterized by the prolific use of direct and indirect quotations, which not only creates some comic effects of parody that spoil the supposed “seriousness” of the artistic play but also turns the play into a text that defies saturation of meaning. This interplay of direct and indirect quotations which renders the play into a text of multiple meanings demonstrates what Jacques Derrida might have called the “citational play” in his “Signature Event Context”: “Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written . . . as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion” (1982: 320; 1988: 12).² For Derrida, the citational play debunks the myth of phonocentrism which prevails in all phonetic-alphabetic writing systems. Derrida argues that the preference of speaking over writing in phonocentrism is rooted in a prejudice against writing as a secondary, derivative “front” of voice that is capable of expressing the living presence of a speaker. To help elucidate Derrida’s point, Christopher Norris writes, “In speaking one is able to experience (supposedly) an intimate link between sound and sense, and inward and immediate realization of meaning which yields itself without reserve to perfect, transparent understanding. Writing, on the contrary, destroys this ideal of self-presence” (28). This phonocentric bias, Derrida contends, can be traced back to Aristotle:

If, for Aristotle, for example, “spoken words (*te en tē phonē*) are the

² This quotation brings forth the citationality of/in every semiotic sign. The quotation itself refers to two sources which are selfsame yet gleaned from different contexts and strictly speaking, different time frames. However, the two English sources are actually translation of their French origin, which is from *Marges de la Philosophie* by Derrida in 1972, and as such they are paradoxically true and false reference at the same time. In one sense, the discrepancy between source and origin duly reflects the fact that no network of reference is ever closed, and that the origin is always open to the play of difference.

symbols of mental experience (*pathēmata tes psychēs*) and written words are the symbols of spoken words” (*De interpretations*, 1, 16a 3), it is because the voice, producers of the first symbols, has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the mind. Producer of the first signifier, it is not just a simple signifier among others. It signifies “mental experience” which themselves reflect or mirror things by natural resemblance. (1974: 11)³

What Aristotle argues here is clearly in accord with the spirit of phonocentrism that Derrida attempts to anathematize. For Aristotle, Derrida explains, mental experiences are directly expressed through primary symbols (*semeia prōtos*) that are capable of fully manifesting things of which experiences are the images. Thus, there exists a natural signification that can safeguard the flux of meaning from any loss; or, put differently, there seems to exist a kind of perfect, transparent translation taking place between things and experiences as well as between experiences and speaking. In brief, what Aristotle has in mind with regard to the relationship between speaking and writing is, in Derrida’s term, an “original and essential link” (11) that guarantees the plenitude of logos to be immediately present in phone.

Derrida calls into question this apparent plenitude and immediacy in signification, and he throws doubt on this transparency in translation. As Derrida criticizes it, to favor speaking instead of writing is tantamount to the assertion that a speaker’s intended meaning, driven by and in its pursuit of what Kathleen Davis has called “the *telos* of plenitude” (53), becomes self-identical with voice. Speaking, therefore, becomes logos incarnated, and such incarnation allows for no difference of/in meaning. In his seminal article “Différance,” Derrida quotes Saussure by iterating that “in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms” (1982: 10-11; 1973: 140). Likewise, in

³ The quotation here is a typical case of what can be called “citation of citation.” Aristotle is directly quoted by Derrida, who in turn is directly quoted by the author of this essay, and yet in this play of citation, Aristotle is virtually quoted indirectly. Despite the fact that the name, Aristotle, appears to be innocently presented, the intentions behind Derrida and the author substantially vary. Simply put, Derrida quotes Aristotle in order to put forth his critique of the phonocentric bias, whereas the author quotes Derrida quoting Aristotle only to side with Derrida.

Positions, Derrida points out that “whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present” (1981: 26). Again, Derrida’s stance on speaking and writing seems clear: speaking does not offer an intuitive, total, and immediate access to the thoughts, i.e., the “mental experiences,” that occasion its articulation, and writing, far from being something that obstructs the so-called “natural” priority of speaking, is never “a deceiving shadow which falls between intent and meaning, between utterance and understanding” (Norris 28). By the same token, if writing fails to attain a state of self-sufficient intelligibility due to its derivation from speaking, speaking is, nonetheless, always already adulterated with/in difference and thus cannot manifest the presence of the self-same (*propre*) within speech. Simply put, the plenitude of meaning in speaking is imaginary; there is no pure communication between speaking and nature, and there are always traces of non-present meaning that constantly elude any utterance.

It should be clear by now that Derrida’s attack of phonocentrism is tethered to his disapproval of “metaphysics of presence.” Derrida contends that if difference is inscribed in language, then language itself, be it in the form of grapheme or phoneme, is always subject to the free play of differences. Meaning, hence, is the effect of trace, or, more precisely, trace of trace, which never stops functioning. For Derrida, meaning is not something stationed in a semiotic sign, only to be ex-tracted in whole from one sign and then put in another in full presence without any semantic loss. On the contrary, residues of meaning always take place, and the dissemination of meaning, which constantly defers and differs the presence of meaning, keeps “going” (*aller*) in infinitum, and mean-ing, which by nature is a “gerund” (Latin, “*gerere*”: “to bear,” “to carry on”), will never end in a full stop.

The vagary nature of a semiotic sign merits our attention for it reminds us of the impossibility of absolute knowledge as well as the possibility of indeterminacy.⁴ As Derrida sees it, if a linguistic sign, being incorporeal

⁴ What is being argued here is not the same as arguing for semantic relativism or stark skepticism of the possibility of meaning, both of which in my opinion seem to evade the question of the responsibility for the quest of truth. Dirk Delabastica opposes what he has called the “unregulated semantic anarchy” (1997: 7), and Derrida emphasizes forcefully that he does not advocate for “complete freeplay or undecidability” (1988: 115). Both men aptly remind us of the danger of extremism as well as the necessity for the participation of humans in pursuing the truth of meaning.

without positive substance and distinguishing from each other with/in diacritical difference, cannot attain to a state of full presence of meaning and is always inscribed in a network of differential traces, what the sign signifies, then, is an endless displacement of meaning. In terms of Saussurean signifier and signified, Derrida actually raises the crucial question of a structural gap that renders impossible the seamlessness between a signifier and its corresponding signified. In other words, in the general economy of meaning, each instance of meaning production, through the free play of signification characterized by endless supplementarity which cancels out semantic reduction, is bound up with “loss and gain” of meaning which is impossible to predict. When it comes to the relationship between speaking and writing, the afore-mentioned “loss and gain”—that is, in a deconstructive term, the *différance* temporarily embodied in a graphic and/or phonetic form—urges us to be wary of the problem of human communication in and through linguistic signs. In Derrida’s view, there is always “the possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication” (1988: 12). And in specific reference to the relationship between speaking and writing and the contextualized meaning which writing engenders, Derrida calls attention to the fact that writing can be “cut-off, at a certain point, from its ‘original’ desire-to-say-what-one-means (*vouloir-dire*) and from its participation in a saturable and constraining context” (1988: 12). Both passages, it is plausible to say, are reminiscent of Derrida’s previous critique of some original, transcendental meaning and his stance toward citational play. If any communication is to take place between a sender and a receiver, Derrida seems to argue, the linguistic signs it depends on must be “iterable”—that is, becoming a citational doubling (*doublure*)—and thereby giving rise to possible and unpredictable change of meaning.

In a nutshell, Derrida’s deconstructive program in general and his proposition on speaking and writing in particular have exerted considerable influence on our study of “the meaning of meaning.”⁵ We learn from Derrida that all linguistic signs, rather than possessing pure singularity, are subject to

⁵ Although “the meaning of meaning” is a common noun phrase here, putting it in quotation marks somehow gives it a chance to become a proper noun, which is reminiscent of *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards.

general iterability or general citationality which, in Derrida's words, "puts down roots in the unity of a context and immediately opens this nonsaturable context onto a recontextualization" (1992: 63). Meaning is constantly in flux, and any claim made by the sender or the receiver that the comprehension of the totality of meaning is attainable is, to say the least, questionable. The "horizon of the unity of meaning" (1988: 14) is but an ideal semantic realm which dissolves with the turn of *différance*, the play of trace, and the act of dissemination.

For contemporary translation studies, Derrida's refusal of meaning as presence and his emphasis on meaning as the effect of language point to one important thing, that is: translation is a performative act. In translation, where a special sort of citational play takes place, a text differs from itself through the "task" of the translator (to appropriate Walter Benjamin's term) who must always engage in what Derrida has called the "regulated translation." This is, of course, not to imply that the translator's intention can dictate, like some determinate cause, in the meaning-making process. Instead, a performative translation, albeit serious or frivolous, requires that the translator be sensitive to the danger of total determination of meaning and at the same time be open to all possible "different connotations, inflections, and emotional or affective values" (Derrida 1972/1982: 322) embedded in language, spoken and written alike. Hence, a performative translator who takes whole responsibility of his/her translation must concede to the fact that a source text is never the "*arche*" of meaning, nor is a target text its "*telos*," and the translated meaning concerned will never consummate in some sort of semantic "*entelechy*." In addition, no text can be confined with its meaning fully saturated, and the "breaking force" (*force de rupture*) of language is always at work to prompt meaning to break away from itself, transforming itself in the movement of iterability and opening itself to the forever play of difference.

III. The Ten Commandments: A Story of Speaking and Writing

And I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written.

Exodus 24: 12

And he gave unto Moses . . . two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.

Exodus 31: 18

And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writings of God, graven upon the tables.

Exodus 32: 16

Hew the two tables of stone unto the first; and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest.

Exodus 34: 1

And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

Exodus 34: 28

For those who are familiar with the Bible, the “inaugural” (à la Derrida) play placed at the beginning of this essay obviously derives from the event in *Exodus* from the Old Testament, in which God passed, in His own words, the Ten Commandments to Moses and asked him to relay them to the Israel people. However, when we peruse the “original” English passage, we might be surprised at the fact that God seemed to prefer to give His commandments to the Israelites through the mouth of Moses rather than directly address them in person. There is no doubt that God was capable of giving a direct order, but why did God shun it? While this puzzling decision by God intrigues us, we are further bewildered by the irony that Moses, who could only hear God’s words, did not actually see God face to face.⁶ God was invisible and yet God’s voice was audible—what an interesting occasion for us to ponder the problem of the relationship between speaking and writing as well as between absence and presence! It is worthwhile to notice that whereas a voice is

⁶ “Thou shalt not see my face, for thou who see wilt not live.” (Exodus 33: 32)

supposed to suggest the presence of a speaker, the presence of a speaker does not necessarily entail speaking. In contrast, the absence of a speaker (supposedly) presupposes silence, yet the presence of a voice may not necessarily suggest there is a speaker present in person. To compound the problem, we may even raise the following questions: First, speaking is a temporary act while the presence of a speaker is spatial. How do we deal with this time-space fusion? Second, any voice is subject to imitation. How, then, can one be certain that a voice originates from its authentic speaker instead of an imposter? Third, a voice may assume to be an echo, or even an echo of an echo. In the case of an invisible speaker, how can one know for sure where the voice is from and whom it is directed at? Fourth, it is possible that a voice is technically separate from its articulator, as in the case of a recording. Does this not suggest that presence and absence can be understood otherwise? Fifth, invisibility does not necessarily translate as absence, nor does presence visibility. By the same token, inaudibility does not necessarily invoke stark silence, and not every sound/voice is readily audible. How, accordingly, can one tell exactly when and whether real presence and absence take place? Evidently, these questions cannot be taken lightly, for they not only obliquely point to the problem with/in phonocentrism and the metaphysics of presence which Derrida has called attention to, but they pose “resistance” (à la Paul de Man) to our “normal” way of reading the “fabulous” story of the Ten Commandments.

The fact that God never directly spoke to the Israelites (except Moses and Aaron) and He totally relied on Moses as a kind of spokesman to hand down the Ten Commandments is rather intriguing. In fact, to speak on behalf of God seems, in a subtle sense, to be the “task” of Moses as a translator of God as well as His words. To some extent, that may explain why the sentence, “And the Lord spake unto Moses” (which is commonly followed by Moses’ “reiteration” of what God has said) abounds in the scripture of *Exodus*. While Moses and occasionally Aaron may appear to be the fortunate ones to be able to hear God’s words, the general Israelites seem ambivalent about this privilege. “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (*Exodus* 19: 8) and “All the words which the Lord hath said we will do” (*Exodus* 2: 3) are conspicuous, and yet these words are in direct conflict with “And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (*Exodus* 20: 20), which, ironically, is in accordance with “And he said,

Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (*Exodus* 23: 30). A paradox seems to exist here: God’s words must be listened to, yet not be heard directly. In the light of deconstruction, such paradox may be construed as an *aporia*—that is, an unpassable path, a way that is a no-way or vice versa—which Derrida often employs to “bore within” any claim of truth that turns against itself. It seems clear, therefore, that God is never present in person and He is not to be seen for fear of death, and that only God’s words appear to “represent” God per se and only the few “chosen of the chosen” people of Israelites can hear the holy voice/words directly. God’s words thus become *esoterica* which, beyond the comprehension of ordinary people, is accessible only to some privileged souls. However, privilege, which comes from Latin *privus*: private and *lex*: law, implies limitation, for a law by nature must be universal in its applicability. In terms of God’s law, such as the Ten Commandments that are meant to apply to all peoples, common knowledge of God’s words is indispensable. God cannot be God of Moses alone and God’s law must be observed by all. Thereby it suffices to say that privilege must translate as/into responsibility, namely, an unforsakable duty, or, in Derrida’s term, an insolvent “debt” to God that needs to be repaid and yet can never be paid off. In order to be a responsible spokesman of God, Moses, the privileged one, must “translate”—not just “carry over, across, or on,” but in all possible senses—God’s words. From this it follows that only by and through translation can God be understood and His words, i.e., His law, observed.

The story of *Exodus* is, indeed, full of turns and twists. God spoke to Moses directly to establish the Ten Commandments, yet the Israelites received the Ten Commandments through Moses’ reiteration of God’s law. The transition from chapter 19 to chapter 20 in *Exodus* exemplifies the significance of reiteration in which the play of iterability, as we shall discuss later, renders the (supposed) singularity of meaning of the Ten Commandments into plurality. Interestingly, chapter 19 begins with the Israelites coming to the wilderness of Si’nai, three months after they left Egypt. The entire chapter is supposed to be about how Moses went up to Mount Si’nai to receive the Ten Commandments from God. Nevertheless, not a single word is inked to describe the expected “*rendez-vous*” (literally, in French, “to present yourself”) between God and Moses concerning the content of the Ten Commandments. Instead, Moses was shown to be

completely silent in the relevant scripture, and he said nothing about the commandments except reiterating God's other words to the Israelites and "return(ing) the words of the (Israel) people unto the Lord" (19: 8). Several relevant passages are worth quoting here: "Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel" (3); "These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (6); "And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord" (9). Accordingly, Moses, serving both as the spokesman of God and as the liaison of the Israelites, did function as a sort of translator whose linguistic "sorties" (again, in a Derridean sense) were constantly at work to bring about mutual understanding between God and the Israel people. Chapter 19 ends with "So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them," an ambiguous sentence only to be followed by/supplemented with the beginning of chapter 20, where the Ten Commandments, through Moses' reiteration—"And God spake all these words, saying . . ."—were revealed. Significantly enough, between chapter 19 and chapter 20, there is a void, a vacuum, an abyss, a hiatus of some sort, which functions as "a bottomless chessboard" of meaning that provides room for any semantic possibility and difference to come into being and to come to play.

We have good reasons to suspect that the story recorded in chapters 19 and 20 might be different from the supposedly "same" story that the subsequent chapters, for instance, chapters 24, 31, 32, and 34, depict. For one obvious reason, in chapters 19 and 20 no ink has been spilled on the two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments are supposed to be inscribed. Does this suggest that the earlier chapters in *Exodus* are the legacy of the oral tradition that characterizes the ancient (hi)story of the Bible? Or, did the Israel people find it more convincing if they could invent a written (hi)story about the (be)coming of the Ten Commandments? The questions are yet to be answered. But in relation to this essay, the question leads to one puzzle: If Moses could successfully serve as a spokesman, a translator, a liaison, a go-between—all of which are related to the theme of *fors da* that Derrida proposes—for God and the Israel people, why would there be a need for the two tablets of stone? Does God prefer writing over speaking? Why should God's spoken words be turned into written words to make effective the Ten Commandments? Why can't God "do things with words" as if He is performing an Austinian speech act? Does God's word(s), apparently as

self-differentiating within itself as *logos* divided into *logoi*, diverge in two directions? For an omnipotent God, “impossible is nothing.” God can give His commandments in speaking, so can He in writing. Yet the paradox is that God, omnipotent as He is, can “choose” to make Himself impotent so much so that He can make neither speaking nor writing work properly. Is it not true that God always has a cause for everything? The answer to the question of the relationship between and the solution to the problems with speaking and writing remain open.

In sharp contrast with the absence of writing about the two tables of stone in chapters 19 and 20 is the vivid description of Moses’ rendezvous with God recorded in the later chapters in *Exodus*. Let’s begin with an incident in 30: 19, in which “Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.” What a profane act by Moses! “The tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables” (32: 16). However, just when one might be shocked at Moses’ blasphemy and worried about the ill fate that would befall him, the “table” is turned because in 34: 1 Moses was given a chance to retribute his act. “Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest.” These are amazing new tables of stone that are like, yet not the same as, the first ones, and God promises to write, once again, the “same”(?) words that He had written before. More baffling is the fact that Moses was ordered by God to bring the two new tables up to the top of mount Si’nai the next day. One cannot help wondering why Moses couldn’t hew the tables right on the spot so that God could, *hic et nunc*, complete His writing of the Ten Commandments as He did before. Why did God defer His writing? Why didn’t He simply give an oral version of the Ten Commandments? And why couldn’t God just turn His words into writing with His omnipotence? Not all questions have answers, yet all answers seem provisional. A passage in 34: 27 and a relevant passage in 34: 28 lead us further into the labyrinth of this fabulous biblical story. As ordered, Moses brought the two newly-hewn tables of stone up to Mount Si’nai, and when he met with God, something extraordinary happened. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel” (34: 27). “And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the

tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (34: 28). The first quotation clearly shows that it was Moses, not God, who would write the words of the Ten Commandments, but the second quotation, especially the third sentence that begins with “And he,” is ambiguous in terms of what the subject refers to. Grammatically speaking, the third “he” seems to designate Moses himself, a logical reading that is quite in tune with the first quotation. Yet in the Chinese version of this passage, the “he,” translated as Yehehua (Jehova) in Chinese transcription, undoubtedly refers to God. Evidently, the Chinese translator, for theological consideration, harbors a very different view of the authorship of the Ten Commandments. Similarly, in the third sentence of the second quotation, while “the words of the covenant” is supposed to function as an appositive that refers to “the ten commandments,” they both might be taken as two separate objects of the verb “wrote.” Consequently, the subject “he,” no matter who it refers to, might have written two different things on two different tables of stone. Furthermore, although both *Exodus* 20: 3-17 and *Exodus* 34: 1-28 cluster around the content of the Ten Commandments, they differ from each other in many details even to the extent that there seem to exist two different commandments for two different peoples. All in all, it appears that there are two sets of tables of stone, that the inscriptions on these tables differ, and that the meaning of the Ten Commandments is “lost in translation.”

All the questions raised in the above discussion may not be readily answered and the thorny problems may yet be solved. One thing, however, seems relatively clear, and that is God, as described in the Bible, intends to have the Ten Commandments passed down in writing instead of through oral transmission. That explains in part why the creation and also the re-creation of the two tables of stone took up much space in *Exodus*, and the “same” story about the Ten Commandments was like a “twice-told” tale in which differences exist. In this, it is plausible to say, runs the theme of iterability and the play of citational play because the self-sameness of this biblical story inevitably engages itself in a constant process of self-differentiation. Although both speaking and writing involve difference that turns language against itself, the transition from God’s speaking to God’s writing—if we may put aside the problem of who actually did the writing on the two tables of stone—merits special attention. In a sense, the preference of writing over speaking here shows a prejudice against phonocentrism, yet it also betrays a dire hunger for

what we may call graphocentrism—that is, simply put, a desire for permanence and a fear of perdition. God’s words must endure and endure without a loss. By extension, if the Ten Commandments are to be observed forever, the law must remain the same. The Heraclitean play of *hen diapheron heautoi*, which Derrida construes as one differing from itself—on the surface, now, at this moment, as its presences—is out of question (Genzler 159). But the question is: how can any law practically exist at all without specific applicability to different cases? A law presupposes interpretation, and interpretation always already involves the participation of interpreters who must oftentimes make difficult decision for or against certain hermeneutic positions. As a written law, the Ten Commandments is not exempt from interpretation, both oral and written, which in turn reflects the very nature of law, namely, its being doubly bound up with time and space. A product of time and space, a law by nature is historical. If a law simply exists in writing without being practiced, then “a law is a law” becomes not only tautological but it foreshadows the death of the law. On the contrary, if a law only exists through oral tradition instead of surviving tangibly in some written form, interpretation of a law might fall victim to legal *rhetorica*. Being historical, a law must engender historical effects by which the law itself is applicable in infinitum to all.

As we have seen, a law, such as the Ten Commandments, presupposes interpretation in order to render the law effective, which, in a subtle sense, means that the interpretation of the law outweighs the creation of it. A law without interpretation is merely an assemblage of dead words. By analogy, God’s words require interpretation or, in the context of this essay, translation. Only through interpretation and/or translation can God’s words have historical significance, for God’s words cannot exist as such, for Himself and/or for “the time being,” but must always involve humans who are historical, finite beings. Therefore, it suffices to say that the Ten Commandments, far from being a dead law created by a god who lives alone and resides in some realm above and beyond (human) history, must exist for a good reason, or, better yet, withstand (human) reasoning for good. In other words, God’s law exists for humans. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*John* 1-1). True as it is that the Word was in the beginning with God and was God, it is equally true that as God will be at the end, so will the Word. Nevertheless, as the beginning and the end presuppose time which

becomes history per se, the Word cannot remain the same but must “tran(s)-scribe” itself in time. Such transcription, as the word itself suggests, engenders translational difference, which in turn points to the fact that the Word already contains “original difference” at the beginning, at the inaugural time, of its creation. The Word, as such, was not a proper noun, nor is or will be a proper noun. In “Freud’s Legacy,” Derrida writes: “Any signified whose signifier cannot vary or be translated into another signifier without a loss of signification induces a proper noun effect” (1987: 312). Claude Lévesque elaborates Derrida’s point by making the following judicious statement, which is worth quoting in full:

There are two simultaneous demands governing the proper name which one must not be too quick to separate from each other: on the one hand, a requirement of untranslatability and unreadability, as if the proper name were nothing but pure reference, lying outside of signification and language; on the other hand, a requirement of translatability and readability, as if the proper name were assimilable to the common noun, to any word that is caught up in a linguistic and genealogical network where meaning already contaminates non-meaning and where the proper name is absorbed and expropriated by the common noun. (qtd. in Derrida 1985a: 93)

Accordingly, God’s word, which is, paradoxically enough, different from the Word as God, the Word with God, God as the Word, God with the Word, or even God’s Word, by no means enjoys the privilege of the proper noun effect. Instead, God’s word always contains within itself God’s words, which shows not only the plurality embedded in singularity but also the play of *différance* that induces impurity, and vice versa. In the light of this constant change(s) that nullifies the proper noun effect, we come to realize that the Ten Commandments, whether as God’s word(s) or God’s writing, are not immune from interpretation and/or translation. In what follows, we may try to grope for the traces of difference in the process of translating the Ten Commandments from English to Chinese. We will pursue, in an effort to put into practice what Derrida has theorized as “the translation contract” that transforms the original as well as the translation (1985a: 122), the “impossible possibility” (123) of the promise of reconciliation between the two languages.

IV. The Ten Commandments in translation

Thou shalt not kill.

Exodus 20: 13

Bu ke sha ren. (不可殺人)

Chu ai ji ji (《出埃及記》) 20: 13

For the letter killeth . . .

II Corinthians 3: 6

Yin wei na zi ju shi jiao ren si . . .

(因為那字句是教人死)

Ge lin duo hou shu

(《哥林多後書》) 3: 6

Before a practical translation/interpretation is undertaken, we may first want to reflect upon a quote from Derrida regarding the “character” of translation. “The event of translation, the performance of all translations, is not that they succeed. A translation never succeeds in the pure and absolute sense of the term. Rather, a translation succeeds in promising success, in promising reconciliation” (1985a: 123). Granted that Derrida might have given a sensible verdict on translation, he certainly did not say the last word about translation. For a Chinese speaker and reader, the word “character” may ring a different bell, for it points to, simultaneously, the written words of the Chinese language, the attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual, and many other relevant meanings. The character of translation thus may connote, among other things, the linguistic means by which a translation act is done and also the translator concerned, both aptly reminding us of the “human factor” that involves in translation. Yet, since “to err is human,” translation can never be perfect in the sense that transparent understanding cannot be achieved. By the same token, interpretation presupposes decision which does not always turn out to be a correct one. Hence, the following translation/interpretation attempt will inevitably run the risk of mistranslation and/or misinterpretation, or “misprision,” which Harold Bloom had put forth in his *A Map of Misreading*:

1. Independent as they may seem, the two quotations that appear at the very outset of this essay and again in the fourth part with their Chinese translation (in the form of transcription) are, due to (con)textual juxtaposition, related to each other to the extent that they together form an extra-ordinary sentence: “Thou shalt not kill, for the letter killeth.” Consequently, the letter, with its killing power, paradoxically becomes the *raison d’etre* for “thou” not to kill. Also, there is a turn and twist of meaning. If the letter does kill, “Thou shalt not kill,” as an assemble of letters, can paradoxically execute the act of killing with its pre-given killing power. In so doing, the sixth commandment ironically turns against itself. In addition, if “Thou shalt not kill” can be taken as a magic spell that exerts binding power on the listener, can its Chinese translation serve the same function? Likewise, if “For the letter killeth” means what it says and/or says what it means, does its Chinese translation (which is actually the transcription of the Chinese “original”), namely, “Yin wei na zi ju shi jiao ren si,” mean and say the same? What about its Chinese character version which does not consist of any English letters? How can we make the original and the translation and/or the transcription work at the same time? Is there a difference between when a commandment in English is translated into Chinese and when this translation is transcribed and thus re-translated? By extension, in what way is a translation different from its transcription?

2. As a commandment, to whom does “Thou shalt not kill” apply? Grammatically speaking, “Thou” as a subject, in contrast with “ye” that refers to second person plural, serves to designate second person singular, which runs counter to the fact that a law by nature must apply to all people concerned. As Moses was the only person present when God declared the decree, “Thou shalt not kill” would ironically become a “private law” by which only Moses must abide. The rest of the Israelites are thereby exempt from their obligation. The ambiguity as to whom the commandment should be directed to is further amplified in its Chinese transcription/translation, i.e., “Bu ke sha ren,” which, due to the peculiar Chinese grammatical rules,

does not require specific naming of the subject.

3. The problem with the use of subject entails the problem with the use of the object. “Thou shalt not kill” does not specify the object of killing, whereas “Bu ke sha ren” specifically points out “ren”—“humans,” “people” in Chinese—as the object of killing. The ambiguity in the object only compounds the ambiguity in the subject.
4. Even if we provide a specific context for “Thou shalt not kill” and thereby limiting the meaning of “kill” to referring to “the killing of humans,” such meaning does not so readily translate into the Chinese translation that a perfect equivalent can be created. In Chinese, “sha ren” may be construed as a two-character verb that denotes “to (man-)slaughter” or a complete imperative sentence that connotes “(go) kill people.” Yet as “sha” can refer to many different “acts,” e.g., “sha qing,” “sha feng jing,” “sha shi jian,”⁷ all of which differentiate the meaning of “sha,” one cannot help wondering what the proper meaning of “sha” should be. The problem with the proper translation of “kill” is further compounded by the fact that the word “kill” is so polysemous in the English language that its meaning is far beyond the “normal” use of “depriving of life,” “putting to death,” or “destroying the existence.” It is clear, therefore, that in translating “kill” into “sha,” not only a semantic equivalent is difficult, if not impossible, to come by, but between “kill” and “sha” there exists a semantic space beyond confinement and/or saturation.
5. Supposed that “kill” and “sha” only refer to “(man-)slaughter” and thereby rendering “Thou shalt not kill” and “bu ke sha ren” into a semantic composite that solely signifies the prohibition of depriving the life of a man, does that rid us of the thorny translation problem? It has been pointed out that the Hebrew original of “kill” actually refers to “murder,” which in a legal sense connotes an act—willful,

⁷ In Chinese, “sha qing (殺青),” “sha feng jing (殺風景),” “sha shi jian (殺時間)” mean, respectively, “to finish (a film),” “to spoil (the fun),” “to kill (the time),” in addition to other possible meanings.

deliberate, and unlawful—of killing with premeditated malice, not to mention the degree to which such a crime is committed. Therefore, given the different meaning of “slaughter” and “murder,” it seems fair to assume that certain uncertainty already permeates in the apparently simple linear translation from Hebrew via English to Chinese.

6. As an archaic form of “shall,” “shalt” is inevitably imbued with the implication of futurity. And since the future (or rather, “*l’avenir*,” à la Derrida) is not wholly predictable, the word “shalt” is subject to multiple interpretations. To begin with, “shalt” may be used to suggest “simple futurity.” If so, “Thou shalt not kill” may suggest some human non-action through which what the sixth commandment intends to postulate shall naturally take place in the due time to come, as if God had told Moses not to do anything, for the time of not killing would come along merely in the natural course of time. Next, “shalt” may suggest “will have to” and thus imply “must.” In that case, “Thou shalt not kill” becomes a law of prohibition that imposes strict ban on human actions. Yet the catch is that although a human—the difference in his/her capability put aside—has no choice but to observe the law, he/she might still fail to accomplish what the law postulates for various reasons. In a nutshell, the law of prohibition simply cannot function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Furthermore, “shalt” may connote “will be able to” and thereby renders “Thou shalt not kill” into a kind of motto to encourage a human to fully cultivate his/her sense of morality so as to abstain from killing. To compound the problem, we may add the following definition from a dictionary to the “proper” meaning of “shalt”: “used to express what’s inevitable or what seems to be fated or decided or likely to happen in the future” (“Shalt”). Accordingly, “Thou shalt not kill” may foreshadow some sort of “fatalism” that works as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, no matter what a human aspires to do, his/her destination is unavoidable, and on the other hand, since the destination is predetermined and thus cannot be changed, a human can virtually do anything at will.

7. In addition to the aforesaid meanings of “shalt,” “shalt” can also be used to express a speaker’s “strong emotion,” in particular “promise” and “threat.” By parity of reason, it suffices to say that “Thou shalt not kill” may represent both God’s promise to Moses that the day for humans’ not-killing will eventually come as well as God’s threat that no more of man-killing will be tolerated from now on. The irony, however, is that the former shows the failure of God’s omnipotence to make everything come true at the time and on the spot, while the latter simply runs counter to human history characteristic of killings that only prove to be more horrible in the course of time.
8. In its “general” and “normal” use, “shalt” is supposed to be “used in laws, regulations, or directives to express what’s mandatory” (“Shalt”). Yet what exactly is “mandatory”? Etymologically, mandatory derives from “mandate” (*mandāre*): “command, specific, legal or judicial; commission or contract by which one acts for another” (“Mandatory”), and thus can be extended to mean “obligatory.” This being said, “Thou shalt not kill” demands obligation and duty of both Moses and the Israelites to abide by the commandment imposed upon them by God. Paradoxically, however, a commandment is not exactly the same as a mandate which implies one-way imposition. Commandment, which consists of *com* and *mandāre*, requires mutual obligation, for the prefix “*com*,” meaning “together, in combination or union,” forcefully demands that the mandate be a “contract by which one acts for another.” A contract, by definition, has binding power over the two parties involved; by analogy, a commandment, despite being imposed by God, must serve as a double bind. In other words, not only humans but also God Himself must be subject to the double bind, and in order to make any commandment effective, God must turn it into a mutual agreement of double command between Himself and humans, rather than merely articulating it as if the commandment could work with its illocutionary force. Simply put, a commandment is not a composite of empty words but that which simultaneously demands action of both God and human beings. From this it follows that

“Thou shalt not kill” is in effect a commandment by which both its maker and its observer are mutually bound; killing is a universally prohibited act, and no one, not even God, is above the commandment.

9. As a commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” must not be reduced to a semantic composition with only its propositional content expressed when articulated. In order to function as a true commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” must not be void of commitments. It is not God’s monologue without an audience, nor is it mere sound that echoes in the ears of Moses. When God imposed the commandment on Moses, He expected absolute commitments from Moses and the Israelites. But here the old question remains: given that God is omnipotent, why can’t He instantly make His wish come true and stop, once and for all, all humans from killing each other? Why can’t God—as He did in Genesis when he ordered, “Let there be light: and there was light”—fully exercise His magical power and once again turn words into things?⁸ “In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And God was the Word.” Did God’s words somehow lose their power at Mount Si’nai? Or is it too blasphemous to think that the Word that was with God in the beginning is different from God’s words that have appeared from then on? What, we are compelled to ask, language/words did God exactly use when the world first came into being in His order and when He addressed Moses? And even if God indeed spoke Hebrew at both occasions, can His words still possess the magical power once they are translated into different languages? Is it (un)fair (not) to consider “Thou shalt not kill” an equivalent to “bu ke sha ren,” simply because none of them is identical to the Hebrew original? **In other words,**⁹ can a translation, be it dynamic (in the sense used by

⁸ John Searle invents a term, namely, “a supernatural declaration” (1989: 547-50) to shed light on the perfect fit between God’s word(s) and the reality the word refers to. For instance, as soon as God articulates, “Let there be light,” the light appears immediately as if God’s command is a magic spell that can once and for all turn words into things.

⁹ Again, “in other words” may have double, or even triple, meanings here. First, the phrase functions as transition words, and second, it suggests a re- or dis-placement of

Eugene Nida) or not, really function like its original?

10. It should be clear by now that “Thou shalt not kill” is both translatable and untranslatable. It is translatable because its Chinese translation already exists; it is untranslatable because its Chinese translation can never serve the same function. And here once again we are reminded of what Derrida has called “the necessary and impossible task of translation, its necessity as impossibility” in “Des Tours de Babel” (1985b/1992: 223). As the sixth commandment of the Ten Commandments, “Thou shalt not kill” is far and away unique, and yet as such, it also displays the previously mentioned “proper-name effect” proffered by Derrida in his “Freud’s Legacy”: “Any signified whose signifier cannot vary nor let itself be translated into another signifier without a loss of meaning points to a proper-name effect.” Being one of its kind and with its proper-name effect constantly active, “Thou shalt not kill” can only remain as it is if it is to function properly. As a result, no translation will suffice to represent it. However, “Thou shalt not kill” is itself already a translation of translation, so like many a different lingual translation of the Hebrew “original” in the human history, it has already lost its privilege of being a proper name. On the contrary, “Thou shalt not kill” has become more like a common noun that can be translated and retranslated again and again. In his query of the (un)translatability of Babel, Derrida writes,

Translate me, don’t translate me. On the one hand, don’t translate me, that is, respect me as a proper name, respect my law of the proper name which stands over and above all languages. And on the other hand, translate me, that is, understand me, preserve me within the universal language, follow my law, and so on. (1985a: 102)

meaning among Hebrew, English, and Chinese in the long history of the Bible translation. For the third meaning, I have in mind Mona Baker’s book, *In Other Words*, which deals with the pedagogy of translation. In short, what can be learned here is the non-riveting of any language.

In the light of this insightful statement, we think it fair to assume that both “Thou shalt not kill” and “bu ke sha ren” form a double bind imposed by God on the translators: one can translate the former into the latter, and vice versa, yet one cannot translate so as to equate the former with the latter, or vice versa. Caught in the double dilemma of “translate or don’t translate” and “translate and don’t translate,” neither “Thou shalt not kill” nor “bu ke sha ren” can stay clear of the ambi-guity of meaning that looms large like a shadow behind/before/beside/. . . any attempt to achieve a transparent translation aimed at complete transposition of meaning. The Italian aphorism “*traduttore, traditore*,” hence, becomes more conspicuously meaningful as it may obliquely point to God’s double command and calls for the plurality of languages or, to use a Derridean term, the ever-elusive, never-ending dissemination of meaning.

V. In the End: A Post-script as an End-ing¹⁰

One hears a thousand things through other tongues.
The Ear of the Other

From the apparently absurd play placed at the beginning and in lieu of a pre-face to the beginning of the end of an essay replete with wild thoughts and phantasies (yet also with seemingly rational citations of Western theoretical jargons), has the author of this essay accomplished his mission, or, put differently, his task of grappling with the problems in the translation of the Ten Commandments? On the one hand, the task is evidently not accomplished for not all the Ten Commandments have been thoroughly discussed. On the other hand, the task is completed to the extent that at least the sixth commandment has been, to appropriate Walter Benjamin’s term, “touched like a circle by a tangent” (99). Nevertheless, whether the task is done or not, the discussion must continue because no one can say the last word about

¹⁰ Writing a postscript, like the act of translation, is both necessary and impossible. On the one hand, a postscript is required to mark an end of an essay that supposedly has length limitation. Yet on the other hand, as a postscript constitutes only a part of a script, it is never complete but calls for a post-postscript which is, to use a deconstructive term, a supplement. If, indeed, “In the beginning was the Word,” then shall we or shall we not expect the Word to differentiate into words as *Logos* into *logoi* in the end?

translation, and for that reason, the postscript here runs the risk of becoming a dangerous supplement to the essay which is both “necessary and impossible.” Given that, one can only harbor a hope that “after” (in its multiple meanings of “in the wake of,” “behind,” “similar to,” “according to,” “*a tergo*,” etc.) the post-script, more words in different tongues will be engendered so much so that they can exist like certain wild life form that, in its constant transmigration, is born(e) free, defies confinement, and can grow in infinitum.

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Appendix

To activate the play—that is, the *inner-play*, the *counter-play*, the *inter-play*, etc.—between speaking and writing, a Chinese character version of the play as the pre-face needs to be provided here. Nevertheless, since the Chinese character version may already serve as a kind of translation of the play at the outset (which is in fact a pinyin transcription of the supposed voice of all the characters in the play), it seems reasonable for me to balk at an attempt to (re)translate it into English. However, this will make little or no sense to those who cannot read Chinese, either in character form or in pinyin transcription. The paradox, it seems, is that although the original play is actually written in English alphabets, an English reader without prior knowledge of Chinese is unable to read and understand, let alone to translate, a text that is both familiar and strange at the same time. By the same token, despite the fact that the language of the original play is supposed to be Chinese by nature, it is “represented” (translated? transcribed?) in English alphabets, which, interestingly enough, may seem both foreign and “familiar” (Latin, “*familia*,” meaning “household”) for a Chinese reader. To compound the problem, as English alphabets evidently originate from Roman alphabets and as Moses, along with other Israelites, apparently does not speak Chinese, the play per se, in which runs the activity of difference, becomes something devoid of purity, and thereby makes it impossible for both English and Chinese readers to feel “at home.” Still, a rough (and by all accounts, unsuccessful) English translation provided below may suffice to give the reader a chance to ponder the question of speaking **and** writing as well as the problem of translatability **and** untranslatability.

(何烈山上)

摩西：你是誰？

上帝：我是誰？我是我，我是神！

摩西：(誰是神；神是誰。)

上帝：誰是神？我是神！神是誰？神是我！我是我；神是神！

摩西：……

(西奈山上)

上帝：你們不可殺人。

摩西：「你們不可殺人。」

上帝：是「你們」不可殺人，不是「我們」不可殺人。

摩西：（是神才可殺人；我們不可殺人。）

上帝：……

（西奈山下）

以色列人：神說了什麼？

摩西：神沒說「什麼」；神說「你們不可以殺人。」

以色列人：神沒說什麼？！神說我們不可殺人？！

摩西：神沒說「我們不可殺人」；神說「你們不可殺人。」

以色列人：神說他們可殺人？

摩西：神沒說他們可殺人；神說我們不可殺人。

以色列人：神說他們不可殺人？

摩西：神沒說「他們不可殺人」；神說「你們不可殺人。」

以色列人：神說他們可殺人？

摩西：神沒說他們可殺人！神沒殺人！

以色列人：誰殺人了？

摩西：誰沒殺人！神沒殺人！

以色列人：誰沒殺人？我們沒殺人！誰說神殺人了？

摩西：誰沒說「神殺人了」！神沒說誰殺人了！

以色列人：神說了什麼？

摩西：神沒說「什麼」！！神說「你們不可殺人」！！

以色列人：我們沒殺人；神說我們不可殺人。

摩西：神沒說「我們不可殺人」！神說「你們不可殺人」！「你們不可殺人」！

是「你們不可殺人」！！

以色列人：什麼？什麼？我們不可殺人，摩西可殺人？

（西奈山上傳來一個聲音）

上帝：唉！什麼都白說了！

以色列人：誰？誰說「什麼都白說了」？

摩西：哦！神啊！！

以色列人：什麼？！神說「什麼都白說了」？！

上帝：誰說白說了！！

（邏各斯出現）

邏各斯：……

(in the mountain of God, Ho'reb)

Moses: Who are you?

God: Who am I? I am that I am; I am God!

Moses: (Who is God; God is Who.)

God: Who is God? I am God! God is who? God is me. I am that I am; God is God!

Moses: . . .

(on the top of Mount Si'nai)

God: You should not kill.

Moses: "You should not kill."

God: It's "You" that should not kill, not "We" that should not kill.

Moses: (Only God can kill; we should not kill.)

God: . . .

(at the foot of Mount Si'nai)

Israelites: What said God ?

Moses: God did not say "what"; God said, "You should not kill."

Israelites: What? God did not say what? God said we should not kill?

Moses: God did not say, "We should not kill"; God said, "You should not kill."

Israelites: God said they should kill?

Moses: God did not say they should kill; God said we should not kill.

Israelites: God said they should not kill?

Moses: God did not say, "They should not kill"; God said, "You should not kill."

Israelites: God said they should kill?

Moses: God did not say they should kill! God did not kill!

Israelites: Who killed?

Moses: Who did not kill! God did not kill!

Israelites: Who did not kill? We did not kill! Who said God killed?

Moses: Who did not say, "God killed"! God did not say who killed!

Israelites: What said God?

Moses: God did not say, "What"! God said, "You should not kill"!!

Israelites: We did not kill; God said we should not kill.

Moses: God did not say, "We should not kill"! God said, "You should not kill"! "You Should not kill"! It's "You should not kill"!!

Israelites: What? What? We should not kill? Moses should kill?

(a voice from Mount Si'nai)

God: Sigh! What said I !!

Israelites: Who? Who said, "What said I"?

Moses: Oh! God!!

Israelites: What?! God said, "What said I"?!

God: Who said I . . . Said what?!

(Logos appearing)

Logos: . . .