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THE INTERPRETATION OF MULTILINGUAL STATUTES BY THE EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE

*Lawrence M. Solan**

EU legislation is written in all of the EU's official languages.¹ Each version is authoritative, and no version is privileged as "the original," at least not as an official matter.² The practice derives from the very first Regulation of the Council of the European Economic Community in 1958, which declared Dutch, French, German, and Italian as the official languages.³ As countries have entered the EU, the Regulation has been amended to expand the number of official languages to match the official languages of the Member States.⁴ Moreover, the accession treaties themselves contain provisions that show respect for the linguistic diversity of the EU.⁵ For example, the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam says:

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1. EEC Regulation 1, art. 4, 1958 ("Regulations and other documents of general application shall be drafted in the four official languages.").

2. See Theodor Schilling, *Language Rights in the European Union*, 9 GERMAN L.J. 1219, 1232-34 (2008).

3. EEC Regulation 1, *supra* note 1, art. 1.

4. In the earlier years, for example, the Regulation was amended to give official language status to Danish and English in 1973, Greek in 1981, Portuguese and Spanish in 1986, and Finnish and Swedish in 1995. See LEIGH OAKES, *LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: COMPARING FRANCE AND SWEDEN* 132 (2001). Most recently, the Regulation was amended in 2007 to give official language status (with certain unique derogations) to Irish. Council Regulation 920/2005, 2005 O.J. (L 156/3) (EC), available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:156:0003:0003:EN:PDF>.

5. Respect for linguistic diversity is EU policy. See Charter of Fundamental Rights, art. II-82, 2004 O.J. (C 310/41) (EU), available at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2004/c_310/c_31020041216en00410054.pdf ("The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.").

This Treaty, drawn up in a single original in the Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Irish, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish languages, the texts in each of these languages being equally authentic, shall be deposited in the archives of the Government of the Italian Republic, which will transmit a certified copy to each of the governments of the other signatory States.

Pursuant to the Accession Treaty of 1994, the Finnish and Swedish versions of this Treaty shall also be authentic.⁶

Since then, others have joined the EU, which now has twenty-seven members and twenty-three official languages.⁷

The existence of a regime of multilingual legislation appears to create a daunting task for a court that must resolve disputes over a statute's applicability in a particular situation. The opportunity for inconsistencies among the various language versions is so profound that it would not be surprising if the entire system collapsed under its own weight.

But that has not happened. Whatever problems Europe and the EU face, statutory interpretation is not high on the list. On the contrary, the European Court of Justice ("ECJ") resolves disputes among Member States in what appears to be a routine manner.⁸ In this Article, I argue

6. Treaty of Amsterdam Amending the Treaty of the European Union, art. 53, Oct. 2, 1997, 1997 O.J. (C 325/5).

7. *Multilingualism: An Asset for Europe and a Shared Commitment* (EC), COM (2008) 566 final (Sep. 18, 2008), available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/com/2008_0566_en.pdf; European Commission, Member States of the EU, http://europa.eu/abc/european_countries/index_en.htm (last visited Feb. 3, 2009). The entry in 2004 of Cyprus, Malta, and eight Eastern European countries nearly doubled the number of official languages, jumping from eleven to twenty. Act of Accession, art. 58, 2003 O.J. (L 236) 33, 48 (EU), available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:236:SOM:en:HTML>. In 2007, Bulgaria and Rumania joined the EU, and Irish was added as an official language. European Commission, *Irish Becomes EU's 23rd Official Language* (Dec. 27, 2006), http://ec.europa.eu/news/culture/061227_1_en.htm.

8. Part of the explanation for the ECJ's success is that it seeks out Member States' policy views and legal and judicial expertise. See Francis G. Jacobs, *Judicial Dialogue and the Cross-Fertilization of Legal Systems: The European Court of Justice*, 38 TEX. INT'L L.J. 547, 549 (2003) ("[O]n every reference to the ECJ, both the parties to the national court proceedings and the governments of the Member States and the Union Institutions are entitled to present written observations and to take part in the hearing. Moreover, the [c]ourt itself is comprised of judges and advocates general from different Member States and with experience of diverse legal systems. The [c]ourt also has a research department that can, for example, provide a survey on the national laws of the Member States."). Nowadays, "[a]ll European judiciaries . . . accept [ECJ] decisions governing conflicts between Community law and Member State law." Henry G. Schermers, *Comment on Weiler's "The Transformation of Europe,"* 100 YALE L.J. 2525, 2530 (1991), quoted in LESLIE FRIEDMAN GOLDSTEIN, *CONSTITUTING FEDERAL SOVEREIGNTY: THE EUROPEAN UNION IN COMPARATIVE CONTEXT* 12 (2001); Martin Shapiro, *The European*

that the proliferation of languages actually *assists* the ECJ in its interpretation of statutes. To the extent that the goal of the court is to construe statutes to effectuate the intent of the legislature and to further the goals of the enacted directive or regulation, the existence of so many versions of the law makes this task easier. In other words, my argument is that the Babel of Europe facilitates communication.

Ideally, the linguistic practices of a supranational legal regime should meet three goals. The first, the value promoted most aggressively by the EU, is respect for the equality and sovereignty of the individual Member States. By treating each version of an EU law as an authoritative original, EU members are treated equally. Although the EU has three working languages—English, French, and German—the final forms of all laws are not limited to these three.⁹

The second goal concerning statutory interpretation in a supranational regime is that the laws should be construed in a manner that is faithful, in some meaningful way, to the intent of the drafters. Although fidelity to the legislative purpose is not the only goal of statutory interpretation,¹⁰ it is the principal goal in any legal regime. Yet it would appear to be more difficult to accomplish when laws are written in many languages, with each version, at least to some extent, reflecting the nuances of many legal cultures. If the laws mean very different things to the various members, whether because of legal, cultural, or linguistic differences among them, the project cannot succeed, since there will be no rule of law for the members to follow.

The third goal is efficiency. If the burden of maintaining a supranational legal order exceeds its benefits, it will lose influence over time and devolve into an obscure, costly burden on its members. The brochure of the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission indicates that it employs some 2350 people (1750 of whom are full-time

Court of Justice, in EURO-POLITICS: INSTITUTIONS AND POLICYMAKING IN THE “NEW” EUROPEAN COMMUNITY 123 (Alberta M. Sbragia ed., 1992) (discussing the ECJ’s role in shaping policy).

9. Europa, Languages—FAQ, <http://europa.eu/languages/en/document/59> (last visited Feb. 28, 2009) (“The European Commission, for example, conducts its internal business in three languages, English, French and German, and goes fully multilingual only for public information and communication purposes.”). Note, however, that “[t]he European Parliament . . . has Members who need working documents in their own languages, so its document flow is fully multilingual from the outset.” *Id.*

10. See William Eskridge, *Public Values in Statutory Interpretation*, 137 U. PA. L. REV. 1007, 1011 (1989).

translators),¹¹ likely at a cost of hundreds of millions of euros a year. Each time a new member joins the EU, tens of thousands of pages of documents must be translated into the language of the new member. To take a recent example, prior to the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, teams of sixteen Bulgarian and twenty Romanian translators arrived in Brussels to prepare for the addition of their languages to the group of official languages.¹²

These three goals—equality, fidelity, and efficiency—are in tension with one another. It would surely be more efficient to legislate in a single language, or a small group of official languages, perhaps those that are now the working languages of the EU.¹³ Such a move, however, would reduce the degree to which the system respects the equality and sovereignty of the individual members, since those whose languages are not represented as official languages would play a somewhat diminished role in the legal process.

The concern of this Article is with the second goal: fidelity. The question explored is how faithful to the will of the legislative body can decision makers be in a system that produces legislation in many languages and gives equal status to each version. The question would seem difficult to answer in the abstract because there is no particular measure of fidelity. However, it is certainly possible to investigate the extent to which the proliferation of languages affects the ability to render decisions faithful to the legislature in comparison to other regimes, such as those where decision makers operate in a monolingual legal order. It is also possible to hypothesize an intermediate legal order limited to a few languages and compare the work of the ECJ with what might happen in such a system. An “intermediate system” might contain, for example, three official languages in which legislation is written. Disputes could be resolved with reference to (a) the three official versions; and (b) the versions of the parties to the dispute if they differ from the official versions. If, say, a dis-

11. DIRECTORATE-GEN. FOR TRANSLATION, EUROPEAN COMM'N, TRANSLATING FOR A MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITY 5 (2009), available at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/bookshelf/brochure_en.pdf.

12. See Translation in the Commission: Where Do We Stand Two Years After Enlargement?, Commission Memo 06/173, Brussels (Apr. 27, 2006), available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/06/173&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

13. Some have argued that the passing of laws is delayed by the translation process and, accordingly, hinders other industries. See, e.g., Duncan Alford, *The Lamfalussy Process and EU Bank Regulation: Another Step on the Road to Pan-European Bank Regulation?*, 25 ANN. REV. BANKING & FIN. L. 389, 423–24 (2006) (arguing that the “translation bottleneck” causes “serious delays” that hinder financial services law in the European Union).

pute arose between Finland and Sweden, the ECJ would look to the three official versions (likely, English, French, and German), plus the Swedish and Finnish versions, in rendering a decision. The three legal orders and their effects on the three goals discussed earlier are set out in Table 1:

Table 1

	<i>Official Languages</i>	<i>Official Languages +</i>	<i>All Languages</i>
Equality	-	+/-	+
Fidelity	?	?	?
Efficiency	+	+/-	-

No doubt, the current legal order, reflected in the rightmost column, is both respectful of the sovereignty of the members, and quite costly, in terms of time and personnel. The open question is whether this multilingual legal order makes it easier or harder for a judicial body to remain faithful to the will of the enacting legislative body.

The rest of this Article explores this issue. Part I briefly develops the notion of fidelity more generally. Part II introduces the concept of Augustinian interpretation: the use of multiple versions of the same law as an advantage in discovering its intended meaning. The term reflects the similarity between this approach to interpreting statutes and the same method, developed by St. Augustine in the fourth century, for interpreting scripture. Part III explores the ECJ's use of Augustinian interpretation, including some recurrent situations in which it falls short.

I. FIDELITY TO LEGISLATIVE PURPOSE IN THE EU

Almost as a mantra, the ECJ looks to the legislative purpose in interpreting statutes.¹⁴ Sometimes called the "teleological approach" or "purposive approach" to statutory interpretation,¹⁵ the method is familiar to

14. See, e.g., Ian McLeod, *Literal and Purposive Techniques of Legislative Interpretation: Some European Community and English Common Law Perspectives*, 29 *BROOK. J. INT'L L.* 1109, 1125 (2004).

15. See, e.g., Nial Fennelly, *Legal Interpretation at the European Court of Justice*, 20 *FORDHAM INT'L L.J.* 656, 656, 665 (1997) (observing the appropriateness of this kind of approach in a multilingual setting); Kenneth M. Lord, Note, *Bootstrapping an Environmental Policy from an Economic Covenant: The Teleological Approach of the European*

those engaged in statutory interpretation in individual states. The court investigates the motivation for the legislation, including founding documents that set forth overarching legal goals, and resolves disputes in a manner that will further these goals.¹⁶ Thus, the court has said in a recent case, *Schulte v. Deutsche Bausparkasse Bardenia AG*, “Where it is difficult to interpret legislation from its wording alone, an interpretation based on purpose becomes fundamental. That is the case where the provision in dispute is ambiguous.”¹⁷ Such references to legislative purpose are easy to find.¹⁸ Barak has noted that purposive legislation typically “reflects, at various levels of abstraction, but particularly at the highest levels of abstraction, the intention of the text’s creator(s).”¹⁹

Just as easy to find are references to legislative intent, which is similar to legislative purpose, but focuses on somewhat narrower goals.²⁰ In fact, sometimes the ECJ uses both terms in the same case. For example, *Sonia Chacon Navas v. Eurest Colectividades SA*²¹ dealt with whether the dismissal of an employee for reasons of illness violated the EC Framework Employment Directive 2000/78, which makes it illegal to dismiss an employee because of a disability. In holding that the Directive does not encompass ordinary illness, the court noted that in construing the Directive, account must be taken of “the context of the provision and the objective pursued by the legislation in question.”²² But it also gave credence to the argument that it is important to enforce the protection “intended by the

Court of Justice, 29 CORNELL INT’L L.J. 571, 597 (1996) (observing that the teleological method is used to harmonize local laws with EU directives).

16. JOXERRAMON BENGOETXEA, THE LEGAL REASONING OF THE EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE: TOWARDS A EUROPEAN JURISPRUDENCE 234, 250–51 (1993).

17. Case C-250/03, *Schulte v. Deutsche Bausparkasse Bardenia AG*, 2005 E.C.R. I-09215, ¶ 87 (Opinion of the Advocate General), available at <http://curia.europa.eu/en/content/juris/index.htm> (follow “C-350/03” hyperlink; then follow “Opinion” hyperlink).

18. See, e.g., Case C-28/03, *Epikouriko Kefalaio v. Ipourgos Anaptixis*, 2004 E.C.R. I-08533, ¶ 26.

19. AHARON BARAK, PURPOSIVE INTERPRETATION IN LAW 87 (2005).

20. See, e.g., Case C-54/07, *Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en voor Racismebestrijding v. Firma Feryn NV*, 2008 ECJ CELEX 607J0054, ¶ 12 (“Article 19 of that law is intended to transpose art[icle] 8 of Directive 2000/43 relating to the burden of proof.”); Case C-275/06, *Productores de Musica de España (Promusicae) v. Telefonica de España SAU*, 2008 ECJ CELEX 606J0275, ¶ 43 (“It should be observed to begin with that the intention of the provisions of Community law thus referred to in the question is that the Member States should ensure, especially in the information society, effective protection of industrial property, in particular copyright, which Promusicae claims in the main proceedings.”).

21. Case C-13/05, *Sonia Chacon Navas v. Eurest Colectividades SA*, 2006 E.C.R. I-06467.

22. *Id.* ¶ 40.

legislature,”²³ by not giving employers *carte blanche* to ignore the disabling effects of certain illnesses. Thus, whether following a law’s language, purpose, or intent, the court’s obligation is to be faithful, and to give primacy to the legislative body that enacted the law.

Sometimes these approaches are contrasted with the goal of ascertaining the intent of the legislature by reference to the language alone, as American textualists would prescribe.²⁴ However, this distinction can be overstated. In its effort to be faithful to the will of the legislature, the ECJ is perfectly comfortable relying on language as an important clue. For example, in *Simutenkov v. Ministerio de Educación y Cultura*,²⁵ decided in 2005, the Advocate General noted, “The starting point for assessing [Article] 23 of the Agreement in isolation must be its wording.”²⁶

Because each EU directive is written in all twenty-three languages, this task is not a straightforward one, as the Advocate General observed: “[I]t must be borne in mind that Community legislation is drafted in various languages and that the different language versions are all equally authentic. An interpretation of a provision of Community law thus involves a comparison of the different language versions.”²⁷ Much of this Article argues that this additional step adds value to the linguistic analysis that takes place in the interpretation of monolingual legislation. Here, my point is that the ECJ does not ignore language in favor of ascertaining the legislative purpose. Rather, language provides a somewhat unique kind of evidence of purpose, and the court regards language differently for that reason.

Articulating the goal of fidelity, however, is easier than determining exactly when a judicial body is faithful in any particular case. In monolingual settings, the following questions recur: What does the statute say (generally, the best evidence of legislative intent is the language used in the law itself)? Does applying the plain meaning of the statute appear to undermine the intent of the legislature? If the statute is vague or ambiguous, are procedures available for resolving the ambiguity in order to reach a decision? If so, should courts risk compromising the rule of law as reflected in applying the statute as written in order to further the legislative purpose?

23. *Id.* ¶ 23.

24. See IAN MCLEOD, *LEGAL METHOD* 248–63 (2005).

25. Case C-265/03, *Simutenkov v. Ministerio de Educación y Cultura*, 2005 E.C.R. I-2579 (Opinion of the Advocate General), available at <http://curia.europa.eu/en/content/juris/index.htm> (follow “C-265/03” hyperlink; then follow “Opinion” hyperlink).

26. *Id.* ¶ 14.

27. *Id.*

These questions are not always easy to answer. To take an example from American law, the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act permits the federal Food and Drug Administration ("FDA") to regulate drugs and "devices" used for the delivery of drugs.²⁸ At the time the law was enacted, it was clear that the legislature did not intend to permit the FDA to regulate tobacco or tobacco products.²⁹ Since then, various efforts have been made to amend the statute to include tobacco, but these efforts have not succeeded.³⁰ Nonetheless, during the Clinton administration, the FDA promulgated regulations that set limits on the distribution of tobacco products.³¹ One of the major tobacco companies, Brown & Williamson, sued, claiming that the federal agency had no right to do so.³² In response, the agency argued that cigarettes can reasonably be seen as devices for the delivery of nicotine, and therefore, come within the scope of the FDA's regulatory authority.³³ A principle of American law requires courts to defer to the interpretation of an agency to which regulatory authority has been delegated if any reasonable understanding of the statute would support the agency's interpretation.³⁴

In a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed with the tobacco company and held the regulation to be invalid.³⁵ At stake was whether the purpose of the statute should prevail over language—the word "device"—that seems to permit the agency to have taken the action it did.³⁶ In this case, the Court held that the independent contextual evidence that the legislature did not intend to permit the regulation of tobacco should trump both the language of the statute and the principle calling for deference to administrative agencies.³⁷

28. Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, 21 U.S.C. §§ 301-99a (1938).

29. *See, e.g.*, S. 1468, 71st Cong. (1st Sess. 1929) (indicating that Congress considered and rejected a bill "[t]o amend the Food and Drug Act of June 30, 1906, by extending its provisions to tobacco and tobacco products").

30. *See, e.g.*, S. 2298, 102d Cong. (2d Sess. 1992) (trying to amend the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to grant the FDA jurisdiction over tobacco products); S. 769, 101st Cong. (1st Sess. 1989) (trying to amend the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to grant the FDA jurisdiction over tobacco products).

31. *See* Regulations Restricting the Sale and Distribution of Cigarettes and Smokeless Tobacco to Protect Children and Adolescents, 61 Fed. Reg. 44,396 (Aug. 28, 1996).

32. *Food & Drug Admin. v. Brown & Williamson Tobacco Co.*, 529 U.S. 120 (2000).

33. *Id.* at 127.

34. *See Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Res. Def. Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 843-44 (1984).

35. *Brown & Williamson*, 529 U.S. at 133.

36. *Id.* at 131-32.

37. *Id.* at 159-61.

On many other occasions, however, the Supreme Court has held that “the language of the statutes that Congress enacts provides ‘the most reliable evidence of its intent.’”³⁸ This creates a dilemma for courts that wish to be loyal to the instructions of the legislature, but sensible in drawing inferences about what the enacting legislature intended. To make matters more difficult, in many cases the legislature had no discernable intent at all concerning situations that arise before courts. As Justice Scalia has put it, “[W]ith respect to 99.99 percent of the issues of construction reaching the courts, there *is* no legislative intent, so that any clues provided by the legislative history are bound to be false.”³⁹ Strange things happen in this world, and legislatures cannot possibly predict each one of them. Dan Simon has argued that when faced with this problem, courts typically speak of purpose and intent, but really use arguments based on coherence to reach a conclusion about how the enacting legislature would have wanted the law to handle a particular situation.⁴⁰

European courts have traditionally been more comfortable than American courts in placing the purpose of a statute ahead of the language in the service of effectuating the legislature’s will. Professors Summers and Taruffo have described this approach:

The argument from ultimate purpose is today most often invoked in the USA when there is no credible argument from ordinary or technical meaning or when the argument from ultimate purpose merely reinforces the argument from ordinary or technical meaning; in other countries, such as Germany and Italy, the argument is invoked rather more widely. . . . The explanation for the declining repute of purposive argumentation in the USA, and for its relatively limited reception in the UK, is simply that it is often seen to conflict with arguments from ordinary or technical meaning which are taken to be the best evidence of purpose anyway.⁴¹

But evidence is evidence, whether it is put before an American court or a European court, and it is undeniable that the language of a statute provides privileged evidence of what the legislature intended. To take a classic example from the philosophical literature, when a law says “no

38. *Holloway v. United States*, 526 U.S. 1, 6 (1999) (quoting *United States v. Tur-kette*, 452 U.S. 576, 593 (1981)).

39. ANTONIN SCALIA, *A MATTER OF INTERPRETATION* 32 (1997).

40. See Dan Simon, *A Psychological Model of Judicial Decision Making*, 30 RUTGERS L.J. 1, 111 (1998).

41. Robert S. Summers & Michele Taruffo, *Interpretation and Comparative Analysis*, in *INTERPRETING STATUTES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY* 461, 472 (D. Neil MacCormick & Robert S. Summers eds., 1991).

vehicles in the park,”⁴² one can argue about the law’s applicability to a child riding a tricycle, but no sane person would think that the law sets a minimum age for buying tobacco products or regulates the dumping of toxins in the sea. That is, language, while often not constraining the range of possible interpretations to one, surely is the principal vehicle through which legislative will is expressed, and this expression is largely successful.

When it comes to the multilingual legislation of the EU, the options for achieving fidelity are both broader and narrower than they are for the monolingual legislation of most individual States. On the one hand, the introduction of additional language versions creates more data from which inferences of fidelity can be drawn. On the other hand, the proliferation of authentic versions in different languages means that there will not be a coherent history leading from a statute’s purpose to its language, since a process of translation must intervene. Of course, individual States with legislation written in more than one language must make their own rules to deal with the status of the various legislative versions, as is the case in Belgium, Canada, and, to some extent, Spain.⁴³ But in the typical situation in which a State’s laws are written in a single, authoritative version, courts may use the statute’s language as a fulcrum, deciding how much weight to give it in a particular dispute.

In contrast, when a dispute is over which of two fully authentic versions of a law should prevail, the status of the authoritative statutory language is itself contested. Courts may still endeavor to find the purpose of a law, but they must do so without the luxury of resort to a single, authoritative text.⁴⁴ Thus, the option of being an American-style “textualist”⁴⁵ is simply not available to interpreters of EU law. Also politically unattractive, but potentially useful, is the translation history of a law. It would be perfectly sensible, for example, for a court to begin with the French version, if that was the one with which the European Commission began during the drafting process. Then, the court could determine whether other versions reflect an error in translation. The ECJ, however,

42. This example is widely discussed in the literature. For a discussion from a linguistic perspective, see STEVEN L. WINTER, *A CLEARING IN THE FOREST: LAW, LIFE, AND MIND* 197–222 (2001).

43. For an excellent discussion of the bilingual and bijural regime in Canada, see Ruth Sullivan, *The Challenges of Interpreting Multilingual, Multijural Legislation*, 29 *BROOK. J. INT’L L.* 985 (2004).

44. For my views on some of the shortcomings of reliance on the literal meaning of the text in monolingual environments, see Lawrence M. Solan, *The New Textualists’ New Text*, 38 *LOY. L.A. L. REV.* 2027 (2005).

45. See *id.* at 2028.

typically does not engage in this method, although there are some early cases reflecting it, decided shortly after the Treaty of Rome, when there were six countries and four languages involved in EU legislation.⁴⁶

*Stauder v. City of Ulm*⁴⁷ provides an important illustration of this early method. This case involved an EU regulation that empowered members to subsidize the sale of butter to certain consumer groups as a means of assisting the dairy industry.⁴⁸ A consumer from the city of Ulm complained when a retailer asked him to reveal his name in order to qualify for the benefit, asserting that it violated his constitutional right to dignity.⁴⁹ The German and Dutch versions authorized the butter benefit to be given to consumers who had a coupon issued in their name.⁵⁰ The French and Italian versions required only that the consumer present an individualized coupon.⁵¹ Who was right? The court noted that the European Commission, which had to approve the measure, had agreed to a draft written in French, wherein the buyer did not need to provide his or her identity.⁵² The court concluded that the divergences in the German and Dutch versions must have been translation errors that occurred when the text was prepared for adoption by the European Commission.⁵³

More recently, however, this method has been used less frequently, for the same reason that the EU has not established an official language or given additional status to the three working languages. Reference to the translation history is the functional equivalent of selecting an official language. Doing so offends basic notions of sovereignty and equality among the members.

Yet, the ECJ does sometimes look at translation history as a last resort. Consider *Simutenkov v. Ministerio de Educacion y Cultura*,⁵⁴ where the court construed an agreement made between the EU and Russia that required each Member State to “ensure” that Russian nationals would not be discriminated against when attempting to obtain employment.⁵⁵ The complainant, a Russian national, was excluded from membership in a

46. See Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community, Mar. 25, 1957, 298 U.N.T.S. 11.

47. Case 29/69, *Erich Stauder v. City of Ulm*, 1969 E.C.R. 419.

48. *Id.* ¶ 1–2.

49. *Id.* ¶ 1.

50. *Id.* ¶ 2.

51. *Id.*

52. *Id.* ¶ 5.

53. *Id.* ¶ 3–7.

54. Case C-265/03, *Simutenkov v. Ministerio de Educacion y Cultura*, 2005 E.C.R. I-2579 (Opinion of the Advocate General).

55. Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation, EC-Russ. Fed’n, art. 23, June 24, 1994, 1997 O.J. (L 327) 3.

certain football club, as required under Spanish law, which limited membership in this club to Spanish nationals. The court first looked at the various language versions of the EU-Russia agreement, but found that some versions, such as the English version, used the word “ensure,” while others, such as the Spanish, used words akin to “endeavor.”⁵⁶ As there was no consensus, the court considered using the narrowest reading (“endeavor”), but found it to be unjustifiable under any legitimate theory of statutory interpretation.⁵⁷ By the same token, the court was unable to eliminate either language type as an outlier.⁵⁸ The court also rejected the idea of making a decision based on which interpretation was reflected in more languages than the other interpretation.⁵⁹ After disposing of all of these other approaches, the court turned to the translation history in order “to consider the intention of the parties and the object of the provision to be interpreted.”⁶⁰ The agreement was originally drafted in English, which uses the stronger word “ensured.” The court found this to be consistent with the broader purposes of the agreement in question.

Whether used as a tool in statutory interpretation, or as a last resort, translation is surely relevant to the interpretation of EU law. The American legal scholar, Lawrence Lessig, proposed more generally that a useful way of characterizing the quest for fidelity to legislative purpose is to liken the judicial role to that of a translator.⁶¹ As Lessig put it, “The translator’s task is always to determine how to change one text into another text, while preserving the original text’s meaning. And by thinking of the problem faced by the originalist as a problem of translation, translation may teach something about what a practice of interpretive fidelity might be.”⁶² Lessig, whose goal it was to explain statutory and especially constitutional analysis within the American legal system, spoke of translation as a way of expressing the thought that one can be faithful to a text without being entirely literal.⁶³ Translators routinely must decide how to balance the target text’s choice of words against the likelihood that readers will understand the translation as conveying the

56. *Simutenkov*, 2005 E.C.R. I-2579 at ¶ 15.

57. *Id.* ¶ 16.

58. *Id.* ¶ 17 (noting that one “solution would be to determine the clearest text”).

59. *Id.* ¶ 18.

60. *Id.* ¶ 20.

61. Lawrence Lessig, *Fidelity as Translation*, 71 TEX. L. REV. 1165 (1993).

62. *Id.* at 1173.

63. *Id.* at 1189–94.

same information as the original, which may require straying from a literal translation.⁶⁴

Translation cannot paint a complete picture of statutory interpretation in the monolingual context, however. As Sanford Levinson has pointed out, the analogy between translation and monolingual legal interpretation is imperfect.⁶⁵ Whereas translators bridge a knowledge gap between two groups of people separated by culture and language, the individual interpreting a monolingual statute is separated from the text only by time. How similar these gaps are is an empirical question.

When it comes to multilingual legal regimes like the EU, translation is more than a metaphor—it is a basic fact about the entire structure of the law. While translation history may not be used as extrinsic evidence of a law's meaning or purpose, a comparison of the various versions of the law provides an important tool for the ECJ.⁶⁶ It is of crucial importance to determine how effective this tool is, since it must both replace analysis of the plain language of a single statute and do the work of the translation history to which statutory interpreters may not refer. To the extent that reference to different language versions provides useful evidence of statutory purpose, it leads to a remarkable inference: the proliferation of languages in EU legislation actually aids interpreters in their quest for fidelity. In other words, Babel is not punishment, it is a gift.

II. AUGUSTINIAN INTERPRETATION IN THE EU

Among the methods of statutory interpretation that the ECJ employs is a comparison of various versions of the statute in question in different languages.⁶⁷ The court looks not only at the versions written in the languages of the parties to the particular dispute before the court, but also at other versions. For example, in *Commission of the European Communi-*

64. See, e.g., CHRISTIANE NORD, *TRANSLATING AS A PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY: FUNCTIONALIST APPROACHES EXPLAINED* (1997).

65. Sanford Levinson, *Translation: Who Needs It?*, 65 *FORDHAM L. REV.* 1457 (1997).

66. See, e.g., Case 283/31, *Srl CILFIT and Lanificio di Gavardo SpA v. Ministry of Health*, 1982 E.C.R. 3415, ¶18 (“To begin with, it must be borne in mind that Community legislation is drafted in several languages and that the different language versions are all equally authentic. An interpretation of a provision of Community law thus involves a comparison of the different language versions.”).

67. For a description and examples of cases using some of these comparative methods, see Geert Van Calster, *The EU's Tower of Babel—The Interpretation by the European Court of Justice of Equally Authentic Texts Drafted in More Than One Official Language*, 17 *Y.B. EUR. L.* 363 (1998).

ties v. United Kingdom,⁶⁸ the complainant challenged a domestic law written in English. Ultimately rejecting the English version, the ECJ compared the English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch versions of the relevant provision, which concerned workers' entitlement to minimum daily and weekly rest periods.⁶⁹ EU Directive 93/104 required that workers be given eleven hours per day and a twenty-four-hour period per week off from work.⁷⁰ While the English version also mandated that workers receive time off,⁷¹ it measured work by performance, rather than by time. Comparing the English version to those of other countries, the court determined that the British national legislation was too narrow to effectuate the objective of the relevant EU Directive.⁷²

The goals of this kind of multilingual inquiry are to determine consensus among the members as to the intended scope of the statute, and to discover whether a particular interpretation allowed (or not allowed) in the language of one of the members is a matter of linguistic happenstance rather than legislative deliberation.⁷³ I call this multilingual approach to statutory interpretation the "Augustinian approach."

In *On Christian Doctrine*, begun in the year 396, Augustine concerned himself with the question of how we can be sure that we understand, and therefore obey, the scriptures. He hypothesized, "Now there are two causes which prevent what is written from being understood: its being veiled either under unknown, or under ambiguous signs."⁷⁴ The solution, Augustine opined, was to look at the scriptures in both the original Hebrew and Greek, and in the various Latin translations:

The great remedy for ignorance of proper signs is knowledge of languages. And men who speak the Latin tongue, of whom are those I have undertaken to instruct, need two other languages for the knowledge of Scripture, Hebrew and Greek, that they may have recourse to the original texts if the endless diversity of the Latin translators throw them into doubt.⁷⁵

68. Case C-484/04, *Comm'n of the Eur. Communities v. United Kingdom*, 2006 E.C.R. I-7471 (Opinion of the Advocate General), available at <http://curia.europa.eu/en/content/juris/index.htm> (follow "C-484/04" hyperlink; then follow "Opinion" hyperlink).

69. *Id.* ¶¶ 62–63.

70. *Id.* ¶ 5.

71. *Id.* ¶¶ 7–9.

72. *Id.* ¶¶ 63–64.

73. See Case C-265/03, *Simutenkov v. Ministerio de Educacion y Cultura*, 2005 E.C.R. I-2579 (Opinion of the Advocate General).

74. AUGUSTINE, *ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE* bk. 2, ch. X, ¶ 15, available at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine/ddc2.html>.

75. *Id.* ch. XI, ¶ 16.

Ambiguity in a text may remain unnoticed, especially if it results from bad translation. Even worse, an incorrect translation can lead to a mistake as to the actual content of the divine scripture, in turn causing even the faithful to err. The surest way to discover such problems is to place competing versions (both in Latin and in predecessor languages, Hebrew and Greek) side by side and look for differences. Examining the translation history can root out obvious errors in the Latin versions. Residual ambiguity should be resolved in favor of promoting core religious values, such as charity.⁷⁶

What about those who do not know Hebrew or Greek? A comparison of Latin translations can also be helpful:

For either [an unknown word or an unknown expression may impede the reader.] Now if these belong to foreign [languages], we must either make inquiry about them from men who speak those [languages], or if we have leisure we must learn the [languages] ourselves, *or we must consult and compare several translators.*⁷⁷

Again, comparing the Latin to the originals in Hebrew or Greek, whether directly or with the help of others learned in these languages, is Augustine's first solution.⁷⁸ As for comparing various Latin translations with each other, while this at first appears to be a third-best method for those not able to consult the originals, it has its own advantages. Studying the various translations can be an improvement over relying upon a single translation. For even when translation is straightforward, some of the Latin vocabulary may be unfamiliar, making it necessary to infer meaning from the surrounding linguistic context. Augustine noted, "In this matter too, the great number of the translators proves a very great assistance, if they are examined and discussed with a careful comparison of their texts."⁷⁹

Augustine's reliance on a comparison of Latin translations was also a matter of necessity, as we now know. While he embraced whatever learning could be gleaned from studying the translation history of biblical text, he himself was not fluent in Greek and had even less control of Hebrew, at least early in his life. Frederick Van Fleteren notes,

Unlike contemporary exegetes, Augustine exegizes the Latin text, not the original Greek or Hebrew text; perhaps Augustine was thinking of

76. I only touch on Augustine's philosophy here. For a much fuller and richer discussion, see JAROSLAV PELIKAN, *THE MYSTERY OF CONTINUITY: TIME AND HISTORY, MEMORY AND ETERNITY IN THE THOUGHT OF SAINT AUGUSTINE* 123–39 (1986).

77. AUGUSTINE, *supra* note 74, ch. XIV, ¶ 21 (emphasis added).

78. *Id.*

79. *Id.*

priest-students in Carthage or Milan, or even his parishioners in Hippo. However, knowledge of foreign languages is necessary for the interpretation of unknown or ambiguous signs—sadly Augustine was not an example of his own principles.⁸⁰

Others make similar observations.⁸¹

Of Augustine's two methods—comparing translations to the original and comparing translations to each other—only the latter is readily available to the ECJ. The former method, as mentioned above, is used less frequently since it is inconsistent with the principle of equality.⁸² Conceptually, it is easy to see how resort to an original text can yield insight into the intent of the drafter of that document. In the absence of being able to draw such an inference, however, it is worth exploring just what makes the comparison of translations a valuable activity at all. Augustine provides some insight into this question as well. Not all translations are created equal. Again, in *On Christian Doctrine*, he complained: “[f]or in the early days of the faith every man who happened to get his hands upon a Greek manuscript, and who thought he had any knowledge, were it ever so little, of the two languages, ventured upon the work of translation.”⁸³ It is only by placing a bad translation next to a good one that, through a chain of inferences, the essence of the passage becomes clear. Sometimes a particular translation has captured it, but at other times, reading the various translations suggests a common theme, expressed in different words by each translator.

Capturing this essence of a scriptural passage is the goal of the biblical scholar,⁸⁴ and capturing the essence of EU legislation is the goal of the ECJ.⁸⁵ Like Augustine, the ECJ may rely upon virtual consensus among

80. Frederick Van Fleteren, *Principles of Augustine's Hermeneutic: An Overview*, in AUGUSTINE: BIBLICAL EXEGETE 1, 13 (Frederick Van Fleteren & Joseph Schnaubelt eds., 2001).

81. A. Bastiansen, *Augustine's Pauline Exegesis and Ambrosiaster*, in AUGUSTINE: BIBLICAL EXEGETE, *supra* note 80, at 33–34 (“His command of Greek was a limited one, not sufficient for an easy assimilation of the contents of theological treatises.”); G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Exegesis Against the Heretics*, in AUGUSTINE: BIBLICAL EXEGETE, *supra* note 80, at 145–46 (comparing Augustine and Jerome as textual critics, and referring to Augustine as an “amateur” in comparison because Jerome was conscious of the Hebrew and Greek, whereas Augustine “was dealing with an Old Latin text which was locally variable”).

82. *See infra* Part I.

83. AUGUSTINE, *supra* note 74, ch. XI, ¶ 16.

84. *Id.* ch. XII.

85. Article 220 of the consolidated version Treaty Establishing the European Community provides that the ECJ is to “ensure that in the interpretation and application of this Treaty the law is observed.” EC Treaty, art. 220, Dec. 24, 2002. Article 234 grants the

the different versions to uncover outliers that probably have simply gotten the point wrong, or it may attempt to find various threads running through the different versions which, taken together, suggest an underlying purpose behind the legislation.

Thus, Augustine and the ECJ are essentialists.⁸⁶ Only if some deeper, underlying understanding exists in the first place can one justify an enterprise whose task is to uncover such an essence. For both Augustine and the ECJ, language provides strong evidence of this essence, but the essence cannot be reduced to any single version of the text. As discussed below, there is an imperfect relationship between thought (conceptualization) and language (words). When evidence of thought becomes frozen in a single linguistic act, whatever imperfections exist become permanent. The ability to compare different versions and then to triangulate, however, brings out nuances that can help the investigator gain additional insight into the thoughts of the original drafter. For this reason, one would predict that the proliferation of languages in the EU actually aids the task of statutory interpretation, making it more likely that the court will come upon the intended goals of the legislation before issuing a ruling.

But biblical studies have one big advantage over the project of discovering the purpose behind EU law. There really *is* an original. For our purposes, statutory interpretation in the EU is statutory interpretation without a single, authoritative text.⁸⁷ Moreover, biblical translation, at least in the time of Augustine, involved only one target language—Latin.⁸⁸ Whether the European endeavor will succeed, in contrast, must depend upon a variable not relevant to Augustine: how well Augustinian interpretation will succeed in the multilingual statutory context is a func-

ECJ jurisdiction to issue rulings on “the interpretation of this Treaty . . . the validity and interpretation of acts of the institutions of the Community and of the ECB . . . [and] the interpretation of the statutes of bodies established by an act of the Council, where those statutes so provide.” *Id.* art. 234.

86. Essentialism is “a philosophic theory significantly concerned with and esp[ecially] based on a conception of essence or essential things.” WEBSTER’S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 777 (3d ed. 1993).

87. See Cay Dollerup, *The Vanishing Original*, 32 HERMES 185, 197 (2004) (“In this way, there is no one target text which has an unambiguous relation to one specific ‘original.’”).

88. In 382 C.E., the dominant language of the Roman Empire was no longer Greek (the original language of the New Testament), and thus, Pope Damasus commissioned the translation of the Bible into Latin—a task that took twenty years. See United Methodist Women, *Three Early Biblical Translations*, <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/bible/translations.stm>.

tion of what makes languages similar to each other and what makes languages different from each other.

In some respects, it seems likely that the proliferation of languages will help the statutory interpreter. To the extent that one language contains a syntactic ambiguity that allows multiple interpretations of a law, whereas other languages do not, the Augustinian approach will quickly unmask the outlier and make clear that the legislative body intended the meaning common to the other language versions. Far more difficult are the problems that arise from subtle differences in the meanings of words from language to language. The more people are designed to form similar concepts given similar experiences, the less it should matter which language they speak and the better a multilingual legal order should work. Divergence from one language version to another might be analyzed according to the following considerations: (a) people in different cultures speaking different languages have different experiences, reflected in words that appear to be translations of each other but really are not (e.g., *consideration/consideración*, *cause/causa*);⁸⁹ (b) languages express concepts differently from each other in small ways, suggesting that there is some truth to the Whorfian hypothesis that the concepts a language makes available influence thought;⁹⁰ and (c) people conceptualize idiosyncratically even when they share both experiences and cultural norms (for example, people vary as to whether they would say that a person who has deceived another person into believing something false has lied if the deception does not literally involve a false statement).⁹¹ If these sorts of conceptual issues did not arise, there would be no particular reason to engage in the Augustinian project because there would be no difference between one language and another. This is not to say that languages are internally crisp. But it does mean that looking at different languages to ascertain the purpose behind a law will only work if the different language versions are not exactly the same as one another, in both the intentional and extensional senses. Yet the languages must be close enough to each other to permit only a small set of possible interpretations. Otherwise, the amount of discretion available to a court would be so broad as to challenge the very notion of a supranational order governed by the rule of law.

89. See ENRIQUE ALCARAZ VARÓ, *EL ESPAÑOL JURIDICO* 216 (Ariel 2002) (discussing this classic problem regarding the translation between Spanish and English).

90. See generally BENJAMIN LEE WHORF, *LANGUAGE, THOUGHT, AND REALITY* (1956).

91. See generally LAWRENCE M. SOLAN & PETER M. TIERSMA, *SPEAKING OF CRIME: THE LANGUAGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE* (2005). For a more general discussion of variation in the conceptualization of nonparadigmatic cases, see Tim Schroeder, *A Recipe for Concept Similarity*, 22 *MIND & LANGUAGE* 68 (2007).

The solution to this problem lies in the nature of conceptualization. The concepts of people who speak different languages and live in different cultures will be most alike if people are designed to form the same or similar concepts from the same or similar experiences; and the experiences of people from the various Member States of the EU are similar enough. Using somewhat different vocabulary, Engberg nicely lays out this problem.⁹² Thus, the likelihood of identical concepts has both an innate component (our cognitive design) and a cultural one (how culture structures experience and represents it in that culture's language).

As for the innate component, during the past three decades, considerable progress has been made in the study of how people form concepts and categories. Many now believe that our concepts are complex entities consisting in part of prototypes based on experience, and in part of definitional conditions, whether necessary or sufficient.⁹³ Peter Tiersma and I have used the dictionary definition of the word "chair" to illustrate this point.⁹⁴ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, one of the leading dictionaries of American English, defines the word as follows: "[a] usu[ally] movable seat that is designed to accommodate one person and typically has four legs and a back and often has arms."⁹⁵ The only necessary (i.e., definitional) component is that the thing must be a seat designed for one person. All of the other features are prototypical in nature, expressed in the definition with the words "usually," "typically," and "often."

Psychologists now believe that we conceptualize by forming mental models that contain both kinds of information, and perhaps even more complex elements, such as how a concept interacts causally with the world.⁹⁶ No doubt people who speak different languages do not have precisely the same concepts. The fact that our concepts are in part comprised of experientially-based mental models would make such uniformity impossible. Moreover, work by the linguist Anna Wierzbicka shows that very few concepts are universally expressed in the languages of the world.⁹⁷

92. Jan Engberg, *Statutory Texts as Instances of Language(s): Consequences and Limitations on Interpretation*, 29 BROOK. J. INT'L L. 1135 (2004).

93. Cf., e.g., JERRY A. FODOR, *CONCEPTS: WHERE COGNITIVE SCIENCE WENT WRONG* (1998); GREGORY L. MURPHY, *THE BIG BOOK OF CONCEPTS* (2002).

94. SOLAN & TIERSMA, *supra* note 91, at 22.

95. WEBSTER'S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 370 (3d ed. 1993).

96. See MURPHY, *supra* note 93.

97. ANNA WIERZBICKA, *SEMANTICS, CULTURE AND COGNITION: UNIVERSAL HUMAN CONCEPTS IN CULTURE-SPECIFIC CONFIGURATIONS* (1992).

What is necessary for the success of the Augustinian method, then, is not the universality of concepts, but rather the universality of how our minds are designed. Similar experiences cause us to produce more or less the same concepts, whether considered individually or culturally. As the philosopher Jerry Fodor puts it, we conceptualize a “doorknob” as “the property that our kinds of minds lock to from experience with good examples of . . . doorknob[s] . . . [by] virtue of the properties that they have [as] typical doorknobs.”⁹⁸ If German and French doorknobs differ from each other, then we may find some differences in the mental models of doorknobs that French and German people form in their minds. But given exposure to the same types of doorknobs, including a sense of what a prototypical doorknob looks like, people of all cultures will make more or less the same thing of their experience. This suggests that to explain the success of Augustinian interpretation, not only must we be Whorfians,⁹⁹ but we must also be Chomskyans,¹⁰⁰ in the sense that an explanation of our innate endowment is a prerequisite to justifying the approach.

III. MULTILINGUAL INTERPRETATION IN PRACTICE

Augustinian interpretation does not always succeed—but it often does. Before we get to what can go wrong, let us look at a few examples of what may go right. Much of the time, consensus among the various language versions is used as a means to confirm the ECJ’s sense of the law’s purpose, which had already been determined on other grounds. For example, *Pretura unificata di Torino v. X* involved a regulation permitting local authorities to exceed concentrations of foreign particles in the water supply under certain emergency circumstances.¹⁰¹ Criminal proceedings had been brought against an official of Torino for violating Italian law by permitting excessive amounts of a contaminant to enter the water supply.¹⁰² He defended by relying upon the EU regulation.¹⁰³ Looking at various versions of the regulation, the court concluded that “it

98. FODOR, *supra* note 93, at 137.

99. See Benjamin L. Whorf, *An American Indian Model of the Universe*, 16 INT’L J. AM. LINGUISTICS 67 (1950), reprinted in LANGUAGE, THOUGHT, AND REALITY: SELECTED WRITINGS OF BENJAMIN LEE WHORF 57, 57–58 (John B. Carroll ed., 1964) (illustrating the assertion that for people of all cultures to understand concepts and experiences in the same way, despite linguistic differences, there must be mental universals).

100. See NOAM CHOMSKY, LANGUAGE AND PROBLEMS OF KNOWLEDGE 17 (1988) (arguing that knowledge of language is possible only via the interaction of language experience and our innate language faculty through which we interpret that experience).

101. Case 228-87, *Pretura unificata di Torino v. X*, 1988 E.C.R. 5099.

102. *Id.* ¶ 2–4.

103. *Id.* ¶ 4.

appears from the different language versions of Article 10(1) that the term ‘emergencies’ must be construed as meaning urgent situations in which the competent authorities are required to cope suddenly with difficulties in the supply of water indented for human consumption.”¹⁰⁴ Since this was not the case, the EU regulation would not provide a defense to domestic environmental crime prosecution.¹⁰⁵

At other times, as Augustine noted, various language versions can be used to find and discard outliers. Sometimes, the issue concerns simple errors in translation. Recall that the court typically avoids referring to any particular translation history because of the principle of equality. A broad comparison among language versions, however, makes a historical account unnecessary, as long as there is relative consensus. Many of these cases involve word choice. Consider *Lubella v. Hauptzollamt Cottbus*.¹⁰⁶ A regulation adopted protective measures with respect to the import of certain cherries into the EU.¹⁰⁷ Just about all of the versions of the regulation used the word for “sour cherries.”¹⁰⁸ But the German version, for some reason, had used the word for sweet cherries (*Suesskirschen*).¹⁰⁹ This fact made the scope of the challenged regulation entirely beyond controversy.¹¹⁰

Lubella provides an excellent vehicle for comparing the Augustinian approach to discovering a statute’s purpose with a textualist approach to statutory interpretation. The latter approach risks ossifying drafting errors that result from legislation written in clear, but erroneous, language. The study and comparison of various versions, in contrast, permit inferences to be drawn based upon consensus and outlying language. Most interestingly, this Augustinian approach does not require courts to stray from official textual material to extrinsic evidence subject to manipulation. To the contrary, the absence of a single text and the presence of many official, authoritative documents together provide a great deal of information that monolingual legislation does not. Thus, Augustinian interpretation gives maximum evidentiary weight to documents that actually have official status, reducing the likelihood that judges will substitute their values for those of the legislative body by straying too far from the legislative process in their analyses.

104. *Id.* ¶ 14.

105. *Id.* ¶ 18–19.

106. Case C-64/95, *Konservenfabrik Lubella Friedrich Büker GmbH & Co. KG v. Hauptzollamt Cottbus*, 1996 E.C.R. I-05105.

107. *Id.* ¶ 1.

108. *Id.* ¶ 4.

109. *Id.* ¶ 5.

110. *See id.* ¶ 17–18.

Other cases involve grammatical nuances. For example, in *Paterson v. W. Weddel & Co.*, the issue before the court was a criminal prosecution within the United Kingdom for violation of a regulation setting certain limitations on the operations of trucks.¹¹¹ An EU regulation, however, allows members to exempt from this regulation “transport of animal carcasses or waste not intended for human consumption.”¹¹² The United Kingdom had availed itself of this exemption, so if the shipper’s conduct was covered by the exemption, then no crime was committed.¹¹³ While it is clear that the exemption applies to waste not intended for human consumption, the question was whether it applies to all carcasses or only to those carcasses not intended for human consumption.¹¹⁴ The shipper being prosecuted was shipping, among other things, sides of beef intended for human consumption.¹¹⁵ The court looked at a number of versions of the regulation, finding most of them ambiguous.¹¹⁶ In the Dutch version, however, “the qualifying words ‘not intended for human consumption’ precede the term ‘carcasses’ and consequently can apply only to both waste and carcasses.”¹¹⁷ The unequivocal version was given a privileged status in this context and was used to reinforce arguments based upon the purpose of the regulation.¹¹⁸

To those versed in American law, the problem resembles cases that consider the proper application of the last antecedent rule, which says that “a limiting clause or phrase . . . should ordinarily be read as modifying only the noun or phrase that it immediately follows.”¹¹⁹ The problem with this rule, however, is that in situations like the one before the ECJ, it is not possible to determine in advance whether the last antecedent is the entire disjointed phrase or the last of the disjuncts. Augustinian methodology provides evidence that may help in resolving this question in particular cases.

In contrast, the Augustinian method does not always bear fruit. Jan Engberg¹²⁰ writes about *Commission of the EU v. United Kingdom*,¹²¹ a

111. Case 90/83, *Paterson v. W. Weddel & Co.*, 1984 E.C.R. 1567.

112. *Id.* ¶ 5.

113. *Id.* ¶ 6–7.

114. *Id.* ¶ 9.

115. *Id.* ¶ 2.

116. *Id.* ¶ 10.

117. *Id.* ¶ 11.

118. *Id.* ¶ 12–17.

119. *United States v. Kerley*, 416 F.3d 176, 180 (2d Cir. 2005) (quoting *Barnhart v. Thomas*, 540 U.S. 20 (2003)). For a discussion of this principle, see LAWRENCE M. SOLAN, *THE LANGUAGE OF JUDGES* (1993).

120. Engberg, *supra* note 92, at 1137–39, 1157–61, 1165–66.

121. Case 100/84, *Comm’n of the E.U. v. United Kingdom*, 1985 E.C.R. 1169.

case involving how we conceptualize fishing. British trawlers were engaged in joint fishing expeditions in the Baltic Sea with Polish trawlers.¹²² The British vessels would cast the nets; the Polish vessels would then trawl for fish; and the Polish vessels would then turn the nets over to British vessels, which would bring the fish on board.¹²³ If these fish were deemed to have been caught by the Poles, then a tariff would be due.¹²⁴ If caught by the British, there would be no tax.¹²⁵

The English version of the regulation in question says first that “goods wholly obtained or produced in one country shall be considered as originating in that country”;¹²⁶ and second that “the expression ‘goods wholly obtained or produced in one country’ means . . . products of sea-fishing and other products taken from the sea by vessels registered or recorded in that country and flying its flag.”¹²⁷ The Commission claimed that the Poles had “obtained” the fish since they were the ones who separated the fish from their natural habitat.¹²⁸ The British claimed that “taken from the sea” should be construed literally, and that the fish did not leave the sea until the British trawler lifted the nets containing the fish that were caught by the Poles.¹²⁹

To resolve the dispute, the court looked at a number of different language versions, but learned nothing from them.¹³⁰ The French *extraits de la mer* was subject to both interpretations: taken out of the sea and separated from the sea.¹³¹ Other versions, including the Greek, Italian, and Dutch, were just as ambiguous.¹³² The German word, *gefangen*, meaning caught, was more helpful to the Commission’s position.¹³³ The court conceded that “a comparative examination of the various language versions of the Regulation does not enable a conclusion to be reached in favour of any of the arguments put forward and so no legal consequences can be based on the terminology used.”¹³⁴ Anthony Arnall observed that this is the typical approach of the court in such situations.¹³⁵ In this case,

122. *Id.* ¶ 2.

123. *Id.* ¶ 3.

124. *Id.* ¶ 4.

125. *Id.*

126. *Id.* ¶ 7.

127. *Id.*

128. *Id.* ¶ 11.

129. *Id.* ¶¶ 11–12.

130. *Id.* ¶¶ 15–16.

131. *Id.* ¶ 15.

132. *Id.*

133. *Id.*

134. *Id.* ¶ 16.

135. ANTHONY ARNALL, *THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS COURT OF JUSTICE* (1999).

the court determined, without the assistance of a comparative analysis of the various language versions, that holding the British vessel liable for the tariff was more consistent with the purpose of the regulation.¹³⁶ The opposite result would have permitted members to “game” the regulation by doing with impunity just what the regulation sought to prohibit: importing fish caught by nonmembers into the EU without the imposition of a market penalty.¹³⁷ Thus, the court relied on arguments based on coherence as a surrogate for legislative purpose.¹³⁸

What went wrong? Recall that multilingual statutory interpretation is essentialist in nature. Since there is no single text, there must be some message that the array of texts, taken as a body, has attempted to convey. The significant overlap in meaning implies that to a large extent, the communication is likely to have been successful. When I, as a native speaker of English, refer to fishing, however, I really do not know whether the essential element is pulling the fish out of the water or catching the fish on the line. It has never really mattered much to me. Perhaps they are both part of the essence, or perhaps they are alternatively part of the essence. If what is true for me is true for many people in my culture and for many people in very similar cultures where Germanic and Romance languages are spoken, then it should not be surprising to find confusion across the board, with only a few languages taking a position on the matter—perhaps as a matter of happenstance, perhaps for more interesting cultural and historical reasons.

What we can conclude from this case is that Augustinian reasoning does not work to clarify a concept when the dispute requires us to take a position on a subtle aspect of the concept that has been neither culturally nor individually resolved. If the essence of fishing is not a universal, and if our common experience permits us to focus on both aspects of the activity with more or less equal attention, then the comparison of different language versions will have taught us only that a particular version’s clear statement in one direction or the other is likely to be accidental and should be ignored. Thus, Augustinian methodology, even when it does not give us a single answer, may caution against drawing strong conclusions from the clarity of any particular version.

CONCLUSION

Let us return to the three values discussed at the beginning of this Article: equality, fidelity, and efficiency. In Table 1, the question of fidelity

136. See 1985 E.C.R. 1169 at ¶¶ 18–22.

137. See *id.* ¶¶ 19–21.

138. See *id.* ¶¶ 16–22.

was an open issue. At this point, we can fill in some of the question marks as follows in Table 2:

Table 2

	<i>Official Languages</i>	<i>Official Languages +</i>	<i>All Languages</i>
Equality	-	+/-	+
Fidelity	-	?	+
Efficiency	+	+/-	-

That is, the proliferation of language versions appears to add to the likelihood that the court will get a case right, where getting it right means issuing a judgment that is more likely to further the purpose behind the law, and that is consistent with the intent of the enacting legislature. This is true when the method appears to succeed, and it is even true when the method appears to fail, in that the knowledge that the members' versions lack consensus gives the court due warning that it should not pay too much attention to any particular version that appears clear on its face.

The conclusion that Babel actually serves to clarify communication is a surprising one, especially for an American academic who is accustomed to an environment in which at most two languages are spoken, and who comes from a culture in which textual analysis reigns, both in statutory interpretation and the law of contracts. Nonetheless, my happy conclusion is precisely this: Augustine had it right when he observed that the careful study of different translations of the same text is likely to lead to a deeper understanding of the text's essential meaning.

