

Max Weber in the United States

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In his contribution L. Scaff outlines the reception history of Max Weber's work from its beginnings down to the present. It highlights the importance of the first translations, including those by prominent American authors and particularly those who had studied in Germany; and then in the post-war years the role of emigrants familiar with Weber's work. The establishment of Weber texts as compulsory reading in the curricula of American colleges also played a significant role. The striking readiness, even ease, with which Weber was received in America is something Scaff deduces from three "narratives that captured the imagination of the American audience". The first is the narrative of voluntarism, i.e. "the way in which Weber developed his conception of the sect and its effects on the individual and society". Next is the narrative of achievement, in the sense of "mastery of the world", preceded by "mastery of the self", which "when put into practice entailed the conquest of the New World's primordial wilderness". Finally there is the narrative of redemption as "the most potent founding myth of the American experience": "The quest for salvation that began as a religiously inspired message became transformed into a secularized cultural theme: the search for the possibility of breaking free from constraints in order to create a better life, to renew the self, to gain a second chance by atoning for moral failures, and to find reconciliation with God, humankind, and the world."

Max Weber represents an unusual and instructive example of a thinker who in his own time was relatively unknown, but who in our era has become internationally prominent. Today his work is widely cited not simply in the human sciences and halls of academia, but also in the arena of public discourse.¹ The change seems remarkable. How did it come about? What explains this kind of recognition, and what is the basis for Weber's present reputation? Under what conditions did it become possible for us to speak about a distinctive kind of intellectual commitment associated with Weber's name – a Weberian theory,

¹ Two recent examples are typical: Fared Zakaria, "Capitalism, not culture, drives economies," referencing the "Protestant Ethic" thesis; and Ezra Klein, "A remarkable, historic period of change," drawing upon ideas from "Politics as a Vocation:" both in *The Washington Post*, 1 August and 11 November 2012, respectively.

a Weberian analysis or “paradigm,” even a “Weberian Marxism” or an “analytical Weberianism?”²

Anyone who has studied Weber’s thought closely and knows his writings well will be tempted to answer that the reason lies in the power of the thought alone. We may want to assert that the texts speak for themselves and justify the author’s fame. Or we may insist that the questions he raised, the significance of the problems he addressed, and the depth of his insights provide a sufficient rationale for his present-day reputation. But such an answer comes all too easily. A more complex and contingent process becomes apparent when we consider the actual historical circumstances, the cultural and political context, and the social relationships characterizing the reception of Weber’s work.

The most obvious way to answer our questions is to propose a provisional thesis: in order to understand the “Weber phenomenon” we must understand what occurred with Max Weber and his work in the United States starting in the 1920s. The work of translation and interpretation proceeded simultaneously elsewhere, especially in Japan, though also in Mexico.³ However, considered from an international perspective, the crucial developments relating to the permanent “institutionalization” of the thought took place primarily in key university circles in the United States. The transmission of ideas over long periods of time is surely advanced by institutional mechanisms and pedagogies that survive for generations. The reading and use of Weber’s texts was promoted by exactly this kind of long-term institutional support.

However, there is a second alternative approach to an answer, found in the fact that Max Weber traveled to the United States twice, as it were: the second time in spirit with avid readers of his work, but the first time in person with Marianne Weber and colleagues attending the Congress of Arts and Science in St. Louis. The actual North American journey covered nearly three months in 1904, while the reception started twenty years later and lasted for decades, persisting to this day. The actual journey to the New World stirred Weber’s imagination and provided substance for his inquiries. It became a

² For examples see Randall Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Gert Albert, Agathe Bienfait, Steffen Sigmund, and Claus Wendt, eds., *Das Weber-Paradigma* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). The idea of “Weberian Marxism” was introduced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Les aventures de la dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955); “analytical Weberianism” is used by Edgar Kiser and Justin Baer, “The Bureaucratization of States: Toward an Analytical Weberianism,” in *Remaking Modernity: Politics, History, and Sociology*, ed. J. Adams, E. Clemens, and A. Orloff (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) pp. 225-245.

³ Wolfgang Schwentker, *Max Weber in Japan. Eine Untersuchung zur Wirkungsgeschichte 1905-1995* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998); Álvaro Morcillo Laiz, “Aviso a los navegantes. La traducción al español de *Economía y sociedad* de Max Weber,” *Estudios sociológicos* 30 (2012), 609-40.

turning point in the biography of the work. The subsequent “spiritual” appropriation in the United States consolidated, extended, and institutionalized the work in the human sciences; it became the essential condition for Weber’s world-wide reputation.

The juxtaposition of the two “journeys” presents an unusual opportunity to inquire how these two moments in the genealogy of Weberian thought – the *Amerikareise* and the subsequent *Rezeptionsgeschichte* – might be related to each other. Can Weber’s actual journey to the New World inform us about the later attractions of his thought for American scholars of the interwar and post-war generations? Are there deeper reasons for the work’s enduring fascination for the audience in the United States? What is it about the particular historical configuration that encouraged the reconstitution in the United States of Weber as a “classic” of enduring contemporary significance? These kinds of questions can be raised in other national and linguistic contexts as well. In the North American case they are potentially consequential because of the genealogy of the discovery and propagation of Weber’s work.

Institutionalizing Weber

The structural and organizational conditions for the success of Weber’s ideas in the United States are by now reasonably well-known. The starting point was the introduction of his texts to the English-speaking world initiated in the 1920s and 1930s in the United States. I have written about these important developments in detail previously.⁴ The appropriation and extension of Weber’s work occurred essentially in three waves: the first was the translations, analyses, and promotional activities of Frank Knight, Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, and C. Wright Mills. The second overlapping series of events supplemented these beginnings with the teachings, writings, and translations of the large number of Weimar era émigrés who fled Nazi Germany and settled in the United States, many reinventing themselves in a new environment as active scholars and teachers. The third extended development was the postwar outpouring of translations and the expansion of interest in new directions, in new locations, and with new groups of scholars and intellectuals.

⁴ Lawrence A. Scaff, “Max Weber’s Reception in the United States,” in *Das Faszinosum Max Weber. Die Geschichte seiner Geltung*, ed. Karl-Ludwig Ay and Knut Borchardt (Konstanz: UVK, 2006), pp. 55-89; and *Max Weber in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 197-244. See also the recent study by Joshua Derman, *Max Weber in Politics and Social Thought: From Charisma to Canonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

The first wave of scholarship was inaugurated by Frank Knight, the founder of the earliest Chicago school of theoretical economics, who produced the first English translation of Weber's work, the Munich lectures compiled by Hellman and Palyi as *General Economic History* (1927). Knight's life-long interest in Weber grew out of a fascination with the historical origins of economic systems, particularly modern capitalism. Coming from an evangelical Protestant background, he was especially intrigued by the possible role in economic development played by cultural factors, such as the belief system of a salvation religion. The Munich lectures seemed to Knight to represent Weber's final, most mature reflection on these topics, well worth his skills as a translator. The young Talcott Parsons shared an upbringing and interests similar to Knight's, though his introduction to Weber occurred in very different circumstances. As a graduate student in Heidelberg in 1925, Parsons was suddenly brought into the orbit of Weber's work. He first read the preface and the essays on the "Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" in the first volume of Weber's *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, finding the narrative so compelling that he became immersed in the text "as if it were a detective story" as he later wrote.⁵ The previous year he had studied at the London School of Economics, attending lectures by R. H. Tawney, Morris Ginsberg, L. T. Hobhouse, and Bronislaw Malinowski, but without ever hearing Weber's name mentioned, even though Tawney was writing *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Indeed, Tawney avoided mentioning Weber's parallel inquiries until the preface to the second edition of his work.⁶ In the Heidelberg milieu, by contrast, Weber's work seemed to be everywhere. Studying with Alfred Weber, Karl Jaspers, and Karl Mannheim (who was teaching a seminar on Weber), Parsons lost little time in choosing a D.Phil. dissertation topic on "capitalism" in recent German scholarship. Not far behind this decision came the proposal to translate a major part of Weber's sociology of religion, eventually reduced to the book appearing as *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. With Marianne Weber's encouragement, support and timely interventions, following three years of labor the text finally appeared in 1930.

As can be seen in Table 1 (see the Appendix) these two texts translated by Knight and Parsons survived for nearly twenty years as the main public sources in English of knowledge about Weber. But other efforts to recover Weber's work were also underway among small circles of scholars. In this respect the

⁵ Talcott Parsons, "The Circumstances of My Encounter with Max Weber," in *Sociological Traditions from Generation to Generation*, ed. Robert K. Merton and Matilda W. Riley (Norwood: Ablex, 1980), p. 39.

⁶ R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937, 2nd ed.); the first edition was published in 1926.

most significant “fugitive” publications emerged at the University of Chicago, where in the 1930s Edward Shils had begun translating numerous Weber texts. His passion for translating Weber focused mainly on selections from the philosophy of science essays collected by Marianne Weber in the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, including “Science as a Vocation,” followed by chapter one of *Economy and Society*, and “Politics as a Vocation.” Like Parsons, Shils was initially compelled to engage with Weber’s thought for personal edification and out of a sense of intellectual adventure: “I was overpowered when the perspectives opened up by Weber’s concepts brought together things which hitherto had never seemed to me to have any affinity with each other,” he wrote retrospectively; “reading Max Weber was literally breathtaking. Sometimes, in the midst of reading him, I had to stand up and walk around for a minute or two until my exhilaration died down.”⁷ Shils eventually began circulating his work to students and faculty in mimeograph format. He was encouraged by Knight, whose Weber seminar – a close reading in the original German of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* – he had attended.

In the hands of Knight and another colleague, the German-born sociologist Louis Wirth, and with Shils’s assent, the texts then became important as part of an effort to define, reform and integrate the University of Chicago’s social science curriculum. Coming to fruition late in the 1930s and supported by the University’s celebrated President and educator, Robert Hutchins, these pedagogical innovations were the first important institutionalization of a selection of Weber’s texts and ideas – the classic distinction between class and status, the conception of social action, or the typology of authority (*Herrschaft*). We should emphasize that the introduction of translated Weber texts in the classroom had to do not simply with professorial interests, but with practical pedagogical disputes and requirements. It was the era in the universities when the social sciences were defined and disciplinary boundaries were drawn. In the United States the debates were intense at Chicago and Harvard, and at public institutions like the University of Wisconsin. Knight in particular was concerned not merely with distinctions among disciplines, but also with the project of countering parochial tendencies in scholarship and integrating knowledge across the social sciences. For Knight it was the breadth of coverage, conceptual richness, methodological acumen, and empirical and historical grounding in Weber’s work – in a word, its vision – that appealed to him. Its world-historical sweep offered a route to professionalization that could attract broad support, and it carried the promise of having unquestioned intel-

⁷ Edward A. Shils, “Some Academics, Mainly in Chicago,” *The American Scholar* 50 (Spring 1981), 184.

lectual prestige in the battles playing out in the sciences. In the classroom the innovation took a specific form: armed with Shils's translations, instructors at Chicago addressed the pedagogical questions in the social sciences by placing major portions of Weber's dense prose in the hands even of the uninitiated undergraduates. Reinhard Bendix was one of these student novices, and the more senior instructors included David Riesman, Daniel Bell, Morris Janowitz, and Milton Singer. This was the kind of educational laboratory in which Weber's ideas began to grow and take root. The collection of mimeographed texts used for these purposes can still be found in the open stacks of the University's Regenstein Library.

The early translation of Weber's work into English was a leap to a new phase in the reception of his ideas. We should remember, however, that there is always a politics and sociology of translation. As with James Strachey's translations of Sigmund Freud, so also with the translations of Weber: they introduced a certain kind of conceptual terminology that has taken on a life of its own, often based on the translators' interests and outlook or on the then current state of scientific discourse. The act of translation is always an act of interpretation, or more strongly, *misinterpretation* – a sometimes subtle distortion of the original, exaggerating some connotations and deeper intuitions while diminishing others. Should *Handeln* mean “action” or “behavior?” Should *Wahlverwandtschaften* be “elective affinities” or “correlations?” Should *Herrschaft* translate as “authority,” “domination,” or “imperative coordination?” The language favored by Parsons and Shils that gained ascendancy tended to emphasize the “behavioral” and “causal” side of Weber's conceptual syntax, downplaying or avoiding altogether the complexities in concepts like *Entzauberung* (disenchantment, demagification) or *Lebensführung* (life-conduct, the way one leads one's life). Numerous debates have been triggered by such choices and their intellectual consequences: criticizing a distorted position, distinguishing the author's actual views from those imposed by the translator, rediscovering an essential but forgotten concept, or reconstructing the theory on an alternative textual basis. This interpretative dynamic will be promoted at the very least by changing interests in the sciences and the culture in which intellectual life is embedded.

Considering the scope of Chicago's influence and dispersion of its graduates across academia, it is not surprising that basic knowledge of Weber's work became widely propagated through university social science curricula. But in this respect there was another important source of knowledge and influence as well, stemming from those who emigrated from Germany in the thirties, and who began to staff social science departments at numerous other institutions.

The Émigrés's Weber

The recognition of Weber's work and the growth of interest in some of his key concepts, such as "charisma" and "bureaucracy," was significantly affected by the emigration of scholars and intellectuals from Germany after 1933: distinguished scholars like Karl Mannheim and Friedrich von Hayek at the London School of Economics, Franz Neumann and Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia University in New York, and of course the many faculty concentrated at the New School for Social Research in New York. In the United States five universities with prestigious and influential graduate programs became crucial in the 1930s for the development and propagation of knowledge about Weber: Chicago, Harvard, Columbia, the New School, and Wisconsin. But during the decade there was also an influx in the United States of numerous widely dispersed émigré scholars on other campuses who knew Weber personally or knew his work well: for example, Paul Honigsheim at Michigan State University, Arthur Salz at Ohio State University, Eric Voegelin at Louisiana State University, Karl Loewenstein at the University of Massachusetts, Carl Landauer at the University of California at Berkeley, and Melchoir Palyi at Southern Illinois University.

Some of the émigrés were especially important for the interpretation, extension and application of Weber's ideas. Alexander von Schelting is one obvious example. Having met Parsons when they were students in Heidelberg, von Schelting later traveled to the United States as a Rockefeller Fellow and renewed their exchange of views. Associated for a time with Howard Becker at Wisconsin, he eventually found a position at Columbia, where he taught a joint Weber seminar with Shils. Von Schelting served importantly as a bridging figure from the Weimar era methodological focus on Weber's work to the reinterpretation of Weber's methodology and conception of social action. It was the social action "frame of reference" that began to preoccupy Talcott Parsons, and for that purpose von Schelting became Parsons's leading authority: the chapters on Weber in *The Structure of Social Action* bore the imprint of von Schelting's guidance, especially on the critical concept of the "ideal type" and its analytic uses and possible limitations.⁸

Hans Gerth was another émigré scholar who contributed significantly to the transmission and dissemination of Weber's work. In some ways his role was unique. Following a somewhat different path than von Schelting, Gerth had been associated in Germany with Mannheim and members of

⁸ Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: Free Press, 1937 [1949].), especially ch. 16.

the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, such as Theodor Adorno. But in 1937 he found himself in badly diminished circumstances exiled in London with Mannheim. With Parsons's encouragement and Shils's assistance Gerth finally made his way in 1940 as an "enemy alien" to Howard Becker's sociology department in Madison, Wisconsin. It was a propitious relocation, for the fateful outcome was Gerth's encounter with two ambitious graduate students: C. Wright Mills and Don Martindale. The Gerth and Mills and Gerth and Martindale partnerships became an essential chapter in the narrative of production for some of the most important Weber texts: both the widely used student-friendly reader, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (1946), and the translations of *Ancient Judaism* and *The Religion of India* that completed Weber's *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion*. In addition, the partnership with Mills brought Gerth's disorganized brilliance into a setting where it could be reshaped by Mills's entrepreneurial savvy. Two of the classics of postwar American sociology – Mills's critical take on postwar American life in *White Collar* (1951) and *The Power Elite* (1956) – owed a great deal to lessons learned from Gerth's immersion in Weberian concepts and ways of thinking about society.

At the New School for Social Research many of the émigrés were thoroughly familiar with Weber's work. Emil Lederer had known Weber personally, assisting as a young Heidelberg economist with the publication of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*. Albert Salomon also was acquainted with Weber in Heidelberg, formulating the tag-line of Weber as the "bourgeois Marx" in an early article, a judgment with an impressively long shelf-life. But in the New School milieu his interests took a more systematic turn, and in the first issues of *Social Research* Salomon presented one of the first précis of Weberian thought – a survey of his methodology, politics, and sociology – for a general audience.⁹ Salomon's broadened view of the work heralded the emergence of a rather different Weber from the professional sociologist and specialized historical economist put forward by American authors. The impression of a shift in focus was strengthened by other scholarship emerging from the New School, such as Alfred Schuetz's use of Weber in phenomenology, Arnold Brecht's in political theory, or Frieda Wunderlich's in agrarian economics.¹⁰ Subsequently this emergent tradition of wide-ranging, even ec-

⁹ Albert Salomon, "Max Weber," *Die Gesellschaft* 3 (1926), 131-53; "Max Weber's Methodology," "Max Weber's Political Ideas," "Max Weber's Sociology," *Social Research* 1 (1934), 147-68, 368-84; 2 (1935), 60-73.

¹⁰ Alfred Schuetz, "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences," *Journal of Philosophy* 51 (1954), 257-73, and *Collected Papers, I: The Problem of Social Reality*, ed. M. Natanson (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1962); Arnold Brecht, "The Rise of Relativism in Political and Legal Philosophy," *Social Research* 6 (1939), 392-414; and *Political Theory: The Foundations of Twentieth Century*

lectic approaches to Weber's work was continued by Benjamin Nelson when he arrived at the New School in the 1960s.

The reasons for the turn to Weber among the émigrés had to do with several fundamental issues. There was a sense among these displaced scholars that if one wanted to engage in social research, then one had to come to terms with the figure of Max Weber, widely credited by them with being the "most important thinker" of their times.¹¹ Furthermore, Weber as the self-described "outsider" took on the function of providing orientation to the experience of displacement and the condition Adorno labeled the "damaged life." The rationale for such an appropriation was to be found in the work itself, since Weber could be read to have confronted the specter of capitalist modernity, writ large in America, with an acceptable cosmopolitan and critical sensibility familiar to a European. But the result of this émigré perspective was then a different kind of Weber, more attuned to the critical problematics of modern life, the unsettled position of the scholar and teacher, and the demanding existence of the "intellectual desperado" (Siegfried Krakauer's pointed characterization of Weber) confronting a world in turmoil. As Franz Neumann formulated the change, in Germany Weber's work had been reduced to its least inspiring dimensions, but it was instead in America under new conditions that it "really came to life" and broke free of superimposed schemes and strictures that tamed its real potential.¹²

At Columbia University émigré scholars like Neumann, Paul Lazarsfeld, Karl Wittfogel, Peter Gay, and Theodore Abel also joined in the kinds of the discussions emanating from the New School in Lower Manhattan. Neumann thought Weber's appeal for historically and theoretically grounded inquiry, combined with intellectual sobriety, showed the way for the émigré scholar's vocation. The appeal offered a kind of corrective to unhistorical naïveté and crude, theoretically uninformed empiricism. In his early work Abel also sought to bring Weber's ideas into the orbit of American social science.¹³ Columbia provided a perfect setting for the cross-fertilization of these émigré perspectives with the work just emerging in the social sciences, encouraged by well-connected scholars like Robert Merton. One result of such convergence was the postwar "Seminar on the State" that began meeting in 1946, attended

Political Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Frieda Wunderlich, *Farm Labor in Germany 1810-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

¹¹ Peter M. Rutkoff, and William B. Scott, William B., *New School: A History of the New School for Social Research* (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 201.

¹² Franz L. Neumann, "The Social Sciences," in *The Cultural Migration: The European Scholar in America*, ed. Franz L. Neumann et al. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), p. 22.

¹³ Theodore F. Abel, *Systematic Sociology in Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929); "The Operation Called *Verstehen*," *American Journal of Sociology* 54 (1948), 211-18.

by Merton, a newly arrived C. Wright Mills, Wittfogel, Gay, Daniel Bell, S. M. Lipset, Richard Hofstadter, and David Truman, among others – a meeting ground for historians, sociologists, and political scientists. Minutes of the group's meetings show a striking reliance on some shared central ideas from *Economy and Society*, such as the chapter on bureaucracy, applied in these discussions to the development of the modern state in a variety of circumstances, from the Soviet Union's contemporaneous efforts at economic development to the politics of decolonization in the developing world.¹⁴

Stemming from these discussions, Merton's *Reader in Bureaucracy* (1952) illustrated one path of development for a new Weberian perspective: no longer interpretation of the work as such, but an application of useful ideas drawn from Weber's texts and extended to novel problems and various research domains. It was this fruitful problem-oriented context in which the ideas could be restated, applied, criticized, elaborated, extended and renewed.

Elective Affinities

The circumstances and relationships identified so far may be sufficient for identifying the conditions under which Max Weber's work was recovered, appropriated, and institutionalized, with a leading role played by universities and intellectual circles in the United States. But my discussion has ignored the possibility of deeper sources of connection internal to the experience of reading an author, referenced in the kinds of enthusiasms recorded in Parsons's and Shils's previously cited autobiographical reflections. In an early essay with the arresting title, "Neither Marx nor Durkheim ... perhaps Weber", Edward Tiryakian has proposed that the essential reason for Weber's acceptance in the United States, his "greater heuristic merit" than other social theorists, was that he "had a much greater range of exposure to American society," including the face-to-face encounters during the journey of 1904, and "had a profound insider's understanding of ascetic, this-worldly Protestantism."¹⁵ With this assertion Tiryakian has followed Benjamin Nelson's broadened conception of the "Protestant ethic" as referring "to the existential and cultural foundations of any society committed to the mastery of this world through inten-

¹⁴ The minutes for 1946-47 are in the Columbia University Seminars Office Archive; see also Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 121-34.

¹⁵ Edward Tiryakian, "Neither Marx nor Durkheim ... Perhaps Weber", *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (July 1975), 14-15.

sive discipline and consensual organization of personal and social orders.”¹⁶ Such a foundation spelled out in the categories of “inner-worldly asceticism” has been widely considered an essential characteristic of cultural identity in the United States. Weber’s experience as an observer of American life in 1904 is of course in itself not an indication of more perceptive understanding of this cultural formation, nor can it speak to the conditions for a certain kind of affirmative reader response. But we now know much more about the biography of the work as linked to the *Amerikareise*, and we have a much clearer understanding of the horizon of the author’s comprehensive vision. In these changed circumstances Tiryakian’s insight is worth exploring further.

For the generations of scholars I have mentioned the engagement with Max Weber became to an important degree a matter of appropriating his enthusiasms and spirit as their own. The pre-history of this appropriation has an important and singular source: not only the transformative experience of reading, as essential as that may be for informing and altering one’s *Weltanschauung*, but also the *subject* foremost in Weber’s mind in 1904: his well-known controversial cultural-historical investigation of the “Protestant Ethic” and its relationship to the “capitalist spirit.”

Weber used the journey to the United States to observe both sides of this world-historical relationship: on the one hand numerous expressions of the spiritual life in social communities, educational institutions, and religious events; and on the other the ethos, the culture, and the everyday expressions of modern capitalism – “the most fateful force of our modern life”¹⁷ – in its most massive and unconstrained forms. The dual theme was never far from his consciousness as he gazed on the social landscape of the New World and absorbed its lessons: a culture filled with “secularized offspring of the old puritan religiosity,” as he wrote at the end of his travels, but also a harsh world in which “with almost lightening speed everything that stands in the way of capitalistic culture is being crushed,” as he observed about native culture on the Indian Territory frontier.¹⁸ Stated concisely, the problematic of Weber’s thinking and writing then reproduced the contradictions of the journey, with

¹⁶ Benjamin Nelson, “Weber’s Protestant Ethic: Its Origins, Wanderings, and Foreseeable Futures,” in *Beyond the Classics: Essays in the Scientific Study of Religion*, ed. C. Glock and P. Hammond. New York: Harper & Row, 1973, p. 83.

¹⁷ “der schicksalsvollsten Macht unseres modernen Lebens:” in the 1920 “Vorbemerkung” to the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1920), vol. I, p. 4; hereafter cited as *GARS*.

¹⁸ The two phrases are from Weber’s 1904 letters: 19 November on board the “Hamburg” in New York harbor; and 29 September from Indian Territory. (The unpublished 1904 letters from the United States are in the Nachlass Max Weber, GStA Berlin, Rep. 92, Nr. 6.)

the paradoxes of the spiritual and material culture represented in the dynamics of the “Protestant Ethic” text. Weber’s American readers could not miss the points of reference: the work conveyed an appreciation of the zeal behind a spiritual quest, but also an analysis of the fervor motivating material conquest. It represented an investigation of themselves and their culture – their hopes, enthusiasms, triumphs, disappointments, and failures.

The journey had multiple dimensions to it, becoming essentially a survey of contemporary life in the United States: the cities, most of which Weber saw east of the Mississippi River; capitalism’s dynamic and business enterprise; the issues posed by rapid immigration; ethnicity, race, and race relations; the woman question and family life; the native American population and the frontier; questions of educational policy and the universities and colleges; the conditions of agriculture and rural society; industrial workers and the politics of labor; the nature and meaning of American democracy; the quality of public life and the media; and of course religion and spiritual life. For Weber’s sociology of religion the experience served as an opportunity to investigate the relationship between religious belief and economic ethics. Sociologically, it became a question of understanding the presence of a relatively high degree of religiosity within a culture in which the effects of market capitalism and the entrepreneurial ethos were on display to an unparalleled extent. Weber often sought to trace the way in which the two forces could persist alongside each other in a dynamic social *modus vivendi*.

One of the most obvious expressions of Weber’s restless spirit was his engagement with religious communities, the churches and the sects of the North American experiment. The search for secularized cultural survivals of the old sacred Puritan religiosity became for Weber an absorbing ethnographic puzzle, pursued among other ways most obviously as a participant-observer in nine different denominational events during his travels. Weber memorialized most of these varieties of religious experience in commentaries or brief references in his published work. The fundamental conceptual distinction he introduced between a “church” as a compulsory organization for administering grace, and the religious “sect” as a voluntaristic community of qualified believers, emerged from these encounters. The participant-observer opportunities also provided points of reference and intellectual inspiration for the second part of “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,” especially the chapter comparing Calvinism, Pietism, Methodism, and the Baptist sects (including Quakerism) that was completed when he returned home to Heidelberg. These episodes were supplemented and reinforced in numerous other ways, particularly the Webers’ visits to universities and colleges from Tuskegee to Harvard, and their observation of settlement houses, voluntary associations, and racial and ethnic communities.

The overall effect of Weber's engagements in the New World emerged in his texts as the ground-work for three narratives that captured the imagination of the American audience. I shall call them the narratives of voluntarism, achievement, and redemption.

By the narrative of voluntarism I am referring to the way in which Weber developed his conception of the "sect" and its effects on the individual and society. It was not simply the formal features of the sect that attracted Weber's attention – voluntary membership, congregational supremacy, election of the minister, a religious polity and offices legitimated by popular authority – but more importantly its social consequences and implications for the individual. The sect was essentially the social mechanism for the "testing" and "proof" of a person's character, honesty, trustworthiness, and overall moral standing – a regime of testing the self performed by one's peers. It served as the crucible in which the moral personality of the *Berufsmensch* was formed. A society of sects was voluntaristic in the sense that it emphasized the formation of civil society as a dense web of personal social relationships and voluntary associations. This distinctive view of the social world made sense because Weber considered the sect the original model in America of the voluntary association and public associational life, a distinctive feature of the United States enshrined in American consciousness. It appeared everywhere, from the social practices of the residential college to the clubs promoting the "Americanization" of immigrant youth. The voluntaristic model was the source of the peculiar version of "individualism" and its anti-authoritarian predispositions in the United States. Weber commented on these characteristic formations, both in correspondence and in his published texts. His readers schooled in vocational culture would have had no difficulty absorbing the message. Parsons even chose to cast his first version of Weberian sociology as the *voluntaristic* theory of social action.

The narrative of achievement is woven into the very idea of the "Protestant Ethic" as an historically consequential social formation emphasizing the character-forming and disciplining power of "inner-worldly asceticism." The orientation of active world-mastery and the norms of worldly accomplishment then carry over to the conception of the "capitalist spirit" that Weber found embodied in the figure of Benjamin Franklin, the most American icon imaginable. It mattered little whether the portrait of Franklin was historically accurate, as some critics have maintained. What counted was the sketch of this spiritual type, set forth already with systematic rigor by Franklin himself in his "Autobiography," a book given by Friedrich Kapp to the young Weber, who then as a mature author reproduced the model personality in the pages of the "Protestant Ethic." Mastery of the world presupposed mastery of the self, and when put into practice it entailed the conquest of the New World's pri-

mordial wilderness. Nature posed riddles and mysteries that could be solved pragmatically. However, the outcome of a problem-solving, practical orientation was fraught with moral ambiguity: either subduing and despoiling nature for utilitarian purposes, or constructing an “iron cage” of self-inflicted domination, or more hopefully promoting the stewardship and care of nature as a spiritual necessity. Weber’s ecological awareness posed the problem in the closing pages of “The Protestant Ethic,” as his readers would have noticed.

But the problem had an answer too, found in the didactic counter-narrative of redemption, atonement and renewal in “The Protestant Ethic” and the one essay directly about the United States, the 1906 article on “The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism.”¹⁹ In key passages Weber managed to capture the most fundamental topos of the culture of the United States. The quest for salvation that began as a religiously inspired message became transformed into a secularized cultural theme: the search for the possibility of breaking free from constraints in order to create a better life, to renew the self, to gain a second chance by atoning for moral failures, and to find reconciliation with God, humankind, and the world. Weber reproduced this alternative cultural narrative in the pages of the “Protestant Ethic,” just as he had noted it in the two most potent literary references of the American journey: Gottfried Keller’s “Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe,” and Peter Rosegger’s “Jakob, der Letzte.” These were literary tales of self-discovery and self-disclosure, and in Rosegger’s mythic retelling of the book of *Genesis* a fable of redemption in a reconstituted edenic, harmonious, multi-ethnic human community, located predictably in the New World. This particular vision appeared in Weber’s mind during an interlude in the mountains of North Carolina. The literary references in correspondence anticipated the cultural contents of the finished text. Readers could not overlook the point of this narrative. It was the most potent founding myth of the American experience.

When Alexis de Tocqueville wrote the first volume of *Democracy in America* some seventy years before Weber’s journey he called attention to the “habits of the heart,” that is, “the whole moral and intellectual state of a people”²⁰ that characterized the qualities of American life: namely, a unique alignment of spiritual zeal, democratic freedom, and practical initiative. In Weber’s account of the American experience these habits have been transformed: it is as if they have now been elaborated in a new way in a probing of the moral and spiritual foundations of a society emerging as the epitome of modern capital-

¹⁹ *GARSI*, pp. 17-236, in the version revised and published in 1920.

²⁰ *Democracy in America*, tr. George Lawrence., ed. J. P. Mayer. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1969, p. 287.

ist culture. What Tocqueville saw as a patterned relationship, Weber began to view as a paradoxical linking of spiritual ideals with material ambitions. His work offered something different to the audience in the United States: not merely an account of social forces, but a triad of narratives with didactic overtones and a characterological sketch of well-known figures and recognizable social types.

The Postwar Weber

As the record of translations suggests, it was not until the 1950s in the social science disciplines that the Weberian imprimatur started to become widely circulated. Considering the textual basis for this development, four publications were especially important, as Table 1 indicates: Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills published their easily accessible reader, including a dramatic and informative biographical sketch, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. It was the Weber “source book” others had wanted years earlier, now perfectly adapted to classroom use. Delayed by the war, Parsons published a translation of the first four chapters of *Economy and Society*, consulting a short version of the text written by Shils and von Schelting, and then revising and expanding work begun by H. M. Henderson at the suggestion of Friedrich von Hayek. This was the only part of *Economy and Society* that Weber had prepared for publication shortly before his death in 1920. By giving the chapters the title *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Parsons announced his intention to appropriate Weber for a general theory of society. It was Weber the “theorist” that became Parsons’s model. In publishing *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Edward Shils (with the assistance of Henry Finch) released for public scrutiny most of his decades-long quest to master Weber’s philosophy of science in translation, introducing readers to commentary on the “ideal type” and a concept of “value neutrality” in place of Weber’s proposal for “value freedom” (*Wertfreiheit*). Finally, by 1958 different translators had published all of what remained of Weber’s writings in the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, though Weber’s original three volumes were out of sequence and in five different books – a situation that has never been rectified, even though Parsons and others had warned from the beginning about the looming confusion in understanding the structure of Weber’s arguments. Regardless of the vicissitudes of partial and piecemeal translations, by 1960 in the Anglophone world a substantial body of Weber’s writings were widely and inexpensively available to scholars, teachers, students and the general public.

Over the last fifty years there has been continuous expansion and refinement of the textual basis of the Weberian project, casting a much wider net for

those interested in the work, as Table 2 indicates. The growth of interest has led to the publication of far more accurate retranslations of important texts, such as the widely read 1904 essay on “Objective Knowledge” in the social sciences.²¹ But burgeoning interest has also encouraged filling major and minor gaps in the textual record. By far the most significant contribution has been the 1968 publication of the complete English translation of *Economy and Society*, compiled and edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, and incorporating Parsons’s earlier text. This is the monumental text that easily captured first place in the International Sociological Association’s survey of the most important books of twentieth century sociology. However, a word of caution is in order about the mythic status of this apparent *summa* of Weber’s thought. For as scholars have begun to appreciate, *Economy and Society* is not actually Weber’s text, but a posthumous editorial reworking of mainly unfinished manuscripts from his desk. Marianne Weber and Melchoir Palyi produced the first version, and Johannes Winckelmann continued with his own edition. Only with the current work of the editors of the *Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe* has it become possible to restore the text to its original form and authorial voice, a project that may yet open new doors onto interpretive possibilities.

Recovering, bringing together, and translating the work has yielded some noteworthy surprises: for instance, the presence of a “structural” perspective in a study like *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*, published by New Left Books, that seemed to some to have affinities with neo-marxist class analysis, though it actually revealed a vocabulary Weber shared with Marx and many others in German political economy. In addition, the political commentary in Weber’s essays on Russia seemed to anticipate subsequent twentieth-century development and revealed an analytic approach to large-scale social change, if not precisely a “theory” of revolution. Or Weber’s early writings on the stock and commodity exchanges, previously unknown outside specialist circles, demonstrated a hitherto hidden side of Weber as a political economist concerned with macro-processes, micro-level choices, and their relationship in rule-governed markets. It was only recently that even another two Weber texts were retrieved, both on topics in applied political economy, and published originally in English in the *Encyclopedia Americana* for 1906/07.²²

²¹ Max Weber, “The ‘Objectivity’ of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy,” in *The Essential Weber: A Reader*, ed. Sam Whimster, tr. Keith Tribe (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 359-404 (translated by Keith Tribe); and in Max Weber, *Collected Methodological Writings*, ed. Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 100-38 (translated by Hans Henrik Bruun).

²² Max Weber, *Wirtschaft, Staat und Sozialpolitik. Schriften und Reden 1900-1912. Ergänzungsheft. MWG I:8*, ed. Wolfgang Schluchter (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2005; see Guenther Roth,

The effect of these retrievals and innovative interpretations has been a significant reshaping of the Weberian field of inquiry, an extension of the horizon and an expansion of interests into new and uncharted territory. It has become possible to address Weberian themes and approaches in widely dispersed domains of inquiry, from rational choice theory and formal modeling in the social sciences to the contemporary significance of the religion and civilization of Islam.²³ It is partly in response to such wide-ranging and varied applications that the question of the “paradigmatic” standing of Weberian thought has become timely and relevant.

The identification, translation and analysis of Weber’s writings starting in the 1950s and especially in the American universities was important not only for the social science disciplines in the English-language world, but because the intellectual capital generated by this activity became the basis for a reintroduction of Weber’s work on the European continent. Indeed, the survival of Weber’s thought and the growth of Weberian perspectives in America was the precondition for his return to Germany after 1945. In some cases outside the German-language sphere the use of Weber’s thought had proceeded somewhat independently. In France, for example, there were the early contributions of Raymond Aron and Maurice Halbwachs, although little sustained interest was evident until the postwar work of Julien Freund and Pierre Bourdieu.²⁴ In Japan, by contrast, a questioning of capitalist modernity and religion produced an early and independent intellectual perspective, with Weber’s *General Economic History* translated in 1927, the same year as Knight’s English translation, and Kajiyama Tsutomu’s translation of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* following in 1938. Other scholars, such as the economist Otsuka Hisao, promoted a continuing exploration of Weber’s ideas.²⁵ But it was obviously in Germany that the postwar reintroduction of Weber’s work was felt most keenly. Relying in part on the version of Weberian sociology promoted by American scholars like Parsons or Reinhard Bendix, the efforts in Germany to recover the work achieved public notice and some notoriety

“Max Weber’s Articles on German Agriculture and Industry in the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1906/07) and their Political Context,” *Max Weber Studies* 6 (2006), 183-205.

²³ See Zenonas Norkus, *Max Weber und Rational Choice* (Marburg: Metropolis Verlag, 2001), and Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schlucher, eds., *Max Weber and Islam* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1999).

²⁴ Monique Hirshhorn, *Max Weber et la sociologie française* (Paris: Edition L’Harmattan, 1988).

²⁵ Wolfgang Schwentker, *Max Weber in Japan*, and his article, “The Spirit of Modernity: Max Weber *Protestant Ethic* and Japanese Social Sciences,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 5 (2005), 73-92; also Takeshi Ishida, “A Current Japanese Interpretation of Max Weber,” *The Developing Economies* 4 (2007), 349-66.

during the political struggles and academic debates of the 1960s.²⁶ Of course, Parsons had rechanneled Weber's ideas into the postulates of systems theory and structural functional analysis, while Bendix had purposefully avoided "general theory" in favor of promoting historical sociology with a Weberian accent. These finer distinctions were often lost in the strains of Weber's uncertain homecoming. But the contentious decade of the sixties turned out to be a prelude to the serious incorporation of Weber's work in the scholarship of the 1980s and afterward, evidenced in Germany in the major and quite different contributions of scholars like Wolfgang Schluchter, Wolfgang Mommsen, M. Rainer Lepsius, Jürgen Habermas, and Wilhelm Hennis, and in the United States especially by work in modernization theory, comparative historical sociology, political and economic sociology, and investigations of state development.

Conclusion

In my retelling, then, in the United States the organizational and institutional features of the reception of Weber's work were supplemented by the cultural forms of identification between text and reader. Viewed from a distance, the Weberian "genealogy" has followed a remarkable path: from relative local obscurity, followed by a reputation acquired elsewhere for reasons having little to do with authorial intentions, then a surprising return to its point of origin, and finally emergence into the visibility and vicissitudes of world-wide attention. Today Weberian thought has long since ceased to be bounded by national traditions. It has ventured beyond these horizons and into the international arena of the human sciences. The most obvious result of this long and unusual trajectory, starting in the 1920s and extending into our century, has been the transnational articulation of a "classical" canon of social theory with Weber occupying a central place, along with Marx and Durkheim, in the pantheon of major thinkers.

Among this triumvirate Weber has had unusual staying power, widely cited, if not carefully read, because his ideas continue to speak to the conditions of the modern world, to address the dilemmas and choices confronting those living within this world or those poised on its threshold. Indeed, the subject-matter of his work offered a message of unmistakable significance: a reflection on the coming of the modern world, a potent commentary and interpretation

²⁶ Chronicled in Otto Stammer, ed., *Max Weber and Sociology Today*, tr. Kathleen Morris (New York: Harper & Row, 1971 [orig. 1965]).

with the possibility of universal appeal. That is why the work still can be read in unanticipated contexts today, from Teheran to Beijing and Sao Paulo to Montréal.²⁷

The perception of significance is sufficient to justify any attempt to assemble those themes, ideas, and problems that constitute the Weberian legacy. From this perspective we read Weber not out of historical interest, or in pursuit of alleged ‘influences,’ or for “solutions” he offered to intellectual puzzles or social problems, but because of his mode of questioning – the problematics of his thinking, the questions posed that are still timely, instructive and edifying. The starting point for these questions is still the long-standing debate over the configuration of forces that resulted in our modern world. The search for new appropriations, interpretations and meanings will endure as long as this problematic continues to strike a responsive chord.

²⁷ A dramatic recent example is Charles Kurzman, “Reading Weber in Tehran,” *The Chronicle Review*, 1 November 2009.

Appendix

Table 1. Max Weber's Work in English Translation: The Main Books and Articles, 1927-1960

Date	Title	Translator/Editor
1927	<i>General Economic History</i>	Frank Knight
1930	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> (GARS I, pp. 1-206)	Talcott Parsons
1946	<i>From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology</i>	Hans Gerth & C. Wright Mills
1947	<i>The Theory of Social and Economic Organization</i> (EaS, part I, chs. 1-4)	A.M. Henderson & Talcott Parsons
1949	<i>The Methodology of the Social Sciences</i> (GAW, pp. 146-290, 451-502)	Edward Shils
1951	<i>The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism</i> (GARS I, pp. 276-536)	Hans Gerth
1952	<i>Ancient Judaism</i> (GARS III)	Hans Gerth & Don Martindale
1954	<i>On Law in Economy and Society</i> (EaS, ch. 8)	Max Rheinstein & Edward Shils
1958	<i>The Religion of India</i> (GARS II)	Hans Gerth & Don Martindale
1958	<i>The City</i> (EaS, ch. 16)	Don Martindale & Gertrud Neuwirth
1958	<i>The Rational and Social Foundations of Music</i>	Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel & Gertrud Neuwirth

Table 2. Max Weber's Work in English Translation: The Main Books and Articles, 1960-2012

Date	Title	Translator/Editor
1963	<i>The Sociology of Religion</i> (from WuG, Part 2)	Ephraim Fischhoff
1968	<i>Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building</i>	S. N. Eisenstadt Guenter Roth & Klaus Wittich
1968	<i>Economy and Society</i> (WuG)	Wittich

1973	<i>Max Weber on Universities</i>	Edward Shils
1975	<i>Roscher and Knies</i> (GAW, pp. 1-145)	Guy Oakes
1976	<i>The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations</i> (GASW, pp. 1-311)	R. I. Frank
1977	<i>Critique of Stammer</i> (GAW, pp. 291-383)	Guy Oakes
1979	'Developmental Tendencies in the Situation of East Elbian Rural Labourers' (GASW, pp. 470-507)	Keith Tribe
1980	'The National State and Economic Policy' (GPS, pp. 1-25)	Ben Fowkes & Keith Tribe
1981	'Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology' (GAW, pp. 427-74.	Edith Graber
1985	'"Churches" and "Sects" in North America'	Colin Loader
1994	<i>Political Writings</i> (selections from GPS)	Peter Lassman & Ronald Speirs
1995	<i>The Russian Revolutions</i>	Gordon Wells & Peter Baehr
1998	'Preliminary Report on a Proposed Survey for a Sociology of the Press' (from GASS)	Keith Tribe
1999	<i>Essays in Economic Sociology</i>	Richard Swedberg
2000	'Stock and Commodity Exchanges' (from GASS)	Steven Lestition
2001	<i>The Protestant Ethic Debate: Max Weber's Replies to His Critics, 1907-1910</i>	David Chalcraft & Austin Harrington
2001	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>	Stephen Kalberg
2002	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism & Other Writings</i> (the 1904/05 text)	Peter Baehr & Gordon Wells
2002	<i>The History of Commercial Partnerships in the Middle Ages</i>	Lutz Kaelber
2002	'Voluntary Associational Life' (from GASS)	Sung Ho Kim
2004	'Introduction to the Economic Ethics of the World Religions' (from GARS I)	Sam Whimster
2004	'The "Objectivity" of Knowledge in Social Science and Social Policy' (from GAW)	Keith Tribe
2005	'The Relations of the Rural Community to Other Branches of Social Science'	Peter Ghosh
2012	<i>Collected Methodological Writings</i> (GAW)	H. H. Bruun & Sam Whimster



Con la moglie Marianne in Italia (1900/1901).