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REVIEW ESSAY

**A New Weber for the International Academic Audience**

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## REVIEW ESSAY

### **A New Weber for the International Academic Audience**

**Economy and Society: A New Translation**, by Max Weber, edited and translated by Keith Tribe. Cambridge, MA & London, UK, Harvard University Press, 2019, 520 pp, \$24.95 / £19.95 / €22.50 (paperback), ISBN 9780674916548.

It has been almost a century since Max Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* was first published and for the first time we have an English translation of the text as it most truly originally stood. The case definitively serves as a testimony not only of the extraordinarily composite texture of Weber's far-reaching mind but also of the many influential readers of an unusually diverse range of origins and concerns that took up an interest to draw insights from his work without having the privileges of the archival and contextual kinds of knowledge that have been somewhat belatedly informing our understanding of one of the greatest figures in the disciplinary landscape of the present-day humanities. The dues for this compelling achievement belong to the already acknowledged Keith Tribe, who has made optimal use of his rare breadth of knowledge of the relevant scholarship along with the academic skill that he has been striving to build for several decades in his accordingly very thoroughly prepared work as the editor and translator of an essentially 'new' version of a gravely misapprehended classical statement. This being so, in what follows we will begin the presentation of the volume by bringing up the different kinds of merit which we consider to be due to the work and gradually we will be adding a few thoughts on its possible further elaboration as well as on Weber's emerging appreciation in this new light.

Starting with the most material aspects, it is worth pointing out that Tribe has quite literally given us a new book instead of a mere translation. The case has been apparently the outcome of a diligently documented account of the complex history surrounding the actual writing of the four chapters of this volume and their first appearances in print, which is presented at the editor's Preface and Introduction. This is where readers are informed that these chapters were originally planned to form part of Weber's contribution to a much larger collective publication project supervised by himself and meant to provide an overview of *Sozialökonomik*; that these were the only pieces that Weber found the time to write specifically for the project and send for publication shortly before his sudden death in 1920; and how most of their career in print began as the opening part of two successive series of multi-volume collections of Weber's relevant writings that Marianne Weber and her associates edited and published under the general title *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. In these respects, Tribe manages to prove that we have best reasons to accept under this title only these four chapters which are included in this translation and which have been regularly known up to now as *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft I* (abbreviated by Tribe as *WuG I* in an effort to keep them distinct from the multi-volume *WuG*), since the other volumes that kept on being published along with this are actually comprised of older manuscripts that Weber would definitely seek to rework in order to make them fit to the standpoint that he was elaborating for this case. Furthermore, Tribe goes one step further in the publication record of the book by expanding on the people and circumstances surrounding the previous English and German published versions of the book. This allowed him to do greater justice than usual to the role that Talcott Parsons played in the entire process as an unwilling translator who eventually agreed to undertake this role in an effort to rescue Weber's reception from Friedrich von Hayek's aspirations when the latter

originally commissioned the project as part of a larger series of translated titles on Austrian and German economics, and who actually proved to have made more insightful translating choices than the following translators of the same book in English in more than one occasions. Parsons' case and his retrospective turn into a convenient target for critics of various kinds of motivation allows Tribe also to give a brief but illuminating commentary on a further source of the later problems in Weber's reception, which have been already largely documented by several other scholars<sup>1</sup> and thus have been rightly kept outside of an already lengthy introductory note. Finally, another important intervention of the editor on the actual text has to do with the choice of format for the presentation of Weber's classificatory divisions, which run through the text from beginning to end. This is a matter of paramount importance for the readers' understanding of the way Weber worked both in this text and more generally throughout his writings and Tribe has once again done a great work by compartmentalizing Weber's multiple divisions and subdivisions in separate lines and paragraphs and with a different range for each divisional order, providing thus greater detail even than the German original printing, letting alone their compression in English editions as part of an uninterrupted text within continuous lengthy paragraphs. The editor allows his readers to appreciate by themselves the interventions conducted at this point by providing a picture of a sample page-set of both the original print and of Parsons' translation of the same part, whereas the chosen format facilitates the assessment of the logical weight of each division and its particular items. In this way the editor brings to

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<sup>1</sup> In these respects see Lawrence A. Scaff, *Weber and the Weberians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and Peter Ghosh, 'History and theory in Max Weber's 'Protestant Ethic'', *Global Intellectual History*, 2 (2018).

the surface the hard-won overall logical coherence of Weber's elaborate account, of which readers may most fully become aware by having also a look at the book's Appendix B, which presents Chapter One's so-called 'definitional' paragraphs in straight succession without Weber's additional comments and internal divisions for each case. An issue on which one may further stand a little more is Tribe's choice to refer to Weber's core numbered paragraphs, in which the different ideal types for each case are set in order one after another, as 'definitional' and to the explanatory and internally numbered paragraphs that follow each paragraph of the former kind as 'expository'. This can be slightly misleading since, as Weber himself notes in one place (p. 206), the former part of the text is meant to achieve a condensing 'expositional' effect, quite much in the received Hegelian sense of the word, for the readers' easiest grasp both of each presented case and of the succession of the different cases, whereas the latter part was used by Weber as a 'commentary' (a term employed in the actual text in this sense in pp. 113, 167, 215, 243) meant to clarify what lay behind each choice of terms in the presented definitions and to minimally address any foreseeable objections and sources of confusion.

That much having been said about the most material aspects of the book, one may turn next to its more interpretative features. At this point, the first thing that one needs to note is Tribe's bent to assess Weber and his project primarily in the light of the prevalent terms and broader historian's *ethos* that have been nowadays turned into an academic commonplace by the so-called 'Cambridge School' history of political thought and ideas. This is an apparent turning point in Tribe's own intellectual trajectory as well, since this same author used to be one of the most pioneering critics of this approach in times when its leading practitioners used to work in grave isolation from non-Anglophone scholar

approaches of a similar inclination, such as the one associated with Reinhart Koselleck, an old-favourite for Tribe, who is turned in this text into a very insightful authority to be consulted in parallel terms to the Cambridge approach. In all cases, Tribe's longtime historical bent has had important implications for the ways in which he has worked in this volume in order to make Weber better understood. One part of the merits of this kind of thought can be seen in the editor's constant references and consultation of the editions of the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*, which allow him not to ask for more things out of his interpretation of Weber's writings than what he can actually receive, whereas Tribe does not fall short of occasionally expressing in great clarity his different views from these editions as a result of his own longtime study of the author. This brings us to the second part of Tribe's historical merits that he also brings up throughout the volume. These have to do with Tribe's precious knowledge of an extensive range of very particular contexts of considerable importance for readers interested to appreciate Weber's text in fuller detail. As presented in this book, these have to do mostly with the long-forgotten titles of German and Austrian economics, with the authors of which and their intricate vocabulary Weber was quite much set to argue, as well as with the most influential works of other German-speaking intellectuals of the times, for whose case Tribe has gone into the particular labour of disentangling every single instance from the reductionist labelings with which such later academic disciplines as sociology went on to accustom their graduates to think about them. However, it is further worth pointing out that Tribe's work with Weber in this book does not stop with these hard and precious fruits, since in cases where a simple resource to contexts or the archive does not suffice to set things straight for the more delicate nuances of Weber's thought, the editor also goes on to suggest inferences based on comparisons between texts and on the identification of more discretionary 'clues' fitting for each case. Tribe's interpretative interests in the text also reach another step

further from a crude historian's work when he comes to appreciate the degrees of success in what has to do with the logical coherence of Weber's ordering divisions throughout the book. At this point, Tribe emphasizes more than once Weber's said increasing loss of balance after the most fully elaborate Chapter One in what has to do with the allocation of space and argumentative gravity in the text between the 'definitional' and the commentary part, with the placing and the succession of themes in the different chapters, and with the ending presentation of a mere list of intricate divisions in Chapter Four. Even though Tribe's suggestions on such issues seem to be plausible and tend to be supported by various features of the text, such as Weber's internal cross-references to chapters and topics that he never wrote, a few mismanagements on the numbering of the divisions, as well as from Weber's circumstantially growing need to finalize a version of the text and send it for publication, a non-Weberologist's impression out of reading the book, which actually Weber did allow to get published as a whole, was that it was usually not that difficult to see through an overall logical sequence in the divisions and chapters in most cases, whereas the differences in the placing of divisions in the 'definitional' or in the commentary part of the text along with Weber's choices to provide further definitions or divisions of a textually shorter or larger range than the standards set by Chapter One in different places and in both textual parts can be viewed as having been conducted with a view to their intended reception under the terms set by the 'expositional' effect of Chapter One and by the following paragraphs meant to achieve such effects of an according range. In these respects, Tribe may also take benefit out of Raymond Aron's old comment on the way the French historians of his time in France were trying to disintegrate the different parts of Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois*, which suggested for the examined case that

[b]efore resigning ourselves to an interpretation which assumes the historian to be so much wiser than the original author, capable of perceiving immediately the



contradiction that supposedly eluded the genius, we must look for the internal order which Montesquieu, wrongly or rightly, discerned in his own thought.<sup>2</sup>

The next issue on which one should stand has to do with the actual work of the translation and its choices. The nowadays experienced translator, who already has a treatise on translation in his publication record, has once again made great use of his skills, as one can tell from the achieved effect of a very natural flow of language throughout the text, which is said to have been prepared so that it would ‘not artificially smooth the path for a reader but [be] organized in a way that provides the reader with appropriate assistance’ (p. ix), and which may perhaps serve as strong evidence that Tribe has quite much understood what Weber had in mind when writing the book. In order to meet this end, Tribe had to go much further than exclusively adopting the most direct lexical equivalent of the expectedly much-connotated original German words in English, opting instead for the English words that best capture the intended meaning of their originals and ending up thus quite more properly for the case with frequent uses of different English words for a single German. Since a venture of this kind seems to always leave room for reservations, possible objections and different intents of emphasis, such as those that may occur out of the translation of *Verband* as simply ‘organization’, Tribe goes at great lengths to explain many of his translating choices and the senses which are meant to be conveyed in each case in the light of the available English alternatives, both in footnotes throughout the main text as well as in a more

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought: Vol. I: Montesquieu, Comte, Marx, Tocqueville, The Sociologists and the Revolution of 1848*, trans. Richard Howard & Helen Weaver (New York & London: Basic Books Inc., 1965), 18.

concentrating Glossary that makes up the book's short Appendix A. One may note here the absence of a discussion throughout the whole book of the apparently innovating translations used for Weber's few but crucial references to *Macht*, *Kraft* and associate terms, which could assist readers to appreciate what the translator has been doing with them.

The final topic to be raised could be no other than a few thoughts on the individual chapters of the volume. Chapter One on 'Basic Sociological Concepts' was very easy to read all the way from Weber's most introductory definitions for his claimed *Verstehen*- and individual-action-based sociology and its basic concepts up until the recommended gradual construction of an effectively and transparently 'objective' account for the very complex reality of the frequently mythified modern state, resting upon the smaller typified pieces of his conceptual edifice. An interesting feature early in the chapter has to do with the use of characteristic 'Cambridge' terms for the translation of certain crucial features of Weber's suggested method, possibly intimating the confluence of both approaches. In these respects we see the role that 'intention' plays in the explication of Weber's account for his multiple uses of 'meaning', whereas Tribe also shows a preference for translating *Beziehung* as 'context', employing thus another term that Quentin Skinner was also in the process of popularizing at about the same years when an older English translation of the work was becoming available.<sup>3</sup> As for one more topic to stand out of this much-impressive chapter, it might be worth following

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<sup>3</sup> See the original publications of the pieces most readily available nowadays as Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics – Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Tribe's introductory suggestion of seeing the typified concept of *Herrschaft*, translated throughout the volume as 'rulership' or 'rule', as 'serving as the glue that keeps social, economic, and political organization together' and as 'the defining feature of all organization' (p. 67). The importance of this point is quite crucial, since it seems to approximate Weber to a view that is nowadays treated in academic debates as the issue of 'political representation' and which the international academic audience is most habituated to ascribe as more characteristic of Thomas Hobbes, whereas offshoots of German-language education quite often attribute this kind of view to the notorious mind of Carl Schmitt as well. In all cases, it is also worth pointing out that both in this chapter as well as in Chapter Three Weber retained the actual term 'representation' for a quite narrower role than that which *Herrschaft* will keep on playing at the book.

Chapter Two on the 'Basic Sociological Categories of Economic Action', the largest one in the volume, shifts the focus of Weber's account to a very different province, which seems to have had to do with the possible extent of a reformulation of the basic concepts and themes of the disciplinary economics of the times in a way that could render it most typically accessible to the suggested 'sociology' of Chapter One. In these respects, the experience of a reader not immersed in economics was that all parts of the text could be patiently understood, owing also quite much to Tribe's well-chosen translations and clarificatory provisions of more particular contexts, up until the typically most advanced features of modern capitalism, as the latter was meant to be very broadly conceived back in Weber's time. The editor notes some correspondences with Chapter One, but one feels that much more can be found and said here, which could also possibly bring to further light Weber's overall design in writing the volume's chapters. To restrict ourselves to a few selected points, one of the most interesting features of Chapter Two has to do with the prevailing emphasis to economic (and

economically oriented) actions as most typically rational, and in fact more specifically as approximating the traits of the most archetypal instance of social action outlined in Chapter One §2, i.e. the type of social action said to be determined by purpose-oriented rationality. Furthermore, approximations between the two chapters to such an archetypal level do not stop here, as one may also tell out of Weber's prefatory pride in the chapter (p. 143) in having quite much managed to eliminate the language of 'value' throughout his typifications for this section and his unwilling resource to the same word within brackets in Chapter One's well-known parts, which seems to be explicated in turn by its place in the account of 'substantive rationality' in Chapter Two §9. This being so, such cases suggest both how much Weber seems to have been reworking the different chapters in parallel terms struggling to achieve an optimal expositional whole, as well as a part of the reasons for Weber's frequent choice of terms originating from the language of economy (next to that of law) for the elaboration of his more general types.

Chapter Three, which ended up with the minimal title 'Types of Rule', may allow for a more extensive commentary by people trained in present-day academic disciplines strongly concerned with the study of 'politics'. Keeping ourselves once again to a selection, a close reading of Weber's massively erudite presentation of the famous three pure types for legitimate *Herrschaft* makes clear the strong expositional connections of this part of the volume also with the previous ones, since the three (emphatically *pure*) types are elaborated on the same pattern as Weber's other three types of social action beyond the purpose-rational one, giving us thus the correspondence of the legal type of rule to value-rational social action, that of charismatic rule to affective social action, and that of traditional rule to traditional social action. Weber also makes quite clear that these types should be understood as far from

operating simply on the basis of particular motivations, but as requiring in turn an accordingly typically distinguished belief in the 'legitimacy' of rulers, which therefore encompasses all three types instead of its stereotypical view as a polar opposite for 'legality'. Quite interestingly also, Weber does not begin his exposition this time from the most elementary types in order to gradually reach the most developed and characteristically 'modern' ones, as the case had been in the previous chapters, but chooses instead to start with the quite 'modern' case of 'legal' or 'rational' rule, in comparison to which traditional and charismatic rule are successively examined, prior to Weber's disclosure of the origins and dues of legal rule itself to a combination of features of the other two types in §13.

The successive sections of the same chapter turn to more historically concrete combinations of the pure types into various kinds of *forms* of rule and their individual components that bring us from feudalism up until Weber's contemporary West. One may add at this point that the discussion of feudalism reveals Weber's concern to present a more elaborate account in place of Montesquieu's much older investigation, on a matter of prime importance for the subsequent fates of the occidental world that had been barely brought to light ever since the latter's classic work, as one may also tell out of Weber's subsequent attempt to account for the concrete origins and the relatively limited chances for a rational restructure of the 'separation of powers'. It is throughout the same parts of this chapter also that Weber begins to intimate towards the status of 'so-called democracy' (p. 341), keeping his views on the topic in some distance from less patient readers along with inserting further references about it to chapters that he seemingly never wrote. In all cases, one may note how democratic legitimacy and our ideas of 'election' and law-making by community first appear in §14 in the course of gradual reinterpretations of retrospective signs of 'proof' of charismatic authority, as

well as how Weber – in sharp contrast to older stereotyped presentations of his views – sees then what he calls ‘leader democracy’, and especially ‘plebiscitary rule’ or said ‘plebiscitary democracy’, as transitional and still partially charismatic instances in comparison to ‘leaderless democracy’, which Weber once describes as ‘characterized by the effort to minimize the rule of man by man’ (p. 408). What actually succeeds in the chapter the discussion of the impressively great range of such transitional forms, from ancient Greece, its *aisymnetes*, tyrants and demagogues, up until Louis Napoleon, the ‘party leaders’ of the modern state and characteristic features of the ‘American “democracies”’, is a similarly thoroughly expansive account of specific social relationships and organizations meant to circumscribe or limit rule, starting from §§15-17. Weber mostly expands here on the establishment of the principle of collegiality in place of monarchy in a wide range of forms, starting from parallel veto-empowered monarchs and reaching up to the most advanced case of the collegial elections of parliamentary representatives, shortly before Weber’s accompanying remark that ‘there is nothing at all especially “democratic” about collegiality’, since this tends to be employed both by monarchs seeking support in underprivileged groups against those privileged and vice versa (p. 419). Perhaps this also forms part of the reason why Weber suggests that the most collegial or ‘leaderless’ kind of parliamentarianism is in need of the intra-organizational ‘free organizations’ called parties, famously cold-bloodedly seen as controlled by leaders and staff aiming to attract ‘passive “collaborators”’ (p. 429) by offering programs, but still as forming part of a much more potent and enduring ensemble than the suggested alternative of ‘disempowered administrative organization’ of the said ‘direct democracy’, which typically ends up being administered by ‘notables’ or ‘representatives’ in place of an ongoing all-members’ general assembly. This typical outcome allows Weber to turn to a closing of the chapter with a discussion of the types

of representation within organized rule that ends up highlighting the development of the distinctively modern Occidental type of 'free representation', designated as ascribing representatives with a 'freedom of choice' that turns them into figures of authority for their voters and including no overt reference to Edmund Burke at this point. In any case, the forms that the type of 'free representation' is said to have assumed in Weber's account bring us to the most recognizable seats of established politics of our times, since 'the most developed form' appears in what Weber calls in an increasingly transitive choice of words 'representation in parliament' and 'parliamentary government', whereas the other forms listed seem to consist in extensions or combinations of this case with other features analyzed above, such as in the cases of 'purely representative government' and 'pure representative democracy', on the one hand, and 'constitutional government', on the other. As for the very ultimate 'definitional' paragraph of Chapter Three, this is left by Weber for a discussion of the additional post-parliamentarian typical development of the characteristically non-free 'representation by agents aligned with interest groups', which is hesitantly analyzed as offering some further chances for rational leaderlessness, 'in theory at least', and as possibly 'either radically revolutionary or radically conservative' (pp. 444-445). As the items included in the latter type make clear, this kind of representation provides the basis for the minimal Chapter Four, entitled 'Social Ranks and Social Classes' and almost exclusively comprised of lists of typical divisions, vindicating thus the intended expositional unity of the volume as a whole.

To close this brief presentation of a book provenly meant to always leave much to be further said, one may turn to no better place than its actual copious author and his well-known broader aspirations. In these respects, it might be worth noting that even though

Max Weber seems to have done more than anyone else in the recent times in order to give us strong reasons to avoid using the solemn work performed under the name of social science as a machine able to generate predictions for the future, one may expect that Tribe's volume will probably meet a great number of thankful readers of different levels of study around the world interested to seriously appreciate and take advantage of Weber's outstanding work.

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