

Charles Camic, Philip S. Gorski, and David M. Trubek, eds.
Max Weber's Economy and Society: A Critical Companion.

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Max Weber's revered *Economy and Society* was only posthumously transmitted as a mass of unpublished notes, manuscripts, and printer's proofs compiled over a ten year period and in various states of completion. Thus it comes as no surprise that what many consider to be Weber's most magnificent and important work would be in need of 'a critical companion' consisting of critical, interpretive and reconstructive essays. As the editors of *Max Weber's 'Economy and Society'* acknowledge, this *Companion* is driven more by a monumentalizing and critical ambition than by antiquarian curiosity, and on the whole proves to be an admirably helpful and user-friendly guide as a consequence.

Richard Swedberg's contribution to this collection is worth starting with since it highlights the relevance of Weber's concerns in this work both for the times in which he wrote and for us today. Swedberg draws from his specialist interest in Weber as an 'economic sociologist' from two related perspectives: first, in pointing out the significance of the fact that the work was originally commissioned 1909 as one of several contributions to the 'Outline of Social Economics,' for which Weber was the main editor (in fact, it was to replace Gustav Schönberg's popular but outdated *Handbuch der politischen Oekonomie*); and second, in demonstrating that the chapter on 'Basic Sociological Categories of Economic Action' constitutes the *centerpiece* of Weber's later work (in fact, it is literally the middle of the three completed chapters of the unfinished version Weber was working on when he died). Together these points provide crucial assistance to our understanding of the text and its present-day importance by directing our attention to the general problem of 'the economy' for sociology, especially the contrast between economic phenomena per se, such as banks and firms, and economically *conditioned* or economically *relevant* phenomena, such as political strata and religious doctrines. At the same time, attending to these issues also highlights the particular historical-sociological problem of the different types of capitalism, especially the contrast between political, commercial, and rational-industrial forms of capitalism, and more generally the dynamics of status recognition and class exploitation that Eric Olin Wright also emphasizes in his contribution to this volume).

These indispensable insights into the construction and intended use of this text are supported by the inclusion of essays by several of the editors of Weber's unfinished magnum opus: Guenther Roth (the co-editor of the English volume) on the biographical sources of Weber's interest in capitalism with respect to the 'cosmopolitan nationalism' of his German and British relatives; Hans G. Kippenberg (the editor of volume I/22.2 of the *Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe* on 'Religious Communities') on how the sociology of religion manuscript from 1910-1914 provided a bridge between Weber's early essays on Protestantism and his later comparative project on 'The Economic Ethics of the World Religions'; and the late Wolfgang J. Mommsen (the co-editor-in-chief of the whole *Gesamtausgabe* edition) on the genesis of the text from 1910-1920 and the subsequent history of its editing and reconstruction (beginning with Marianne Weber's decision to split the early and later 'drafts' into two connected parts).

On the basis of the drafts and outlines emerging from Weber's correspondence with his publisher, Mommsen (in collaboration with the other German editors of the *Gesamtausgabe* over the past two decades) arrived at the following arrangement of the text, corresponding respectively to the still incomplete Volumes 22 and 23 of the *Gesamtausgabe* (and to Parts II and I of the English edition, which roughly follows Marianne Weber's third and Johannes F. Winckelmann's fifth editions):¹

Economy and Society (1910-1914)

1. Communities
2. Religious Communities
3. Law
4. Domination
5. The City

Economy and Society (1918-1920)

1. Basic Sociological Concepts
2. Basic Sociological Categories of Econ. Action
3. Types of Domination
- [4. Status Groups and Classes -- outlined]
- [5. Communities (Forms of Association) -- planned]

Through the archival and interpretive efforts of Mommsen and others, readers are invited to move beyond the casual cataloguing of sources by well-meaning bibliophiles to consider the significance of Weber's intensive engagement with his predecessors and contemporaries. The most important of these influences include Ferdinand Toennies, whose *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* left a lasting mark on Weber's preoccupation with concepts of 'community' and 'communalization/*Vergemeinschaftung*,' and Georg Simmel, whose concepts of 'individualization' and 'societalization/*Vergesellschaftung*' are central to Weber's understanding of 'Soziologie' (the title of Simmel's 1908 collection and the eventual subtitle of *Economy and Society*). As these close textual readings show, tracking Weber's starting points, revisions, and departures is not simply an edifying antiquarian exercise, but rather a way of critically unlocking the core of the text through its 'key concepts' in an attempt to correct its abuses and to render its insights useful for further redevelopment.

Unfortunately, two of the weakest essays in this collection deal directly with the foundational introductory chapter of the later version of *Economy and Society* on 'Basic Sociological Terms.' By overlooking the significance of Weber's pedantically-formatted paragraphs for the formulation of 'ideal types', Mustafa Emirbayer misleadingly concludes that the underdeveloped concepts of 'traditional' and 'affectual' action reveal Weber's 'bias' or are somehow denigrated by him as 'only second-best' in opposition to 'value-rational' and 'goal-rational' action. Likewise, Donald N. Levine finds a way to misconstrue Weber's canonical definition of 'sociology' as concerned solely with '*individual* action', despite having just quoted Weber both in German and English: '¶1. Sociology ... will be defined here as a discipline that seeks to understand *social* action interpretively and thereby to explain its course and its consequences causally'.² Since Weber's development of the hermeneutic task of sociology in the passage that immediately follows may be the source of Levine's confusion, and since its importance is also ignored by the editors of this collection, it is worth quoting at length:

I. Methodological foundations

1. Meaning [*Sinn*] is here subjectively *intended* meaning which is either:

a) actually existing [*tatsächlich*]

i) in an historically given case of an actor or

ii) on average or approximately in a given number [*Masse*] of cases of actors, or it is

b) conceived as a *pure*, conceptual type of such an actor or actors *thought* of as a

type.

It is not somehow or other the objectively 'correct' or metaphysically established 'true' meaning. Therein lies the difference between the empirical sciences of action: sociology and history – vis a vis the dogmatic sciences: jurisprudence, logic, ethics, aesthetics, whose objective is to investigate the 'correct' 'valid' meaning.³

Although the editors of this volume – Camic, Gorski, and Trubek – do not underscore the significance of these distinctions, in their introduction they describe how Weber's 'methodological individualism' can assume 'subjective meaning' as its point of departure while at the same time taking inter-subjective, collective, or institutional phenomena as its primary focus. Weber's concern in this opening statement is primarily to demarcate the 'dogmatic sciences of action' (which search for objective 'validity' and metaphysical 'truth') from the 'empirical sciences of action'. The more humble aim of the latter is to determine degrees of both 'adequacy' at the level of meaning and 'certainty' with respect to hypothesized patterns. In Weber's view, sociology in particular must also find a middle way between those empirical disciplines which formulate explanatory laws (such as economics and political science) and those which construct descriptive interpretations (such as history and ethnography) (pp. 2-3). In an important earlier essay on the problem of 'rationalization and freedom', Levine himself had stressed that, in contrast to Simmel, Weber successfully sustained the distinction between the subjective interpretation and objective analysis of social action.⁴ As Camic, Gorski, and Trubek point out, these crucial passages do not simply rehash Weber's position in the *Methodenstreit* (methodological controversy) of the late nineteenth century in favour of a self-contradictory individualist sociology. Rather, the method outlined in *Economy and Society* involves interpreting processes of meaning-making that extend from the simplest human actions to the most sophisticated cultural achievements (including the scientific texts of sociology itself). In fact, the perspective and emphasis developed throughout this chapter constitutes 'the culmination of nearly twenty years of systematic reflection and, as Weber's final statement on the subject, an effective encapsulation of the position at which he ultimately arrived' (p. 6).

To be sure, the majority of essays in this collection deal not with the theoretical and methodological issues highlighted in the 1918-1920 version of *Economy and Society*, but rather with the rich empirical studies and historical narratives that make up the preliminary 1910-1914 manuscript. Julia Adams takes issue with Weber's assumption that the normal relationship between the sexes within patrimonially organized *communities* (*Gemeinschaften*), particularly the family-state compacts in early modern Europe, necessarily entailed superiority in men and dependence in women. Harvey Goldman (along with Kippenberg, as mentioned above) discusses Weber's broader political and ethical interest in the comparative study of *religious communities* on a global scale, with particular attention to how Weber's views were influenced by the military and cultural conflicts of his day. Hans Joas shows how the concept of natural law provides a bridge between Weber's sociology of religion and his sociology of law (*Recht*) by focussing on the connection between early Protestant and enlightenment notions of individual rights. Duncan Kennedy elaborates on this theme with a comprehensive examination of how Weber negotiated the paradigm-conflict between classical legal thought, which posited the will as the basis of law, and logically formal rationality, which put values at the centre of legal reasoning. Gorski's more focussed discussion of the 'bureaucratic revolution' which led to the rise of rational-legal domination (*Herrschaft*) in the seventeenth century offers an alternative account to Weber's by arguing that the traditional person-office relationship had already

been challenged by both the pre-Reformation papal sale of public offices and the post-Reformation disciplinary culture of the northern European monarchs. Finally, Regina F. Titunik and Randall Collins address the problem raised in Weber's unfinished monograph on the city (*die Stadt*) concerning the possibility of non-legitimate domination and the process of revolutionary delegitimation. Each lays particular stress on Weber's discussion of the medieval communal associations of urban citizens (the *coniuratio*, or *Einverbrüderung*) as an implicit model for understanding the political mobilization of radical ideas, interest groups, and alliances in past and present revolutionary movements.

In the light of these critical assessments, it is interesting to note that Marianne Weber initially presented the five thematically distinct (but textually overlapping) sections of her husband's early manuscript under the title '*Typen der Vergemeinschaftung und Vergesellschaftung*', which may be translated either as either 'types of communal and associative relationship', or 'types of communalization and societalization'. Clearly, Weber's concern throughout *Economy and Society* is as much with classifying persistent patterns of interaction as with accounting for processes of change. For this reason, the interpretive assistance and reconstructive efforts undertaken by the contributors to this *Critical Companion* aim at more than simply the preservation of a precious relic; above all they are engaged in an exemplary exercise in the emulation (and adulation) of a monumental achievement.

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¹ Baier, Horst, M. Rainer Lepsius, Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Wolfgang Schluchter, 'Overview of the Text of *Economy and Society* by the Editors of the Max Weber Gesamtausgabe,' translated by Austin Harrington, *Max Weber Studies* 1 (1): 104-115. In a letter to his publisher dated October 27, 1919, Weber indicates that these texts indeed constitute two *distinct* 'versions' separated by several years, rather than two continuous 'parts': 'Das dicke alte Manuscript muss ganz gründlich umgestaltet werden [The thick old manuscript must be thoroughly revised]' (cited by Mommsen, note 3, p. 93). In placing the earlier rough draft after the more abstract version written in the last few years of Weber's life, Marianne Weber and later editors (including Winkelmann and Roth) left the misleading impression that what they designated as 'Part II' (though drafted earlier) was meant to illustrate and apply the general concepts defined in 'Part I' (composed later).

² Max Weber, 'Basic Sociological Concepts' [1920], translated by Keith Tribe, in *The Essential Weber*, edited by Sam Whimster (London: Routledge, 2004), 311-331, at 312; translation modified, emphasis added). Compare Levine, note 5, p. 101.

³ Max Weber, op. cit., 312; translation modified.

⁴ Donald L. Levine, 'Rationality and Freedom: Inveterate Multivocals', in his book, *The Flight from Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 142-178.