

THE TRANSLATION OF Weber's corpus into English has a long and complex history. No complete translation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* exists, and the extant partial translations were carried out for different purposes, by different people, from different disciplines, with little consistency, over a long period of time. There is a whiff of scandal about the texts published by Edward Shils, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, which between them include four of the key articles in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Shils had begun a large project in 1938 with Alexander von Schelting which included two of the methodological writings that were eventually included in the Shils and Finch *Methodology of the Social Sciences* ([1904] 1949)¹, as well as "Science as a Vocation" ([1919] 1946)². This text was a source of trouble when Shils became aware of the Gerth and Mills project, which overlapped with his own larger but never realized project (Oakes and Vidich 1999)³.

The Shils and Finch translation, entitled *Methodology of the Social Sciences* ([1904] 1949), was prepared with an undergraduate student audience in mind, and was used in the famous Soc Sci II course at the University of Chicago. Gerth and Mills translated the "Vocations" speeches. Parsons translated, or rather modified A. M. Henderson's translation, of the opening sections of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ([1930] 1958)⁴. These were all available in print in the late 1940s. Yet together they represented much less than half of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The rest had to wait. The student-oriented translations

* About Hans Henrik BRUUN and Sam WHIMSTER, eds., *Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings*, translation Hans Henrik Bruun (London/New York, Routledge, 2012).

¹ Max WEBER, [1904] 1949, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", in A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, translation and eds., *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York, The Free Press, pp. 49-112).

Max WEBER, [1904] 1949, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy", in Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster, eds., translation H. H. Bruun, *Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings*, (London/New York, Routledge, pp. 100-138).

² Max WEBER, [1919] 1946, "Science as a Vocation", in H. H. Gerth, C. W. Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 129-156).

³ Guy OAKES and Arthur J. VIDICH, 1999, *Collaboration, Reputation, and Ethics in American Academic Life* (Urbana/Chicago, University of Illinois Press).

⁴ Max WEBER, [1930] 1958, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translation Talcott Parsons (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons).

had their merits. They were direct. Some of the phrasing was memorable, and conveyed the power of Weber's words, even where they were not precisely accurate. The Gerth and Mills' collection served its purpose: it brought Weber to a large audience.

Then there was a long lapse until *Roscher and Knies* (1975)⁵ and *The Critique of Stammer* (1977)⁶ were translated by Guy Oakes. Edith Graber translated the crucial *On the Categories of Interpretive Sociology*, published in 1981.⁷ There was little consistency. But there was a certain evolution in style, as student-oriented translations were replaced by translations oriented to scholarly users, but users who wanted the ideas, rather than specialists in Weber, a category that barely existed at the time, and would have read the originals anyway. The translations by Oakes, in particular, were designed for an audience of readers more or less competent in the analytic philosophy of the time. Weber came across as a contemporary, acute thinker on subjects such as rule-following, and as a scourge of bad teleology. This eliminated some of the strangeness or archaism of the earlier translations. After the copyrights expired, in the 1990s, there was a flurry of retranslation. Some of this (*cf.* Ghosh 2008)⁸ was of questionable merit. The expiration of the copyrights was a chance to make money.

The Bruun and Whimster project, with translations by Bruun, has an entirely different character. It is the next step in this evolution: a full, scholarly edition of selected texts together with additional material previously unavailable or untranslated, as well as very detailed explanatory notes and discussions of issues of translation. The audience is that maligned group complained of by journal editors and critics of sociological theorists, namely people concerned with what Weber actually meant, that is to say the English language Weber industry itself. The title reflects the selection of texts. One of the most important parts of the book is taken up by translations from letters and notes, some already published in the Max Weber *Gesamtausgabe*, but a very significant portion not. The intention was to include every scrap relating to the problem of interpreting Weber on "methodology", a term they concede is not precisely bounded the first place. This makes the book the most authoritative and

⁵ Max WEBER, 1975, *Roscher and Knies*, translation G. Oakes (New York, The Free Press).

⁶ Max WEBER, 1977, *Critique of Stammer*, translation G. Oakes (New York, The Free Press).

⁷ Max WEBER, [1913] 1981, "Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology", translation E. Graber, *The Sociological Quarterly* 22, Spring 1981, pp.145-150.

⁸ Peter GHOSH, 2008, *A Historian Reads Max Weber: Essays on the Protestant Ethic* (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz).

complete collection of Weber's methodological writings, in any language, ever. It is a model of editing and translation.

The selections from letters are critical to this project, for reasons the editors make clear in their useful introduction. They are, indeed, compelling. Where Weber's published texts, and sometimes the letters, albeit with qualifications, pay obeisance to the "modern logicians" Rickert, Windelband, and Simmel, Weber even writes to von Below that "With the exception of the last third – which is, however, in my opinion the most important part of the article [on Objectivity] really only contains an application of the ideas of my friend Rickert" (To George v. Below 17 July 1904; GStA Berlin Rep. 92, Nl. Max Weber, no. 30/4; Weber 2012, p. 376). But the qualification is important. The letters and unpublished notes destroy Rickert's arguments, brutally, and point to the places in Weber's own texts which also reject them. The question of the relation between Weber and Rickert has long been a matter of dispute among specialists. But there is more going on here than contention between Weber interpreters. The arguments of Weber are negative. Once their force is recognized, we must also recognize more ambiguity about Weber's ultimate destination. To understand this requires some background.

The major disputes over the interpretation of Weber have to do with the complex philosophical context in which Weber wrote: the dissolution of neo-Kantianism. The promise of neo-Kantianism, in its dominant form, was that it would reveal, through "logical" analysis, meaning analysis of relations of conceptual dependency, the presuppositions that constitute intellectual domains, such as disciplines or sciences, or even social and historical domains of thought. The alternative form, which flourished in Weber's Heidelberg, shared this basic idea, but was more inclined to identify antinomic presuppositions, and to reveal fundamental and rationally undecidable conflicts. This was also a way of providing a comprehensive picture of fundamental presuppositions, because these conflicts were themselves understood by way of an overarching structure.

Wilhelm Windelband, the senior of the three "modern logicians", defined philosophy as "the science of the necessary and universally valid determinations of value" (*Wertbestimmungen*) (I, p. 26) (quoted in Beiser 2009, p. 14)⁹. It was central to this project that there be one answer to the question "what are the presuppositions" of a given

⁹ Frederick C. BEISER, 2009, "Normativity in Neo-Kantianism: Its Rise and Fall", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17 (1), pp. 9-27.

intellectual domain. If there was not only one universally valid determination, it could not be necessary – it could only be a perspective, and one among many. But the basic reasoning of neo-Kantianism involved a circularity: the world of fact was understood to be constituted by presuppositions that ordered the world of fact into a hierarchy of concepts; the presuppositions were validated by the fact of science, the fact that the world so constituted was ordered into a hierarchy of concepts.

The irony was this: rather than coming to the agreed view of these presuppositions, the whole point of this movement, the neo-Kantians provided a vast number of alternative comprehensive schemes, all in conflict with one another, as well as conflicting analyses of the conceptual dependencies in different intellectual domains. Weber lectures Rickert on exactly this point concerning Rickert's own philosophy of the systematic cultural sciences: "This [*i.e.* Rickert's] is only *one* – particularly successful – systematization among others. (That can in my view be demonstrated.)" (To Heinrich Rickert, End of November 1913; UB Heidelberg, Heid. Hs. 2740 Erg. 93, 1.2 (NI. Heinrich Rickert). Printed in *MWG* 11/8, pp. 408–410; Weber 2012, 408).

What follows from this is that there is no point to a "systematic" neo-Kantian social science, the project which Rickert talked about under the heading "systematic cultural sciences". We, from our present point of view, can construct concepts systematically, but they are no better than ideal-types. They can make no claim to unique validity and therefore no claim to necessity. This is the point of Weber's qualification in writing to von Below: the last third of Objectivity is about this exact issue: there can be no general necessary and unique solution to the problem of what selections we make out of the material of history in order to constitute it as our subject matter. We can only have perspectives.

This is the negative argument. It is still recognizably neo-Kantian, but by the time Weber and his philosophical confidant, Emil Lask, arrived on the scene, this process was well advanced. Serious thinkers were looking for the exits. But there were no easy ways out. Once one accepted the basic picture of the conceptual constitution of factual domains, which no one within this movement challenged, one is stuck with looking for presuppositions. The fact that this gets too many conflicting answers makes the quest for a single answer or even a single comprehensive picture of the problem futile. But it did not free them from the model of the conceptual constitution of domains.

Where was Weber in all this? He was a sophisticated user of this literature. Some of his language comes from Rickert, who had provided

a comprehensive scheme of the sort that other more prominent neo-Kantians had provided. His close friend Lask was more radical. His follower Karl Jaspers, and eventually Georg Simmel, were also more radical. The exit for Simmel was *Lebensphilosophie*, for Jaspers the “ontological turn”. But these were philosophical, not methodological exits. Methodology was stuck with the idea that disciplines had presuppositions.

But there are some instructive passages. Although the section on basic concepts was not included in this collection, much of it is foreshadowed in “On Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology”. From the perspective of the problem of neo-Kantianism, however, both texts present something startling, or perhaps only ambiguous. The language of presupposition, which recurs repeatedly in “Objectivity” (indeed, more than is evident in this translation, which sometimes translates *Voraussetzung* as precondition) and also in Weber’s discussion of empathy in *Roscher and Knies* (where he argues that the validity of empathic claims requires presuppositions), now disappears. In both Categories and Basic Concepts, the notion of *Evidenz*, which Weber already alludes to in *Roscher and Knies* (and which Bruun translates as Evidentness), becomes central. Weber knows that this is a technical philosophical term that he is modifying for his own purposes. The philosopher who promoted the term is Franz Brentano: it is explicitly opposed to neo-Kantianism.

Weber commits to some ideas that were antithetical to neo-Kantianism. “Direct observational understanding” of meaningful action, for example, is knowledge free of presuppositions. If there was any doubt about this, he adds that this knowledge is a matter of *Evidenz*.

In the later work, the meaning of an act can at least sometimes be given by direct observational understanding – meaning without the need for presuppositions. The problem of understanding past historical actions is summarized in this passage:

On the other hand, many ultimate ends or values, toward which experience shows that human action may be oriented, often cannot be understood completely, though sometimes we are able to grasp them intellectually. The more radically they differ from our own ultimate values, however, the more difficult it is for us to understand them empathically. Depending upon the circumstances of the particular case we must be content either with a purely intellectual understanding of such values or, when even that fails, we must sometimes simply accept them as given data. We can then try to understand the action motivated by them on the basis of whatever opportunities for approximate

emotional and intellectual interpretation seem to be available at different points in its course. These difficulties confront, for instance, people not susceptible to unusual acts of religious and charitable zeal, or persons who abhor extreme rationalist fanaticism (such as the fanatic advocacy of the “rights of man”, Weber [1968] 1978, pp. 5-6)¹⁰.

If we take the “opportunities for approximate emotional and intellectual interpretation seem to be available”, to involve ideal-types, and we take this to be a full picture of the problem, the change is quite startling. All the neo-Kantian machinery is gone. Audience relativity and ideal-types remain. But they no longer need the support of the language of presupposition. Was this what Weber intended, or was it merely an accident of the form of exposition? The notes and letters do not answer this question, but they do point to Weber’s profound dissatisfaction with the neo-Kantianism around him.

S T E P H E N P . T U R N E R

¹⁰ Max WEBER, [1968] 1978, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* 3 vols, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. (Berkeley, University of California Press).