

## REVIEW

Max Weber's Economic  
Sociology"Part One" of *Wirtschaft  
und Gesellschaft*

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Max Weber. *Economy and Society: A New Translation*. Ed. and transl. by Keith Tribe. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.

As every translator knows, translating is a difficult task. And, as every translator of the writings of Max Weber knows, his are notoriously difficult. Furthermore, there are differing degrees of difficulty in Weber's writings. His "Politik als Beruf" is difficult to render into English, but not compared to "Wissenschaft als Beruf." Then there are his difficult methodological writings, but the most difficult of Weber's works to translate is probably *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Parts of it had been translated in the 1940s by Talcott Parsons while other parts were translated by a group of scholars during the 1960s. The complete English version finally appeared in 1968 in three volumes. Now we have a new version by Keith Tribe in which he acknowledges the difficulty in translating Weber's work. It is an outstanding translation accompanied by an enlightening introduction and two helpful appendices.

The title is *Economy and Society. A New Translation*; however, it is not a translation of the entire *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Instead, it is a translation of "Part One" of that book and its history helps explain why Tribe chose to translate only this first part. Much of Tribe's 73 page Introduction is devoted to setting out much of this history. And, Tribe not only discusses the history of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, he also provides its context for what would become the series *Grundriss der Sozialökonomik*. Max Weber had been approached in 1905 by his publisher Paul Siebeck about advice concerning the fifth edition of Gustav Schönberg's *Handbuch der politischen Ökonomie*. This work had ballooned from two volumes to five and was too large and rather unfocused. Weber offered a number of suggestions regarding size and scope and Siebeck attempted to use them in discussions with Schönberg. After Schönberg's death in 1908, Siebeck tried to persuade Weber to become the editor and finally Weber partially relented and agreed to become director of the *Handbuch*. And, he insisted that it be renamed *Grundriss der Sozialökonomik* to better reflect his approach to social economic issues. Weber had intended his volume to be the third volume published in the series, but he changed his approach in 1913. Then, the initial months of the war caused interference with his studies and when he was able to return to scholarship, his primary interest had shifted to the economic ethics of the world's religions. It was only after the war and Weber's return to teaching in Munich that he began to rework much

of what he had written prior to the war. The book that Marianne published in 1922 with the title *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* was a combination of many old manuscripts and a number of new ones. The old ones are found in pages 181-817 and were given the title “Second Part”. In the preface to this second part Marianne noted that those manuscripts were written *before* the “First Part” and they stemmed mostly from 1911 to 1913 (Weber 1922: III). She gave these the title “Types of community building and societal building” (“Typen der Vergemeinschaftung und Vergesellschaftung”). In contrast, the “First Part” was written later, between 1919 and Weber’s death in June 1920. He was able to review the page proofs of the first three chapters; thus, “Part One” is taken to be an account of Weber’s final thinking. “Part One” carried the title “Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte” (“The Economy and the societal Orders and Powers”). It is worth noting that the general editors of the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* chose this as the title for the volumes which comprise the contents of “Part Two” of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. It also worth noting that the editors chose to list the five volumes containing “Part Two” as Band 22 whereas the single volume containing “Part One” is Band 23. However, the MWG editors added some confusion by also giving the six volumes the title *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* as well as giving Band 23 the subtitle *Soziologie. Unvollendet 1919-1920*. And, it is not clear what is meant by “sociology” nor by “incomplete.” It is to Tribe’s credit that he tries to sort out this confusion and he does so by providing a brief history of this part of *Wirtschaft und Gsellchaft*. Before turning to that, I will focus on his translation. Tribe has been translating from German into English for decades and his proficiency here is obvious. He recognizes the difficulties any translator encounters and he provides a 26 page “Translation Appendix.” In it, he discusses the need to balance the twin demands of clarity and fidelity—does the translator sacrifice allegiance to the text in order to make the author’s ideas more intelligible? Or, does the translator stick to the text even if it means that the author’s ideas are not conveyed clearly? Tribe offers three key terms which are difficult to render into English. To take the first one—“Chance.” It means either “opportunity” or “allocation”, but it is only by the careful consideration of the context of the word that the choice is made less difficult (Tribe 2019, pp. 459-460). He then provides discussions for 42 German terms which are resistant to translation. To choose one of the most difficult ones: “Herrschaft.” As Tribe notes, this is “a central term in Weber’s vocabulary” (Tribe 2019, p. 471). He further notes that the standard translation stemming from Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mill has been “domination” and Tribe acknowledges that there is some validity in that choice. However, he objects to it on the ground that “domination” suggests force and Weber spoke in terms of legitimacy. Hence, “rule” is Tribe’s preferred choice. Tribe’s argument has much to support it, but my preference has been “authority.” That is because “rule” also has overtones of the threat of force and Weber emphasizes that his three types of “Herrschaft” are legitimate ones. Translating is a difficult task and one that is often unrewarding. Tribe not only does a superb job but he also provides an enlightening and a useful Appendix in which he explains the use of the German term, its historical significance, and why “his” English word is the better, or even the best, choice.

Tribe argues that his new translation was warranted by a number of factors. He mentions the usual complaint that Talcott Parsons’ translations are generally flawed; however, he provides five additional important criticisms. First, in his attempt to smooth over Weber’s work, Parsons ended up “blurring the conceptual sharpness of the conceptual structure.” Second, given his own preference for social structure, Parsons minimized Weber’s focus on individual action. Third, Parsons and many others have regarded Weber as not only a sociologist, but a founding father of sociology (Tribe 2019, p. 34). But Tribe correctly reminds the reader that Weber always “self-identified as a political economist.” (Tribe 2019, p. 6). I would add to Tribe’s third point that too often, scholars concentrate on the “society” aspect of the work rather than the “economy” aspect. This is especially problematic given that “economy” precedes “society” in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. My point is underscored by Tribe’s fourth criticism and that is that Parsons and many others treat *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* as a “book in its own right”, thus obscuring the fact that it was a part of the series that Weber had been involved in since 1908. Furthermore, Weber and his contributors were intent on exploring the social impact of modern capitalism. Fifth, Parsons eliminates much of the particular layout of Weber’s work; thus, confusing Weber’s approach as well as his emphasis. Tribe illustrates this well by

juxtaposing page 80 from the original 1922 edition with page 250 from Parsons' translation in *Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Tribe 2019, pp. 9-10). Tribe's criticisms are all valid and readers of Weber's work are advised to keep them in mind.

Max Weber's "Part One" contains four chapters of varying length and differing degrees of completeness. One of the many strengths of Tribe's book is that he provides an overview of each of the four chapters. The final chapter is the shortest and the least satisfactory in its worth. Its focus is on "social ranks" ("Stände") and "social classes" ("Klassen") and Tribe offers several reasons for its less than satisfactory value. First, it is only three paragraphs in length and is a fragment. Second, Weber differentiates between social rank and social class but this is more of a classification than it is of a definition. Third, Weber did not integrate this chapter into the frame work of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* which also contributed to its fragmentary character. Fourth, Weber failed to provide an account of society based upon class and standing distinctions; however, Weber did distinguish between the traditional social ranking and the modern class system. And, Tribe suggests that Weber provided the "basic instruments" by which later sociologists could develop such an account of class that would be able to avoid some of the problematic aspect of Marxist class analysis (Tribe 2019, pp. 448-449, 454).

The title to Chapter Three is translated as "Types of Rule" ("Die Typen der Herrschaft") and is devoted to the three types of legitimate "Rule." These are "tradition", "bureaucratic", and "charismatic." Tribe suggests that bureaucratic "rule" is the most modern and is mostly prevalent in capitalist societies. He further suggests that its defining feature is "formal rules" but he neglects to say anything about how important Weber believed that these formal rules needed to be applied without bias or favoritism. Tradition is "established tradition" and was widespread throughout history. Tribe suggests that it is based upon "personal power" but Weber makes it clear that it is not personal, except in the sense that the traditional leader is the one who is entrusted in making decisions which are predicated on tradition. Charismatic rule is, as Tribe notes, personal and is based upon "special powers" given to that individual. He is also correct to note that "charismatic rule is inherently unstable" and it becomes "everyday" (Tribe 2019, p. 335-337). While the account of "Herrschaft" in "Part One" is a later version, anyone interested in Weber's account is advised to read the section "Herrschaft" as well as "Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft" in Band I/22-4 of the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*.

Chapter One is on "Basic Sociological Concepts" and while Weber did not claim originality for his sociological concepts, he maintained that he has made them as precise as possible. He also makes it clear that he departs from most sociologists who study groups whereas his concern is with individuals. He further clarifies that he is not interested in the status of groups but is focused on actions performed by individuals. Finally, he clarifies that unlike the dogmatic sciences of law and logic which have objective validity, history and sociology have subjectively valid degrees of intentionality. This does not exclude the possibility of understanding others; Weber insisted that "One need not be Caesar to understand Caesar" and this is made possible by the degree to which one can understand the individual's sense of meaning (Tribe 2019, pp. 77-79). Tribe emphasizes the importance of "Evidenz" "which carries the meaning of 'transparency', 'obviousness', or 'self-evidence'" and he distinguishes between the English legal sense of "evidence" from the German—it is not "Evidenz" but is "Beweismittel" or "means of proof." Tribe not only explains Weber's usage but adds the German term (Tribe 2019, pp. 466-467).

Tribe has a number of theses which are intriguingly argued if not always convincing. Here I briefly address two of them. One is his thesis that Weber often mentions a scholar but rather than taking this as an indication of Weber's intellectual debt, Tribe argues that it is often an indication that Weber has taken some point from another scholar in order to radically revise it or to refute it. Tribe points to several examples and one of these is Ferdinand Tönnies. Tribe argued that Weber and Tönnies disagreed in many respects: Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* is a philosophical book and nothing like Weber's analytic writings. He argued further that Tönnies' thinking is binary rather than complex. Finally, he suggested that Tönnies was lamenting the loss of the traditional, rural, living community whereas Weber was not nostalgic but was also concerned about the capitalistic future (Tribe 2019, pp. 49-52). I think Tribe's account of Tönnies' work

does not reflect its complexity and while I agree that there were differences between Weber and Tönnies, Tönnies was one of the rare sociologists for whom Weber had respect<sup>1</sup>. This leads to the second thesis and that is Tribe's attempt to adjust Weber's position in the sociology pantheon. Tribe regards Weber primarily as a political economist and not a sociologist and he reads "Part One" as being predominantly a work in economics and less as a sociological treatise. As I have indicated, I share much of this view and I suspect what prompted Tribe to ascribe to these two theses was Wolfgang Schluchter's attempt to make "Part One" into a treatise on sociology. Schluchter makes his general case that Weber was a sociologist in his 2017 book *Max Webers späte Soziologie* and he offers his particular case in the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* of "Part One." In the "Studienausgabe" of Band I/23 Schluchter's account is found in the "Nachwort" (Weber 2014, pp. 221-263). Tribe responds that Wilhelm Hennis and a few others have sought to "detach" Weber from the American sociological tradition (Tribe 2019, pp. 5, 33-34). To discuss the merits of Tribe's account and Schluchter's is beyond the scope of this review essay. While Tribe and Schluchter disagree on many points, they are in agreement about Chapter Two. Tribe and Schluchter agree that Chapter One was largely based upon Weber's "Ueber einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie" and Chapter Three was mostly a revision of the early part of the "Herrschaftssoziologie." And, Tribe and Schluchter agree that it is unfortunate that Chapter Two has been mostly neglected ("vernachlässigt") (Tribe 2019, p. 38; Weber 2014, p. 267). Yet, this lengthy chapter (60,000) reveals Weber as an economic sociologist.

In the overview to Chapter Two, Tribe notes the continuity with the previous one by emphasizing both intentionality and subjectivity. But he also stresses Weber's notion of calculability which Weber expressly ties to the use of money. Given this, it is unfortunate that Tribe appears to minimize Weber's emphasis on money. Tribe writes that Weber "interpolates two paragraphs on money", that Weber "becomes transfixed by Knapp's monetary casuistic", and "Many pages are devoted to an increasingly arcane treatment of monetary forms, including a subsection directly addressed to Knapp's book." (Tribe 2019, pp. 139-141). The book was Georg Friedrich Knapp's *Staatliche Theorie des Geldes* (1905) and Weber claimed that it "brilliantly fulfilled its **formal** demands, but for material issues related to money, it is incomplete; see below" (Tribe 2019, p. 163). Weber noted that it was "warmly received by the Austrians and that nothing showed that Knapp was wrong." Weber regarded *Staatliche Theorie des Geldes* to be a "magnificent book" and he intended to build upon it (Tribe 2019, p. 309). That is why Knapp is either explicitly mentioned or implicitly referenced throughout much of Chapter Two and that is why Weber devoted an entire section to Knapp's state theory of money (Tribe 2019, pp. 309-318). It may not be too much of an oversimplification to suggest that where Marx saw the main feature of capitalism in the exploitation of labor, Weber regarded money as the key feature because it allowed for rational calculability, it promoted exchanges over distances, and was a durable standard of exchange.

Tribe's overall estimation of Weber's economic sociology seems to be somewhat mixed. On the one hand, he documents how Weber's published portion moves from a rather clear and focused account in Chapter One through the increasing less satisfactory Chapters Two and Three to a fragment of Chapter Four. And, he complains that Weber begins a chapter with a clear focus on exposition but ends up mostly with classifications. Thus, Tribe's complaints about Weber's form and focus are mostly justified. However, Tribe is also convinced that "Part One" of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* is crucial for understanding Weber's late thinking. Moreover, he believes that Chapter Two demonstratively rejects the traditional opinion that the Austrian School of Economics defeated the German Historical School in the "Methodenstreit" and he is convinced that Weber showed that "a synthesis was always possible" (Tribe 2019, p. 142). If I am reading Tribe correctly, he faults Weber for the lack of clarity but praises him for his advancement of economic sociology. If my reading is correct, then I concur with Tribe's assessments.

The criticisms which I have offered are mostly matters of interpretation or are minor ones, and they all pale in comparison with the tremendous worth of Tribe's efforts. He wrote that he intended to provide a volume that was not only readable but understandable, which is a rather large challenge. In the Preface he writes: "In presenting this new translation of that work, I hope to make Max Weber's real intellectual achievements more accessible" (Tribe 2019, p. ix). Tribe has more than managed to achieve his goal: his In-

roduction and editorial aids only further the value of his translation and they show that Weber was more than a sociologist—he was an economic sociologist. As an indication of how much I recognize Tribe’s impressive scholarly expertise and his admirable ability to translate, I can only hope that someone can persuade him to complete the difficult task and translate the remainder of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*.

## NOTES

1. Weber referred to *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* as a “fine book” (Tribe 2019). Tribe’s minimizing of Tönnies’ influence may have led him to overlook the importance of Tönnies’ *Die Sitte* for Weber’s understanding of the ethical value of “Sitte.”

## REFERENCES

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