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MAX WEBER AS A TEXT

To my surprise, I found that I had given this paper a title "Max Weber as a text". I cannot exactly remember why I did so. But let me start to think about it with some demarcations related to the Weber studies, with some difficulties and experiences in the Weber interpretations by classifying the arts of textuality. Then I will say a few words on Weber as a classic in political theory. In the Addendum I will illustrate the textual genres with examples from Weber's work.

By dealing with Max Weber as a text, I do *not* mean that Max-Weber-the-person did not exist. I am by no means a structuralist or a discourse analyst who denies the existence of the individual.

There is obviously a kind of textbook-Max-Weber. He is a "German sociologist, 1864–1920" or a legend present in the innumerable memorial narratives from that time (cf. esp. the special Weber volume of *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* of 1963). Surely Max Weber was a fascinating personality, and this is part of his reputation as a classic. My point is that this kind of preliminary view on Weber's "life and work", whether a raw textbook variant or a richer and more anecdotic biographical variant, rather prevents than promotes a close and attentive reading of the texts written by him. In a problematizing reading of his text we more or less need to forget our received view on Max-Weber-the-figure in order to find there something different.

Closely related to the previous point is that the earlier readings of Max Weber's texts not only contribute to the figure of Weber but also to the construction of the texts themselves. So different the forms of Weber-reception are, as demonstrated by Sven Eliæson (1982 and further publications) and others, that I think their common effect is rather to simplify than to diversify the horizons of reading Weber. Not only the figure of Weber but also the texts themselves have being canonized in a rather questionable manner.

The next step outside the Weber-of-the-reception is the Weber-of-the-context. An important move in the Weber scholarship in the eighties and nineties is to remove Max Weber from the received context of the 20th century Anglo-American academic sociology and to put him back to his "contemporary contexts", in plural, of course – otherwise he would not have been Max Weber (cf. esp. Mommsen & Osterhammel [eds] 1986). So important this contextualization is that it seems to lose its heuristic value, when comparisons are multiplied and Weber again appears as only one of the turn-of-the-century "German mandarins". This sort of contextualization comes surprisingly close to the view on Weber held by his contemporaries, who, according to my opinion, hardly had the patience to read his texts in detail. They found it difficult to understand that he perhaps was not only one of them but also something else. A new move towards contextualization can, in the worst cases, lead to a reading of Weber, in which his footnotes and allusions to the persons or formulas of the contemporaries appear as the main point.

By this I do not deny that a contextualizing reading of Weber has also obvious advantages besides removing something of the ex-post-wisdoms in the reception literature. This presupposes that the contexts thematized and the aspects of Weber-the-text as well as of Weber-the-person are specified to be sufficiently one-sided or perspectivistic, in the sense of the Nietzschean-Weberian theory of knowledge. For example I am waiting with great interest for my friend Wolf-Dieter Narr's yet unpublished writings on "Max Weber und der Wilhelminismus", trying to understand the both sides in the title with the other. There surely are typically Wilhelminian traits in the figure and even in the thought of Max Weber and the typical phenomena of the era can be well understood through analyzing its presence in such an untypical figure as Max Weber. But the question in which

respect Weber, exactly, was a Wilhelminian, remains to be discussed through, above all, close and perspectivistic readings of his text.

The key point in my claim to cast a fresh look to Weber's texts can be formulated in the thesis that he is deceiving simple readers, by intention or not. His texts often are both seemingly familiar and seemingly modest in relation to the contemporaries – a paradigm is the introductory paragraph of *Soziologische Grundbegriffe* (WuG, 1). Both contemporary and present-day readers of Weber tend to classify Weber's writings too easily in an anachronistic manner, with categories which would not have been acceptable to Weber himself. Paradigmatic examples of obviously misleading readings of Weber are especially mediated by translations, which appear to be, or at least have been until the very last ones, systematically erroneous (Breiner 1996, xv, for example has made translations of his own). However, the German concepts often have also connotations, which make the reader link them to some familiar views, although Weber's interpretations of them have an entirely different point.

One of the obvious case is *Auslese*, which was read by numerous Weber-scholars as a sign that he was a Social Darwinist. It is only recently that, due to the work of Wilhelm Hennis (1987), Catherine Colliot-Thélène (1990) and others, the Freiburg inaugural lecture *Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik* (1895) has been distanciated from this connection. The point is that in order to characterize some of the aspects of the chances of becoming, for example, professional politicians, Max Weber borrows a term made popular by the contemporary Darwinists, but in the context of his anti-naturalistic thinking the concept gains a different significance. How different it was and how important the difference was, remains, of course, an open question to be answered by detailed studies. The Weberian figure of unintended consequences does not only concern the reception but also the chances and their limits in this sort of borrowing.

Another example is the formula on the first page of *Politik als Beruf*: "Was verstehen wir unter Politik"? (MWS Edition, 35). My point here is not his answer to it but the formulation of the question. Who are the "we" in Weber's formula? Is it the actual audience, the contemporary German politicians, journalists and academic scholars writing on politics or who? In the text, Weber shortly refers to

some common usages, makes a demarcation concerning them and then starts to reinterpret the concept. Through the singularity of the interpretation he moves himself gradually from an inclusive to an exclusive "we" (cf. Wilson 1990) and finally it becomes clear that Weber is using *pluralis majestatis*: "We, Max Weber...".

Max Weber had an highly individual style of thinking. Both the creation or modification of new verbal forms and the reinterpretation of the meanings of the concepts used by others and borrowed by Weber himself are distinctive features of his writing. If you have learnt both the present-day and Weber's day's conventional meanings of some concepts, you cannot be sure that you understand Weber's usage of the same concepts, even if there appear to be nothing specific in them. The more important a concept was for Weber, the more you can be sure that he reinterpreted it for his own purposes and in order to make it suit to his own linguistic profile.

This is not due to some stylistic brilliance. It becomes obvious when one of Weber's central philosophical commitments is taken into account. Max Weber was, above all, a *nominalist*, who, so to say, wanted to purge the whole language of his contemporaries. Idealists, naturalists, empiricists etc., all of them appeared to Weber to have in common a tacit assumption that the "things really are" so or so, even if their interpretations were opposed to each other. Weber's whole world-view is opposed to this sort of naïve realism or essentialism concerning the concepts and their usage. This did not only or even mainly mean a Kantian critique of *das Ding an sich*, although he sometimes quotes Rickert's Neo-Kantian views and understands *Wirklichkeit* as an analytical borderline concept, to which he refers not as something knowable but, on the contrary, as something inexhaustible by any sort of conceptualizations (cf. esp. *Roscher und Knies*, 15, 35).

More important is the Nietzschean consequence that Weber draws from this situation. Instead of imagining that it is possible to "approach the reality" or to detect to it some analogous but coherent descriptions, or resigning to the skeptical idea of the unknowability of *Wirklichkeit*, Weber adopts, following Nietzsche, a *perspectivistic* view on the conceptualizations. They are partial, one-sided and temporal constructions concerning some aspects of *Wirklichkeit*. The constructions are formed in order to be replaced by others one day

or another, and they are all the time competing with each other without a common measure or a given criterion. The first thing to understand about concepts is that they cannot be taken "from the reality" but that they are constructions of the interpreters, who make use of them according to their heuristic value. (For the problematic cf. esp. *Objektivität*).

It is from this viewpoint of a constructionist nominalism that Weber always wants to start afresh, while at the same time making use of the vocabularies created by others. He probably underestimated the situation, bearing in mind how radically he reinterprets the concepts by the very move of borrowing them and recontextualizing them into his own thinking. This holds, for example, some Marxian concepts which he uses as ideal-typical constructions and takes away e.g. their links to evolutionistic philosophy of history. Still, already in the *Freiburger Antrittsrede* Weber denied that there could be something like "economic *Weltanschauung*" and sees himself more or less in opposition to the whole craft, most often turning the same arguments against the opposed parties in a controversy.

To speak of Max-Weber-as-text refers to an assumption that he had formed an inimitable profile of both thinking and writing, which takes him outside all the academic and other sorts of parties. He experienced the world in which he lived as radically contingent, both foundationless and without salvation. His whole political, academic and philosophical project is linked to this *Entzauberung der Welt* in the wider meaning of the concept (to be found especially in *Wissenschaft als Beruf*). This does not mean any resignation or pessimism but serves as a starting point both for action and for the analysis of those religious and quasi-religious projects in which the adherents believed to some foundations or solutions. He was not worried about the lack of order but about the tendencies to return to the kind of monolithic orders which he had encountered in ancient cultures (cf. *Agrarverhältnisse*).

This is, according to my perspectivistic interpretation, also a reason for treating Weber's writings, to a certain extent, as a single text. This reading emphasizes the opposition of Weber to his contemporaries, predecessors and later thinkers. The single Max-Weber-the-text was, however, continuously moving into different and unexpected directions and it had all the time unintended consequences,

which put limits to its coherence. Max-Weber-the-text has a history of its own. We could even use an anachronistic metaphor and speak of *Max-Weber-the-hypertext*. This also corresponds to the fragmentary character of his writings and actualizes the problems of edition of his both published and unpublished writings, which are prominent in controversies between Weberologists.

Dimensions of textuality

I will not go into the details of the *œuvre* of Max Weber and its history. The constructive part of this essay, rather, consists in the use of some elementary categories borrowed from linguistic and literary theory. The point of using them is to make Max-Weber-the-text more readable and to demonstrate some specific difficulties in reading Weber.

I assume that everyone has heard two slogans, context and intertextuality. I will bring them into a simple but more systematic schema of references, either explicit or implicit, which could be used in reading any text, at least any hypertext like Max-Weber-the-text.

I want to distinguish between four dimensions of textuality:

intratextuality
intertextuality
cotextuality
contextuality

Intratextuality concerns single texts, like *Politik als Beruf*, and emphasizes both the internal links and the internal oppositions between its parts or different narrative levels. Max Weber was not an author who tried to solve one problem at a time and then move to next ones. On the contrary, he was involved all the time in several controversies and problematics seemingly unconnected to each other. My impression is that any major texts were used by him as an occasion to treat at least one problematic from a new angle and to put it in relation to others and to the controversies around them. In this sense, Weber's writings remain in most cases difficult to read: the readers are not told when he moves from one level or one problematic to other.

For example, *Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland* is at the same time a pamphlet on German politics at the final phase of World War I and a treatise on political theory in the age of an overwhelming tendency towards bureaucratization. Weber certainly used both the fragmentary theorizing as a means to his interpretation of the German situation and the German situation as a test case for the fate of modern politics in general. He, however, never explicated how he moved between these levels of interest. A look at the original newspaper articles in comparison to the book refers to an increase of theoretical reflections. Maybe Weber himself realized that he was doing something more than a war-time pamphlet when he published the articles in the book form.

So, I have shifted the discussion to the problems of intertextuality, a concept I am using here in a narrow sense of a relation between the different Weberian texts. A problem of Weber-the-text is thus the internal reference to his own earlier writings. The title *Politik als Beruf* does not only refer to his colleague and fellow-editor of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* Werner Sombart (1907) and his in-married-uncle and early mentor in politics, Hermann Baumgarten (1866). The fact that both of them used the formula was doubtlessly known by Weber. Above all, the title refers to his famous own treatment, in *Die protestantische Ethik*, of Luther's duplication of the concept of *Beruf* (NWB Edition, 34-51), visible in the title of the translation of Lassmann and Speirs: *The Profession and Vocation of Politics*.

I have also found some astonishing similarities in the formulations concerning the puritan in the *Antikritiken* and the politician in *Politik als Beruf* (cf. Palonen 1995). Still, here we have to note not only the similarities but also to reflect upon the differences both in the formulation and in the meaning of the slogans. The above mentioned problems of both the internal coherence and the historical character of Max-Weber-the-text are problems of intertextuality within the hypertext.

Textum means in Latin a tissue which has been knit together. Cotext and context refer to that what has been knit together with the text but which, in a sense, are not in the text but around it. I said once, in *Tekstistä politiikkaan*, that context is the implicit part of the text (Palonen 1988). Now I want to distinguish, partly following Dietrich

Busse's *Textinterpretation* (1991), between cotext and context as two different dimensions implied by the text. In this sense neither cotext nor context refers to the 'social background of the author', nor there are some given conventions about which cotext and context should be discussed. What is a cotext and a context is determined by if and how they are used in the text. The author decides which references and allusions s/he makes in the text, which s/he leaves implicit and which s/he disregards, even if they are judged by others as obligatory.

By cotext I speak of the references to other texts, whether explicit quotations or implicit allusions known to the insiders. "Texts" here can also be mere slogans, like *Wahlverwandtschaft*, the title of a novel by Goethe used by Weber in *Die protestantische Ethik*, but also longer narratives paraphrased and reinterpreted by Weber or the contemporary works against which Weber polemizes. Allusions to Goethe, the Bible etc. were obvious to the *Bildungsbürgertum* of early 20th century Germany, but they are no longer obligatory readings to political theorists of the late 20th century. A problem which I myself, reading intensely Max-Weber-the-text, have faced, how far I also have to read the co-texts to which he refers explicitly or implicitly. Until now I have not experienced a greater need to read Gustav Schmoller, Rudolf Stammler or even Goethe or the Bible to understand Weber, but well to read Nietzsche, to some extent Heinrich Rickert, and maybe I should still start reading authors such as J.S.Mill or James Bryce as co-texts to Weber.

By contexts I refer here to the problematics of the time or of a long-term debate which are thematized in the text. These problematics were those of the contemporaries, but more or less radically revised by Weber. *Max Webers Fragestellungen*, to borrow a formula of Wilhelm Hennis but, unlike him, to put it into plural, are modifications of the questions which serve to him as contexts. To ignore the problematics of the contemporaries is to miss the contexts of Weber's questions, to ignore his problem shifts in relation to them is to miss the text. Weber's *Antikritiken* (published in the volume *Die protestantische Ethik II*), by which he answered the polemics against *Die protestantische Ethik* are perhaps the best manifestation of how astonished Weber was over the fact that the readers could not go into his singularized problematics but read his texts as if he would

have spoken of the Protestant ethic "in the normal sense of the word", as demanded by a critic (*Antikritisches...*, PE II, 176). In addition, Weber's numerous polemics against thinkers such as Eduard Meyer, Stammler, Lujo Brentano (in GAW) are less answers to their specific problems than media to Weber himself and his audience to link them to Weber's own problematics and to give a new nuance to them.

If we start reading an example of Max-Weber-the-text, we should thus relate it to the four levels of textuality presented here. Their internal relations depend, of course, on the actual research problems. When our concern is understanding a historical point, like Weber's problem shift, the contextual level may be the best starting point, in analyzing the relations to the contemporaries the cotext is perhaps the most important, in studies of the whole Weberian *œuvre* and its history, intertextuality becomes a main problem, while the explicitation of a single text requires a keen attention to intratextuality.

If the problem is taken as given, this classification helps to explicate the primary types of reading. Especially in writing academic theses, you can also adapt the problematic to the question which kind of work you are willing, interested and competent to do. Intratextuality is something for those interested in a close reading needed in studying poetry and philosophy, intertextuality cannot dispense with an interest in textual biography and problems of edition, cotextuality is more closely related to the intellectual history of the period and country, while contextuality presupposes a competence of dealing with the interpretations and assessments of the 'eventual' history of the period and the culture in question and with the ways in which the events were conceptualized. If you want to be a specialist on Weber, you have to be more or less an expert on all of the fields, and the real problem often is how not to leave Max-Weber-the-text in the shadow of your newly-created specialization in the fields presupposed in order to read Weber properly.

With a Weberian perspectivistic view of knowledge, it is also easy to say that you can have a 'true and complete interpretation' of his work – it is better not even try to give a 'total view'. To some extent, you can say that some interpretations are erroneous: you can demonstrate this by criticizing the translation used by the author, by showing some only recently published letters of Weber or by correcting some errors in dating Weber's work. Expressed in the

Koselleckian (1988) terms: corrections are possible at the level of *Fortschreibung*, but when you move to the *Umschreibung* of history, it is your own imagination in sketching the perspective, in finding a strategy of reading or interpreting a single passage in a Weber-text, which gives a new profile. Despite the huge 'Weber industry' – or perhaps because of it – anyone studying Weber has still good chances of saying something new about his work. My experience has been that to do so is not even especially difficult, if you do not worry about the other commentators but start to read Weber with your own ideas.

Max Weber as a classic

Max Weber serves here as an example of a classical political theorist, whose work I happen to be familiar with. To a great extent all I have said, especially concerning the degrees of textuality, suits to any classical thinker, especially to the European ones in the 19th and 20th century. In certain respects the case of Max Weber is however, a special one, which makes a knowledge of his work both more difficult and perhaps more important than that of others, say Carl Schmitt or Karl Mannheim.

I just want to stress two points here. The first point is that he was a kind of "decathlonist of human sciences", not to be understood by the classifications of a later and more specialized university systems and, above all, a figure of a past time who cannot be imitated any more. Do not strive for becoming a Max Weber of the 21st century! Read him as a person who had a range and profile of readings, interests and experiences no longer available to anyone.

The second point is, once again, Weber's militant nominalism, which made it difficult if not impossible to rely on the conceptual categories of others. Whether this aspect of his work can be followed and even radicalized or not , is an open question. I myself try to do so in certain respects, especially in trying to dispense with such misleading collective concepts as *die Gesellschaft* (Cf. Palonen 1998). Perhaps the most important Weber-inspired research programme of today is to be seen in the work of Quentin Skinner – not recognised among the Weberologists, of course – who has been able

to combine the Weberian approach with some aspect of the Austinian speech act theory and classical rhetoric. (cf. Palonen 1997)

My main point here is, however, that when reading Weber, you cannot overestimate the significance of his nominalism. Even in occasional writings, in which the commitment to the vocabulary of the contemporaries is a rhetorical strategy to persuade some special audience, you can detect some nuances which make clear how Weber distanciated himself from the customary meanings. Denaturalization, desubstantialization, decollectivization as purifying moves as well as the temporalization of concepts into horizons of action, expressible by opposite ideal typical alternatives, are some of the main strategies in Max-Weber-the-text. They are all related historically to a shift towards both an appraisal and a conceptualization of contingency in terms of *Chancen*. This historical singularity I have called the Weberian moment in the history of political thought (cf. Palonen 1998).

Addendum: A classification of Weber-texts

With this list I want to distinguish between different sorts of texts written by Max Weber. The point of the list is to relativize the content of the text to the specific rhetorical audiences and stylistic demands of each sort of text. The problem in Weber scholarship has sometimes been the non-distinction between different sorts of texts, at other times they have been distinguished too neatly, as if Max Weber himself would have had a full command a linguistic theory of *Textsorten*. In this sense, my classification serves rather pragmatic purposes of Weber scholars than an attempt to contribute to the theory of *Textsorten*.

As a decathlonist of human sciences who also was more or less involved in the political life of his time, Weber wrote all kinds of texts. The classification here takes into consideration at first, the distinction between publications and private texts, and, secondly, the degree of theoretical ambitions. With these categories in mind, I arrive to following classifications of Weber's work:

1) Monographs

According to a legend, Weber wrote after his dissertation (*Zur Ge-schichte der Handelsgesellschaften im Mittelalter*, 1889, contained in GASW), the habilitation thesis (*Die römische Agrargeschichte*, 1891, published in MWG and MWS 1/2) and the monumental *Die Lage der Landarbeiter im ostelbischen Deutschland* (now in MWG 1/3) no monographs. Even if this is more or less true in the sense of a separate publication, writings like *Die protestantische Ethik* (cf. the differences between the original and revised version of this study see the NWB-Edition), *Die Stadt* (included in WuG), *Das antike Judentum* (=GARS III) etc., can well be read as separate monographs, maybe even *Die Rechtssoziologie* (included in WuG)

2) Programmatic writings

To this category belong the Freiburg inaugural lecture *Der National-staat...* (besides GPS now also in MWGÊ1/4), the methodological articles *Die 'Objektivität'* and *Der Sinn der 'Wertfreiheit'...* (included in GAW) as well as *Wissenschaft als Beruf* and *Politik als Beruf* (now together in MWG and MWS 1/17).

3) Lexical writings

The lexical form is visible in real lexical articles, although the most important of them, the third edition of *Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum*, rather seems like a monograph (published in GASW). The lexical character is also obvious in the style of the most parts of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, although the older parts are rather like background research to this volume

4) Polemical 'journalism'

Weber characterized himself his two huge articles on Russia 1906, *Zur Lage der bürgerlichen Demokratie* and *Rußlands übergang zum Scheinkonstitutionalismus* (now included in MWG and MWS 1/10) as journalism, although they contain important pieces of his political theory. Even more importantly, his journalism contains the war-time writings, although the most important of them, *Wahlrecht und Demo-kratie* as well as (the book version of) *Parlament und Regierung* are also explicitly related to political theory (both included now in MWG and MWS 1/15).

5) *Methodological polemics*

Most of the essays published in *Wissenschaftslehre* consist of methodological polemics against earlier or contemporary authors, such as Meyer, Stammler or Brentano. Weber's style was that he usually sketched his own thinking better through polemic than through declarations of principles, although this does not make it easy to discern his own points in the texts.

6) *Popularizing writings*

Especially in the 1890's Weber held public lectures and wrote popular articles, of which *Die Börse* (included GASS) is probably the most important – it was based on a series, published in *Zeitschrift für das gesamte Handelsrecht*, of huge comments on the work of a committee intending to reform the German stock market. They are rather technical and the political point comes up in the two popular articles.

7) *Research project plans*

As a professor, Weber was a kind of project leader to studies on the East Elbian peasants, later he took a more active role in the sketching of the project *Die Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit* (now published in MWG 1/12) as well as in planning an enquête on the German press (published by Wilhelm Hennis in *Jahrbuch Politisches Denken* 1995/1996).

8) *'Opinion statements'*

Some of Weber's most controversial formulations are due to his statements in *Verein für Sozialpolitik* and *Deutsche Gesellschaft fŸr Soziologie* (included in GASS). To this or to journalism we can also include his polemics on the *Lehrfreiheit* in the universities around 1908-1912 (published so far only in English in *Minerva* 1973)

9) *Reviews*

As the editor of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* Weber occasionally wrote reviews to his own journal, which are sometimes interesting, as well as some prefaces, as the one to Blank's article on Social Democracy in 1905 (now published in MWG 1/8).

10) Lectures
Of Weber's lectures not much has been published. Only a *Grundriß* for the Heidelberg lectures on *Allgemeine (theoretische) National-ökonomie* in 1898, as the posthumous edition of *Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, based on the student notes.

11) Letters
Earlier only a collection of *Jugendbriefe*, edited by Marianne Weber during the NS-period, in 1936, a few *Politische Briefe*, included in the first but not in later editions of *Gesammelte politische Schriften* as well as some fragments of letters published by Eduard Baumgarten in his *Max Weber. Werk und Person* (1964) have been available. Now three letter volumes of *Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe*, concerning the years 1906-1912, have been published (MWG II/5,6,7).

12) Academic statements
An important source hardly known until now could be Weber's statements on dissertations, professorial *Gutachten* as well as remarks to faculty, plans for new academic institutions etc. Some of them have been published in the letters from 1907 and 1908 (MWF II/5).

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GAW = *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Hg. Johannes Winckelmann. Tübingen: Mohr 1973.

GPS = *Gesammelte politische Schriften*. Hg. Johannes Winckelmann. Tübingen: Mohr 1973.

MWG = Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe.

MWS = Max-Weber-Studienausgabe.

PE = Protestantische Ethik.
WuG = Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.

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