

Keith Tribe

Paper: *The Composition of Max Weber's 'Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Erster Teil' and the Influence of Austrian Economics*
Cambridge, 5th May 2008

Max Weber (1864-1920) first became a key figure in the development of the social sciences and social science methodology in the second half of the twentieth century. This post-war period was however very much an “American” period in the social and political sciences, and so Max Weber’s work first became widely understood and read in selections and translations in English (on this see Tribe’s essay ‘[Talcott Parsons as translator of Max Weber's basic sociological categories](#)’ in *History of European Ideas* 33 (2007): 212-233. His ideas were instrumentalised for a new orthodoxy in sociology and political science, although this was by the 1970s widely seen as discredited.

Max Weber’s reputation survived this development, but the selection, translation and reading of this work that had been disseminated through the 1950s and 1960s remained largely unchanged; most of those who wrote books and essays about Max Weber or used what they thought were his ideas could neither read German nor had any interest in intellectual history. Hence the basic (but very selective) corpus of his writings laid down in English translations of the 1940s and 1950s survived more or less intact into the 1990s, and this itself played an important role in preserving the prejudices and misunderstandings established in the early years of the Weber reception.

Renewal began in the early 1980s, associated in particular with a series of essays by Wilhelm Hennis which reached back to German commentary on Weber from the 1920s and 1930s, first of all in search of Weber’s *Fragestellung* – his “central question” (see the collection of essays in Hennis, *Max Weber's 'Central Question'*, Newbury, Threshold Press, 2000). Combined with other commentary, a reappraisal of Max Weber’s writing that would reveal a different, and more significant, body of work became a possibility.

This process was assisted by the project to publish a critical edition of Weber’s writings as a [Gesamtausgabe](#). In 1975 the Bavarian Academy of Sciences established a *Max Weber Arbeitstelle* to which in 1976 was linked the project of publishing a historical and critical edition of Weber’s collected writings, and this has since the later 1980s provided a basis that makes it at last possible to discard the previously accepted “[corpus](#)”. The new scholarship associated with the Weber *Gesamtausgabe* can be judged most directly in two papers published in *Max Weber Studies* Vol. 3 Issue 2 (2003): Hiroshi Orihara’s article on the editorial approach to creating a new edition of *Economy and Society*, ‘[From](#)

[a 'Torso with a Wrong Head' to 'Five Disjointed Body Parts without a Head'](#) and Thomas Kemple's interview with Cornelia Meyer-Stoll, who assisted Knut Borchardt in the editing of Weber's writings on stock and commodity exchanges, [The Last Hand](#), which also includes a valuable summary of the work of the *Gesamtausgabe*. These two articles, when read together with a lecture by Knut Borchardt, "[Max Weber's Writings on the Bourse: Puzzling Out a Forgotten Corpus](#)", it is possible to gain some sense of how much our understanding of Max Weber has changed in the last ten years.

It remains however true that Max Weber is today chiefly read in English translation, and so alongside the process of creating a historico-critical edition of his writings, correspondence and lectures, it is clear that new translations are also necessary, since the existing corpus ranges from the useable to the unreadable (see Tribe's essay on ['Translating Weber'](#)). Some of the issues involved are discussed in the introduction to Tribe's translation of [the conceptual preface to Weber's *General Economic History*](#), a book that was published in English in 1927 without its preface, because the translator, the Chicago economist Frank Knight, wrongly believed it to be a summary based on *Economy and Society* Ch. 2 written by Melchior Palyi. How the issues raised here link to the more familiar Weber of the *Protestant Ethic* has been shown [in an essay by the Oxford scholar Peter Ghosh](#), whose new translation of the *Protestant Ethic* will be published by Oxford UP.

As is made clear by Hiroshi Orihara, Weber's *Economy and Society*, his apparent *magnum opus*, is more a collection of texts than the unified work that Weber originally envisaged, only the first four chapters having been prepared for publication by Weber himself. These four chapters can and should be read as a separate text from the rest, adumbrating the basic concepts of sociology, economics and politics. Hence it is important that we understand the scope of the concepts that Weber uses in these chapters; and here the effort of adequate translation directs our attention to the provenance of the terminology that Weber employed (see Tribe's [notes about Weberian terminology and its translation into English](#) that were prepared in connection to Tribe's translation of Ch. 2 of *Economy and Society*). This new effort of translating Weber properly directs our attention to the nature of his text, and the effort required to understand it with any precision. While Weber's status as "founder of the social sciences" is further consolidated by this new work, we now understand what this means in a radically different way.

Short biography of Keith Tribe

Keith Tribe became a graduate student in Social and Political Sciences at Cambridge in the autumn of 1972. Under the supervision of Maurice Dobb 1973-76 he wrote a thesis on agrarian capitalism and classical economics, and was appointed Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Keele in 1976.

In 1979 he received a fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to study German economics, from 1979-80 in Heidelberg and then from 1982-1984 at the Max Planck Institut für Geschichte, Göttingen. During this period he began to translate the work of Wilhelm Hennis on Max Weber, and in 1986 he completed his study of German Cameralism, *Governing Economy* (CUP, 1988). In the meantime he transferred to the Department of Economics at Keele, where he taught mainstream undergraduate economics until his retirement as Reader in 2002. Tribe is now a professional translator, private scholar, professional rowing coach at The King's School, Worcester and Senior Visiting Fellow in Intellectual History at the University of Sussex.

Since the later 1980s he has been working on a major project concerning the invention of the discipline of economics, which will be published under the title *Making Economics. The Formation of Economic Science and the British University 1805-1950* (Brill, 2009). In 2009 he will also publish his translation of Wilhelm Hennis, *Politics as a Practical Science* (Palgrave) and a new translation of Weber's *Economy and Society* Chs. 1-4 (Routledge)

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Publications of Keith Tribe

Keith Tribe has published widely on several topics, such as the history of modern economics, the methodology of the history of economic thought, the political economy of Adam Smith, the formation of British economic discourse, the role of the universities in the formation of the modern British economic profession, the history of Cameralism, the history of nineteenth-century German economic thought, the economics and sociology of Max Weber, the formation of *Begriffsgeschichte*, German political and constitutional thought in the twentieth century, the rise of German social market economics, Marxist debates about agrarian society in Germany and Russia and some other issues.

1) Books

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