

## Translators' Note

### How Did This Happen?

Like many American graduate students interested in twentieth-century French philosophy, in school we were quite enamoured with the big names – Sartre, Foucault, Derrida, and especially Deleuze. For various philosophical and non-philosophical reasons, these are the figures that reached us from across the ocean and time, and we consumed them greedily. As we did, other, less well-known names began to make themselves manifest. The more they came up, the more we came to realise the much wider scholarly context that always frames the emergence of the more recognisable names, and the more we were forced to acknowledge that there was a whole lot more to the story of French philosophy than we had initially assumed.

For us, Gilles Deleuze was among the most intriguing thinkers, and *Logique du sens* his most intriguing and mysterious text. Published in 1969 by Les Éditions de Minuit, the year after *Différence et Répétition*, and then translated into English by Mark Lester and Charles Stivale and edited by Constantin V. Boundas for Columbia University Press, *Logic of Sense* was as confusing as it was captivating. After one read, we were hooked. After a second, unexpected things began to occur. And during a third read, something really stood out – the relatively obscure name ‘Émile Bréhier’.

That name appears most explicitly in the second chapter, which Deleuze calls the ‘Second Series of Paradoxes of Surface Effects’. The chapter begins with the Stoics and their strange ontological

formulation of the mysteriously tantalising yet enigmatic and difficult idea of the 'incorporeal'. After some fascinating – and confounding – elaborations of Stoic ideas came the name in question: 'In his fine reconstruction of Stoic thought, Émile Bréhier says ...', followed by the largest block quote in *Logic of Sense*. For seventeen lines, nearly half a page, Deleuze quotes Bréhier writing of scalpels slicing through flesh, which generates a new attribute – 'being cut' – and which is expressed in a verb that separates two planes of being – bodily forces and an 'endless multiplicity of incorporeal beings' that 'frolic on the surface of being'. What did this all mean, we thought, and why is this Bréhier person so important? And if he is so important, why has no one translated his text from which Deleuze quotes so authoritatively and so fervently and, moreover, at an arguably pivotal moment in this crucial text?

Years later, Ryan was still asking those questions. By 2017, he had written and published *The Deleuze–Lucretius Encounter*, but he kept thinking about Deleuze's relationship to other ancient traditions. After Edinburgh University Press published his Lucretius book, he turned directly to the Stoics, which brought him back to *Logic of Sense*, especially that second chapter. Soon, what became his second book, *Deleuze, a Stoic* (also published by Edinburgh University Press, 2020) emerged, and so did an idea. What if, Ryan thought, *he* translated Bréhier's *La Théorie des incorporels dans l'ancien stoïcisme* and include it as an appendix to his Deleuze and Stoicism book, just as Deleuze appended essays to *Logique du sens*?

Given Ryan's limited translation skills, he would need help. So he reached out to Jared, who was, as usual, totally game. Jared and Ryan had actually become friends many years prior in 2008 at the North Texas Philosophical Association, when Ryan was just at the beginning his graduate trajectory and Jared was still an undergrad major in philosophy and French. In 2017, Jared was engaged in his own research in philosophy and had a vested interest in translating works from the French, especially the various rationalist and epistemological threads that make up the unique tapestry of Deleuze's thought. Having over two years' teaching in France and ample translation experience under his belt, Jared was eager to help bring voices like that of Bréhier into the anglophone

world. Thus, in summer 2017, Ryan drafted a full translation of Bréhier's *La Théorie des incorporels* and sent it to Jared, who worked his magic. In a few short months, we had a complete, fairly polished version and were eager to share it with the larger scholarly world.

The next step was to contact the French publisher who owned the rights, J. Vrin, in order to secure the necessary copyright and permissions. Since our first visits to Paris as fledging philosophers, la Librairie J. Vrin has always been an alluring, enchanting and indeed intimidating place, situated at la Place de la Sorbonne, the veritable beating heart of the French philosophical universe. To our dismay, however, J. Vrin would only allow translations that consisted *exclusively* of Bréhier works. We could do it, but we would need to translate a lot more of Bréhier's oeuvre, something we were unable to do at such a juncture. Frustrated, we enlisted the help of the wonderful Carol MacDonald, Commissioning Editor at Edinburgh University Press, who did her best to thresh out paths to make this happen. Yet one by one, each path was blocked and we eventually – quite reluctantly – conceded it would not be possible to publish Bréhier's classic essay as an appendix to Ryan's *Deleuze, a Stoic*. It was very disappointing, especially for Ryan, who felt he had lured Jared into a project that now seemed destined to go nowhere. It was 2018.

Two years later, the COVID-19 pandemic rocked the world. Locked inside, many scholars formed reading groups or took them online and expanded the membership as Zoom enabled distant people to connect. One such group was the 'Critical History of Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy Workshop', organised by Andrew LaZella and Richard A. Lee, Jr.

At each meeting of that group, attendees presented works in progress in the hopes of receiving expert feedback. Meetings were always lively, therapeutic and productive. At one, Andrew shared part of a book project he was writing on Peter Abelard's nominalism and continental philosophy. Engrossed by Andrew's project and seeing a potential connection to Deleuze and Stoicism, Ryan sent Andrew a follow-up email to share relevant chapters from *Deleuze, a Stoic*. Andrew appreciated the chapters and emailed Ryan saying as much, which included an unexpected suggestion:

'I noticed that you had translated large sections of Bréhier's book. (In obtaining the French, I also realized how short of a work this is.) I have long thought this would be a great book to translate and publish in our series [*Cycles*]. Is this something you might be interested in undertaking?'<sup>1</sup>

And just like that, we were back!

For a while, we explored options for a book consisting only of untranslated Bréhier works, until, that is, J. Vrin told us that, since Bréhier died in 1952, his works would enter the public domain on 1 January 2023. As long as it came out after then, we would not need copyright or permissions from anyone. Immediately, a new path opened itself for us.

Eventually, we settled on a volume, with *La Théorie des incorporels dans l'ancien stoïcisme* as its centrepiece, which would additionally include extensive essays from scholarly experts on Bréhier, Hellenistic philosophy and contemporary French thought. To our delight, Michael James Bennett and Thomas Bénatouïl agreed to write, respectively, introductory and reflection essays to frame Bréhier's, while Jared and Ryan would take on the task of organising it all. With Carol's and Andrew's help, Edinburgh agreed to publish what you are now holding in your hands.

## Why This Fills Gaps

More than simply providing something of a skeleton key to Deleuze's metaphysics, *La Théorie des incorporels dans l'ancien stoïcisme* fills several gaps in the outstanding scholarship. Many twentieth-century receptions of Stoicism and more recent forms of materialisms engage, respond to or were inspired by, at least in part, Bréhier's classic essay. Once rumours of our translation came out, countless scholars, from across the anglophone world, expressed interest to us or to Edinburgh University Press. This is just some of the vast abundance of evidence demonstrating how shocking it is that Bréhier's text has never been translated into English in over a hundred years.

<sup>1</sup> From personal email correspondence.

Such omissions become slightly less shocking whenever one considers that, in his own context, Bréhier is relatively an obscure figure. Just consider what Alan Schrift's *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers* says about him:

Émile Bréhier (1876–1952) was born in Bar-le-Duc (Meuse, Lorraine). He attended *lycée* in Versailles, then Louis-le-Grand, where he completed his *baccalauréat* in letters in 1893, and a second *baccalauréat* in sciences in 1896. Bréhier studied at the Sorbonne from 1896–1900, passed the *agrégation* in 1900, and received his *Doctorat ès Lettres* in 1908, submitting theses *Les Idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* ('The Philosophical and Religious Ideas of Philo of Alexandria') and *La Théorie des incorporels dans l'ancien stoïcisme* ('The Theory of Incorporeals in Ancient Stoicism'). Bréhier taught as Professor of Philosophy at *lycées* in Coutances (1900–02), Laval (1903–08), and Beauvais (1908–09) before being named *Maître de conférences* at the University in Rennes (1909–11) and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bordeaux (1912–14). Seriously wounded in World War One, he was appointed *Maître de conférences* in the History of Philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1919, promoted to Professor without Chair in 1923, and named Professor of Philosophy and the History of Philosophy in 1930, a position he held until his retirement in 1946. Bréhier also served for one year (1925–26) as Professor and Associate Dean of the Faculty at the University of Cairo. In 1944, Bréhier was elected to the *Académie des Sciences morales et politiques*, and became its president in 1950.<sup>2</sup>

In the anglophone world, Bréhier is best known for his seven volumes called *The History of Philosophy*, published in France in between 1926 and 1932 and translated by Joseph Thomas for University of Chicago Press between 1963 and 1969, and which reportedly inspired Frank Copleston's eleven-volume *A History of Philosophy* project.

<sup>2</sup> Alan D. Schrift, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 107.

There is no doubt Bréhier was an important philosopher, in France and beyond. And yet, one of his most influential texts was not translated into English. While most interested scholars read (or muddled through!) the French, we firmly believe that this gap in the anglophone translation regime limited what could have been an even larger impact, and this lacuna, to some degree, allowed an unexpected revival of Stoic philosophy in the anglophone world to be pulled in an unfortunate direction.

In the last fifteen years or so, Stoicism has become extremely popular, especially in the public reception and consumption of philosophical ideas. Most of this transpired outside academia, although several scholars have spread the 'philosophy as a way of life' trend that follows the work of Pierre Hadot, whose own studies at the Sorbonne overlapped with Bréhier's last years of teaching there. Yet, it was the corporate world – with their ruggedly individualist marketing strategies and ever-expanding self-help racket – that really initiated a resurgence of interest in Stoicism for the public sphere. For us, it is quite strange to see, in the 2020s, Stoic (or correctly pseudo-Stoic) ideas appear in titles populating the *New York Times* bestseller list, on the cover of millions of books at Barnes and Noble, as well as ranked among the most popular podcasts, online communities, YouTube videos and so on in the United States and the virtual world in general. It is extremely disappointing and indeed disheartening to witness how this massive recuperation of Stoicism for capitalist and individualist ends obscured not only their brilliant innovations in materialist thinking and metaphysics but their utter perversity.<sup>3</sup> Translating Bréhier's essay, we hope to help disambiguate Stoic materialism from its appropriation by contemporary capitalist ideology, especially the libertarian variety that has become ubiquitous in the current intellectual conjuncture.

Adjacent to these louder and thus more conspicuous trends of Stoic appropriation, many excellent scholars continue to study and

<sup>3</sup> For the specific way in which they are 'perverse', see Ryan Johnson, 'Understanding Stoicism with Deleuze: Laughter and Perversion', *Edinburgh University Press blog*, 25 March 2022, <https://eupublishingblog.com/2022/03/25/deleuze-a-stoic/>.

share Stoicism's interesting concepts and positions, especially its strange and somewhat counter-intuitive materialism. Many of these scholars are French, including Thomas Bénatouïl, whose excellent final essay to this volume situates this conversation and tradition within the broader French philosophical landscape. Some scholars in the anglophone world, too, have done top-notch work on the parts of Stoicism that we value, including Michael James Bennett, whose fabulous Introduction in this volume in turn explores the anglophone side of things. Also of note are Kurt Lampe and Janae Sholtz's *French and Italian Stoicisms: From Sartre to Agamben* (Bloomsbury, 2020), as well as Kurt Lampe and Andrew Benjamin's *German Stoicisms: From Hegel to Sloterdijk* (Bloomsbury, 2022). We hope that this volume will resonate with and enhance these vibrant conversations, and do the same with the many volumes in continental philosophy and ancient thought in Edinburgh University Press' catalogue.

In addition to counteracting the capitalist recuperation and emphasising the value of Stoicism for twenty-first century materialisms, what we see in Bréhier's essay engages other, equally important, contemporary issues, such as the metaphysical and epistemological questions underpinning the contemporary politics of gender and race.

For example, *La Théorie des incorporels* will illuminate some of the feminist thinking in Elizabeth Grosz's *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism*. More popularly, Donna Zuckerberg's chapters in *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age* explore the fascination with ancient Stoicism displayed on 'manosphere', where 'writers use Stoicism to justify their belief that women and people of color are not just angrier and more emotional than men, but morally inferior as well'.<sup>4</sup> Our hope is that this translation will help rethink and undermine the overly masculine, misogynist, racist and ablest tones with which Stoicism has recently been inflected. What Bréhier's text reveals, *inter alia*, is not the caricatural libertarian emphasis on the ideology of the self – the idea that everything stands and

<sup>4</sup> Donna Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 7.

falls with the reflexive mastery of desires and the strengthening of the individual will – as so many popularisations of Seneca, Aurelius and Epictetus have championed, but an intricate and highly sophisticated metaphysics of material conditions and inevitably transient yet paradoxically eternal effects. Rather than turn to the ham-fisted platitudes of Crusoeade fantasies, this metaphysics, as you will surely discover, evokes transience, fragility and above all contingency and difference.

### Remarks on Translation and Bréhier's Prose

The best-case scenario for a translation is that it passes into its reception without incident. History rarely remembers great translations and even the very best are superseded as academic language evolves across generations. More frequently, translations are remembered for their shortcomings, if not for their perniciously distorted transmission of ideas and the unavoidable inertia of the diffusion of translated ideas.

With this difficult truth in view, and given the many reasons listed above for bringing this particular text into English, we have above all sought both transparency and functionality with this particular translation. In terms of transparency, we have sought to bring this text into English in such a way as to illuminate the difficulties and complexities involved in analysing and arguing about philosophical ideas that are over 2,000 years old. As for functionality, we have essayed to provide a philosophical text, equipped with an accompanying apparatus that can be of use for scholars and on which future generations can continue to build and improve.

Although relatively short in length, Bréhier's text exhibits a number of notable features that bear on the task of the translator. As one may reasonably expect, Bréhier deploys academic prose characteristic of scholarly writing of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French academy. This style is not homogeneous but is marked by a number of overlapping tendencies. Bréhier tends, as befitting the times, to frequently employ highly complex and lengthy sentences with numerous subordinate and apposite constructions. As translation convention dictates, we have in many



instances broken up Bréhier's more byzantine constructions into separate sentences, while retaining the original intention and flow of his argument whenever it is appropriate and necessary to do so.

Another and opposite tendency in Bréhier's writing is his remarkable economy of expression and the general terseness of his philosophical assertions. Despite the aforementioned syntactical and propositional complexity, Bréhier does not, in good French fashion, repeat himself or reiterate his conclusions. Unlike the more turgid German tradition of prose writing (exceptions notwithstanding), which tends to say what it is going to say, say what it says and then say what it said, the French tend, by contrast, to employ a *svelte*, dense prose that aims for analytic precision over and above imagistic flourishes and excessive literary panache.

This style originates in the long French rationalist tradition that extends at least from Descartes and Malebranche passing through figures as diverse as Denis Diderot, Auguste Comte and Olympe de Gouges all the way up to the magisterial writings of Henri Bergson. Situated within this broader tradition, Bréhier's prose style also points forward towards the tradition of French epistemology and philosophy of science with figures such as Canguilhem, Koyré and Cavallès and, in this regard, presages the analytic precision as well as elegance of the philosophical prose of Althusser, Foucault, Deleuze and Badiou. For the English translator, such a stylistic tendency requires a good deal of inventiveness as well as close familiarity with the idiomatic dimension of the French language. Moreover, it also requires an English prose style that possesses a corresponding degree of analytic fortitude and economy of expression. As is the case for all translations, it will inevitably fall to the reader to decide on the failure or success of this particular endeavour.

In many places, we have signalled the original French text in square brackets [] whenever it felt necessary. Although ancient Stoic materialism does lend itself to the kind of philosophical jargon-mongering ubiquitous within the contemporary academic and especially the French Theory scene, we have highlighted any relevant French terms that might not be obvious to the English reader. Beyond a few interesting terms that the reader will discover, it is worth mentioning in passing the spectre of Bergson

which becomes most strikingly manifest at the end of this essay, with Bréhier's elliptical mention of the concept of the *élan vital*. Within this text, such a reference remains opaque, perhaps pointing to a future research vector that might attempt to work out the relation between Stoic materialism and Bergsonian vitalism. With the appearance of this translation in English for the first time, Deleuzians and New Materialists alike seem to have their work cut out for them!

We have also highlighted the French when it concerns key terms from the tradition of ancient philosophy. This text essentially draws from the original Greek and Latin sources with which Bréhier was at home. For our purposes, it seemed sufficient to signal the French in order to assist the reader in circumventing any potential ambiguities in the scholarly telephone game between Greek, Latin, French and English. Specialists and classicists will undoubtedly continue to debate the correct rendering of these terms in all of these languages, yet we feel that providing transparency with respect to the decision that we took is the best possible way to proceed, even if our decisions prove controversial or inadequate. This move felt particularly necessary with Aristotelian terminology. Additionally, we have opted to provide transliterations of the original Greek script, employed quite abundantly here, in order to facilitate an easier read for those unfamiliar with Greek. We feel that this modification of the original text allows for the original flow of Bréhier's prose to truly shine through unimpeded.

Like many works of philosophy, in translation or not, it all began on a whim and a chance encounter. Who knows why some idea or some thinker sparks a fire that burns across time and continents? Who knows how future philosophical friends randomly meet, fall out of touch, later meet again and then find themselves drawn together by the aleatory swerve of history? Whatever the causes, a strange idea under a Greek porch emerged long ago, sparkled in and out of conversation for 2,000 years, was crystalised into a material force in twentieth-century France, and is still pulsating in the rhythm of the words you are reading now. Without even noticing it, an incorporeal is bringing us all together – you, the

Stoics, Bréhier, Deleuze, Ryan, Andrew, Jared, Thomas, Michael, Carol and more. As Deleuze and Guattari write at the beginning of *A Thousand Plateaus*, 'Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd.'<sup>5</sup> It took a crowd, and at least one incorporeal, to make this book happen. Now y'all are a part of it.

*Jared C. Bly and Ryan J. Johnson*

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3.