

Lawrence A. Scaff, *Max Weber in America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011) xiv + 311 pp.

Martin Woessner, *Heidegger in America* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xiv + 294 pp., index.

Scaff and Woessner's studies both fit neatly into the vogue of 'transnational' history; they follow the reception and appropriation of the works of Max Weber and Martin Heidegger, respectively, in twentieth-century America. Despite the obvious differences between Weber and Heidegger, they have both become 'classic' authors in their respective disciplines of sociology and philosophy; no lecture course in modern German intellectual history can ignore them. Equally, their works have had a major impact on American culture: 'Heidegger's reception in the United States has been widespread and far-reaching', as Woessner explains, and 'has transformed – and simultaneously been transformed by – developments both within and beyond the American Academy' (p. 2). American readings and interpretations of Heidegger and Weber matter not only for historians of the USA, but also for scholars who are mainly interested in contemporary German history, since it was often 'Americanized' interpretations of their theories that were exported back to the 'Old World', in a complicated transatlantic exchange of ideas. In Weber's case, for instance, Talcott Parsons's version of Weber's main works became the dominant view of the 'founding father' of sociology from the 1960s onwards, even though Parsons had played down the cultural pessimism of Weber and instead presented him as a champion of unbridled 'modernization' of society.

Scaff's book is divided into two main parts, which deal with different aspects of his topic. (The title of his book reveals itself as a double entendre.)

The first, larger section provides a detailed study of Weber's views of America, which were, to a large degree, formed during a three-month journey across the country, which he undertook in 1904. The second, shorter part of the book looks at the reception of Weber's works in the USA from the 1920s onwards. In 1904, Weber participated in the International Congress for the Arts and Sciences in St. Louis, Missouri, which was held alongside the world exhibition celebrating the centenary of the Louisiana Purchase Act. Scaff provides a detailed account of Weber's journey and reminds us his itinerary across the USA resembled that of one of his most famous predecessors, Alexis de Tocqueville. Like most European visitors to the USA, Weber travelled to the urban centres of the East Coast and the Mid-West, where he was fascinated by the fast-pace of urban life, which he took as a paradigm for modern capitalism. None the less, in contrast to many of the German colleagues who accompanied him to St. Louis – amongst them Werner Sombart, Karl Lamprecht and Eduard Meyer – Weber did not neglect small-town America; he made trips to the 'frontier' in Oklahoma, where he visited a native American reservation and witnessed the creation of a new state of the Union, and spent time in the deep South, where he had the opportunity to meet Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institution in Alabama and reflect on the 'racial question' in America. Thanks to his family relations in the New World, he also had the opportunity to meet 'ordinary' Americans alongside numerous academic colleagues. Weber thus formed a more nuanced and less cliché-ridden view of American society than did many of his contemporaries. The main parameters of this story are well known, but Scaff adds a lot of detail and context to our knowledge of Weber's American experience. He fills some of the gaps left by Marianne Weber's biography of her husband, which had for

decades remained unrivalled as the standard account of Max Weber's 'life and works'.

Alongside his interest in American capitalism, state formation, and problems of ethnic and racial tensions, Weber was most absorbed by religious life in America, and, by extension, the workings of secular voluntary associations and clubs, which he saw as the backbone of civil society. Scaff shows how Weber systematically collected material for his study on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* during his journey through the USA, and demonstrates to what extent he was indebted to American scholars he encountered during his stay (for instance William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*). Making exhaustive use of all available sources on Weber's American journey, including the complete letters the Webers wrote during the trip, Scaff often reaches the limits of what can be known about Weber's travel experience and the impact it had on his academic work. On several occasions, therefore, he speculates about people Weber 'would have' met or whose works he 'must have' read.

The last fifty-odd pages of Scaff's study reconstruct the discovery, introduction and appropriation of Weber's sociological work in the USA from the 1920s onwards. This process of transnational reception and adaptation was not straightforward, but 'a lengthy and unusually complex affair' (p. 197). The chapter provides important material for understanding and debunking the myth of Weber as the crown-witness of American-style 'modernization'. In the inter-war period, several American sociologists had started to translate some of Weber's most important works, including the *Protestant Ethic* and parts of the posthumous collection *Economy and Society*. Not surprisingly, it was Weber's long essay on the 'elective affinities' (or, in Parsons's translation, 'correlations')

between puritanism and capitalism that became Weber's best known and most popular text: 'Astute readers could not miss the moments of recognition. The characters were all too familiar. It was a story about ourselves. For that reason the cultural narrative was the deepest source of attachment to Weber's worlds and of fascination for his work' (p. 198). In meticulous detail, Scaff shows how Talcott Parsons subtly changed the tone of Weber's text and thus 'Americanized' it; references to Nietzsche disappeared, as did the air of cultural pessimism of Weber's mature texts. Before the rise of Max Weber to a sociological 'classic' and 'founding father' of the discipline, his texts and several private American translations circulated amongst a network of scholars and institutions, which were instrumental for the 'diffusion' of his writings. Next to Talcott Parsons, who had written his PhD dissertation on Weber, Sombart and the problem of capitalism while studying at the University of Heidelberg in the 1920s, the sociologist Edward Shils and the German émigré Hans Gerth played major roles in this process; their translations and collections are still in print and used by undergraduate students on both sides of the Atlantic. Scaff's study thus shows how Weber was re-invented as a hero of modernity, but he stops short of fully exposing how the central message of his sociology was transformed in the American context. Too much a Weber-scholar himself, 'reception history', which indeed tells us more about Weber's American readers and interpreters than about the 'intended meaning' of his sociological theories, remains an afterthought of his study.

Martin Woessner's book deals exclusively with the transmission, adaptation, and critique of Heidegger's philosophy in America. In contrast to Max Weber, Martin Heidegger never travelled to the USA; indeed, some authors have, rather prematurely, declared him one of the major representatives of

German anti-Americanism, on account of some derogatory remarks about American civilization Heidegger made in a 1935 lecture, which was eventually published in 1953. Heidegger was certainly opposed to the 'Americanism' of the Weimar Republic; still, his philosophy found its followers and readers in twentieth-century America, despite his anti-modernist and anti-technological attitudes, and despite his open support for National Socialism.

Woessner has written a most illuminating history of the reception of Heidegger's philosophy in the USA, which he follows in diverse and often surprising contexts and settings. Introduced by a concise chapter that could easily serve as a general introduction to intellectual history, his study demonstrates the strengths of this approach to the field. The early mediators of Heidegger's philosophy in the USA, Woessner shows, were all personally acquainted with the 'wiseman from the Black Forest': some American students who had studied with the increasingly famous Heidegger at the Universities of Marburg and Freiburg in the interwar years, such as Marjorie Grene (née Glicksman) or Paul Weiss, continued to engage with his philosophy long after their return to the USA. After 1933, a number of Heidegger's students were forced to emigrate from Germany to the USA, most notably Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas and Herbert Marcuse. To these 'children' of Heidegger, who have been studied in detail by Richard Wolin, Woessner adds a number of scholars he presents as 'Heidegger's stepchildren'. These emigré academics, for instance the philosopher and historian Paul Oskar Kristeller and the political philosopher Leo Strauss, were of equal importance in introducing Heideggerian existentialism to the USA. None of these 'children' and 'stepchildren' of Heidegger were uncritical followers of his existentialist philosophy, but, by critical appropriation, played their part in the complex story of its reception in

America. Woessner, however, has not stopped at reconstructing the scholarly reception of Heidegger's philosophy, but has extended his search for the impact of Heideggerian philosophy well beyond learned journals and academic conferences: 'there has been in the United States a distinct cultural appropriation of Heidegger as the impenetrable Black Forest Philosopher par excellence. This lineage, which includes novels, poems, films, plays, and everything in between, blurs the line between highbrow, philosophical reception history, with concomitant seriousness, and the satirical smorgasbord of popular culture.' Ironically, Woessner argues, 'it was popular culture that helped solidify his reputation in the United States' (p. 161). References to Heidegger can be found in the novels of Saul Bellow as well as in Benjamin Kunkel's more recent *Indecision*, but also in Hollywood films such as Hal Ashby's *Being There* (1979) and Ben Stiller's *Reality Bites* (1994). Even Daniel Libeskind's buildings and monuments are based on the architect's reading of Heideggerian philosophy, Woessner argues. In the 1980s, Heidegger was both a catalyst and an object of the so-called culture wars over 'theory', i.e. post-modernism and its ramifications within and beyond American campuses. Woessner shows the degree to which Jacques Derrida and 'deconstruction' contributed to the fascination with Heidegger. He has written an outstanding and original study, which opens multiple perspectives for students of transatlantic perceptions and interactions and which in many ways can serve as model for further similar enquiries.

Both Scaff and Woessner's studies demonstrate that a transnational approach to intellectual history is not a fashionable luxury, but a requirement to understand the 'making' of classical authors. Therefore they should be read not only by specialists in Weberian sociology or Heideggerian philosophy, but by

anyone interested in the transmission and diffusion of ideas across national borders. Unfortunately, these two important books have not received the treatment by their publishers they would have deserved. Neither book – specialized monographs written for an academic audience – contains a bibliography; Scaff's book, moreover, does not even contain proper foot- or endnotes, but merely 'bibliographical notes', which list bibliographical information by page number at the end of the main text. This lack of full bibliographic documentation diminishes the practical use of these studies considerably and does not do justice to the efforts of their authors.

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