

An underwater photograph showing a large stingray swimming in the center, surrounded by a dense school of smaller fish. The water is clear and blue, with sunlight filtering through from above.

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Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna

**“AI, philosophy and the
disequilibrium of translation”**

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Problem setting

What makes the human being human?

What would the mark of human knowledge be?

- In addition to the dominance of education oriented by the global economy, another imminent threat that affects education today is AI. Chat GPT has become part of our daily lives, and it seems to help people think and work efficiently.
- Due to the rise of Chat GPT, there has arisen the claim that foreign language learning is unnecessary.



If Chat GPT instantly translates one language to another, what is the point of the human being taking the labour of translation?

Theme: Translation reconsidered

- I shall argue that translation is more than the matching of different language systems.
- Undergoing ourselves the process of translation and undergoing the sense of a gap between languages is an important part – perhaps the most important part – of translation, and this is something AI cannot do.
- Translation puts emphasis on the gap, the unknown and the untranslatable, which, paradoxically perhaps, is the condition of “mutual understanding.”

Paul Standish

“I’m your teacher, I am your man” (2025)

The film, I Am Your Man (2021) is a “love” story between a human woman and robot man.

The robot, Tom, can perform every task perfectly, but there is something that he cannot do: “Tom cannot be taunted or embarrassed or hurt in the way that the human teacher can. Whatever is in the black box, Tom cannot be exposed. He is not vulnerable” (Standish 2025).

Absence of the space of skepticism is a real threat posed by AI – a threatening fact that we cannot even doubt. As for Alma, the woman, her deep despair is that she cannot acknowledge Tom.



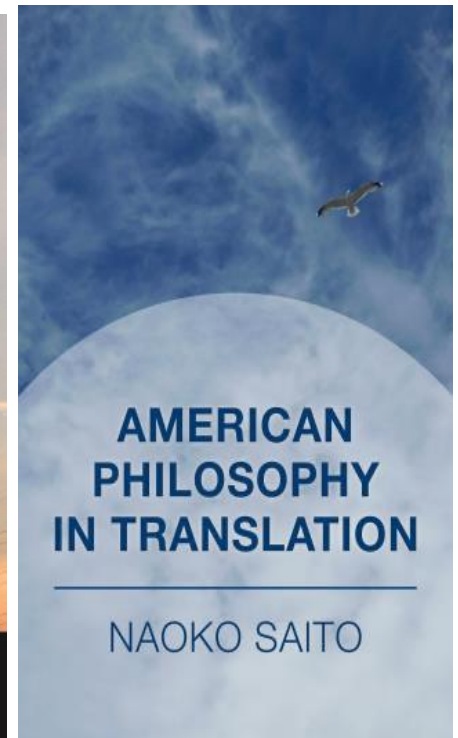
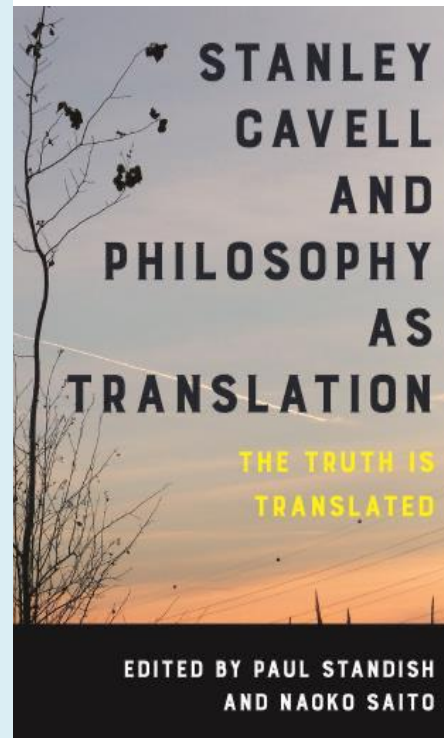
Philosophy as translation

It is in the very process of translation that such ambiguity and the sense of loss play a crucial role – one for which AI cannot substitute human being.

It is of importance here that translation is recognized as involving something more than conversion between two independent language systems.

Translation is not simply a substitute or metaphor for human transformation.

Rather, in the experience of rewording the world, in the little rebirths this continually effects, and hence in its renewal of interest in the world, *translation is transformation*.



Translation already begins at an intracultural and intralinguistic level.

Education for human transformation

- Connecting the psychological and existential to the political, translation involves an answerability to others and an experience of the inadequacy of this that is not unconnected to the sense of shame.
- Such emotional destabilizing goes beyond the political language of mutual recognition and of respect for different values.
- It points us to [political education for human transformation](#)—political education that is inseparable from language education (and the experience of translation) and from transcendence.
- Hence, what is at stake here is not so much an ideological insistence upon a kind of equality between languages, but the problematization of how language is understood, inviting a change in the way that we perceive and are engaged in language.

The disequilibrium of translation

- I propose a shift in the conception of dialogue from the symmetrical discourse of mutuality and presumed commensurability to the acceptance of a relationship of **disequilibrium** – one that acknowledges an unbridgeable gap and the sense of loss in communication.
- The smooth and effortless process of translation that is achieved by ChatGPT not only cannot respond to such disequilibrium but also covers it over.
- The sense of struggle over words, the sense of loss the untranslatable brings, do not mean that we must stop thinking or that the unknown is to be mystified: rather such experience provides the chance of creating judgment out of chaos and triggers our efforts for finding common ground in meanings in the absence of an already given shared ground.