

ARTICLE

Max Weber never was mainstream,-but who made him a classic of sociology?

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Abstract

If by “mainstream sociology” one understands a specific paradigm that dominates the discourses of sociology because its adherents form the majority of the discipline, then Max Weber’s program of a sociology that is built upon “interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences,” was never mainstream, not during his lifetime (1864–1920) or since. So why has he become this overpowering “classic” of sociology? Who is responsible for this development?

This paper does not aim to reconstruct the entire impact of Max Weber upon the history and presence of sociology since his death. Starting with the observation that he has been made into an indisputable “classic” of international sociology this paper, first aims to depict the sharp contrast between the weak and very selective impact and reception of Weber’s work during his lifetime and its significance for international sociology today. Second, it attempts to explain Weber’s career as a classic of sociology, having become—along with Marx and Durkheim—one of the pillars of a “Holy Trinity” in international sociology. Thirdly, after offering a general overview of forty-three individuals who may be regarded as mainly responsible for the fashioning of the sociological classic Max Weber, it concentrates upon the three most important figures by sketching their quite distinct ideas, interests and roles in this endeavor.

Keywords

Max Weber; mainstream sociology;

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A man and his work (almost) condemned to oblivion: Reception and influence of Max Weber during his lifetime

When the body of the 56 year old Full Professor of Gesellschaftswissenschaft, Wirtschaftsgeschichte und Nationalökonomie of the Staatswirtschaftliche Fakultät of Munich's Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Max Weber, was cremated at Munich's Ostfriedhof on June 17 1920, only a small number of family members, friends, colleagues and students attended.

Very few of them would have imagined then that Max Weber would become the German sociologist who would rank as the most important founding figure of a continuous tradition in current international sociology. On that day in the Spring of 1920, only his widow, Marianne Weber, might have been convinced, it became at least the aim to which she herself would devote considerable effort; to make the work of her late husband known and important.

Today it goes without saying that Max Weber has been made into an indisputable “classic” of international sociology. No dictionary, no history of sociology and no relevant sociological textbook would fail to make prominent mention of his name and to stress his crucial significance for the development of the discipline. Since this rescue from oblivion, the triumphal march of this early German sociologist continues. For some decades the work of this Wilhelminian scholar has been deemed essential to international sociology. Since the end of “real socialism” and the farewell to its masterminds, Marx, Engels, and Lenin, interest in Max Weber—who has so often been categorized as the “bourgeois Marx”—seems to have grown even further. Weber's work, which had been interpreted by Marxist scholars and by anti-Marxist interpreters alike as an opposing challenge to Marx's work (Bader et al. 1976; Böckler and Weiß eds. 1987), has been presented as the historical “winner” of what has been far more than merely an academic debate.

From a sociologist's point of view it would be more than naive to assume that this development, from a marginalized scholar shortly before the beginning of Weimar Germany to the internationally overpowering classic of international sociology of today, has been the result of the intrinsic value of Weber's writings alone. From a good Weberian perspective in particular we have to ask ourselves (a) who was responsible for this gradual fashioning of the sociological classic Max Weber, and (b) what were their “interests”—both “idealistic” and “material”—in so doing? Who were the people without whom we would not currently have access to the published work of this scholar, as well to the preconceived knowledge that we are dealing with the ideas of one of the most important sociologists, if not thinkers, of the 20th century?

The present relevance of Max Weber's work contrasts sharply with his national and international reception and impact during his lifetime. If one looks at the early reception of Weber's writings as a whole it shows extreme selectivity. It concentrated almost exclusively on the Protestant ethic writings

(1904/5; 1920) and the printed versions of the lectures on *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (1919) and *Politik als Beruf* (1919). After Weber's death in 1920, even Marianne Weber's successful attempts to bring most of the scattered and mostly unfinished texts to the attention of a wider readership with her construction of four collected volumes—*Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (1921), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (1922), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1924) and *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik* (1924)—did not alter much of the basically weak reception and influence of Weber's writings during the period leading up to World War II.

Even Max Weber's so-called “magnum opus”, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, when it was first published in 1922 encountered an echo, which was rather too weak to be worth mentioning. With very few exceptions, it immediately fell prey to a strong influence, which was segmented according to disciplines. The influence of Weber's formulation of a program and a methodology of scientific, interpretative and empirical sociology appears not to have reached out beyond its influence on Werner Sombart, Georg Simmel and, only later, Alfred Schütz. These three scholars, however, were outsiders to the academic and professional institutionalization of the young university discipline of sociology in Germany in their time (Käsler 1984). Indeed, the single fact that during the period from 1922 to 1947 fewer than 2,000 copies of “Economy and Society” were sold, illustrates my argument.

The same findings present themselves if one looks at the quite unimpressive impact Max Weber made as an academic teacher. The very small group of people who wrote their dissertations under his guidance did not achieve any relevant scholarly importance and none of his very few “pupils” wrote their Habilitation under his supervision. Max Weber had no successors in any strict sense; a “Weber school” founded by Weber himself did not exist.

Weber's career as a “Classic” of sociology in Post-war (West) Germany

Immediately after the end of World War II and after the reopening of (West) German universities it was not so much the German sociologists of the Weimar period, such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Max Weber, Werner Sombart or Georg Simmel, who were read in (West) German sociology but rather the “modern” American sociological writers. It was regarded as the task of the time to connect with mainstream Western sociology, and this formed an important part of the “re-education” policy to be achieved by the (re) establishment of sociology in (West) Germany.

Very few scholars took Max Weber seriously in those years of the German *Wirtschaftswunder*. With the rare exceptions of Friedrich H. Tenbruck, then University Assistant at Frankfurt University, and Johannes F. Winckelmann, retired vice-president of *Hessische Landeszentralbank* who lived near Munich as a private scholar and as late as 1963 was made *Honorarprofessor* of Munich University, dominant German academic sociology was more preoccupied with research on other topics. Let me mention as prominent examples research on the (supposedly) vanishing German class structure (“*nivellierte Mittelstandsgesellschaft*”) by the powerful Helmut Schelsky (Hamburg, Münster, Dortmund), research on the dynamics of the German family and the empirical reality of German industrial factories by the influential René König (Köln), or research on the “Dialectics of Enlightenment”, undertaken by the Frankfurt sociologists, Max Horkheimer und Theodor W. Adorno, after their return to Germany.

It took the 1964 convention of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie* (German Sociological Association) to confront German sociologists with the very different state of Weber's international

reputation. The “Makers” of international sociology gathered in commemoration of their German progenitor: Talcott Parsons (Harvard); Pietro Rossi (Turin); Raymond Aron (Paris); Herbert Marcuse (Boston); and Reinhard Bendix (Berkeley). They all celebrated—not without some critical remarks—the very man who, without any significant contributions by German sociologists, since the more than forty years since his death had gradually become universally acknowledged as a major figure of international sociology. Only through the concerted efforts of these foreign or exiled scholars had the German scholar Max Weber become—together with Marx and Durkheim—one of the pillars of the “Holy Trinity” of international sociology.

The Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons was mainly responsible for this development, which transformed this German sociologist who had died shortly after the end of World War I and had almost become forgotten at the beginning of the 1950s into an internationally reputed Master of Sociological Thought. It was Parsons’ structural functionalism that had become the internationally dominant theoretical paradigm of sociology from around 1950 until 1965. Parsons, as one of the central figures of this development by his own writings, in particular “The Structure of Social Action” (Parsons 1937), and by his own translations of the “Protestant Ethic” (Weber 1930) and of the first part of “Economy and Society” (Weber 1947) drew this universal attention to Weber and through this created such international involvement with his work.

Regardless of one’s position vis-à-vis Parsons’ interpretation of Weber, it must be stressed that it was Parsons’ work that first aroused broad international interest in Max Weber. Although Parsons’ translations offered sufficient scope for improvement—so that his interpretation of Weber later necessitated a “de-Parsonization” of Weber (Cohen, Hazelrigg, and Pope 1975a; Parsons 1975; Cohen, Hazelrigg, and Pope 1975b; Parsons, T. 1976)—this in no way detracts from his historical importance in promoting Weber as a sociological classic. Even in Germany, the broader “re-discovery” of Weber after World War II was only set in motion by the reception of US-American structural functionalism.

The effect of this belated (re)discovery of Weber’s work became immeasurably more influential than earlier attempts by those sociologists who had in their own works, in some cases with great emphasis, tried to utilize Weber’s categories and approach and who were convinced that Weber should rank among the more important sociologists. In connection with the period between 1920 and 1945, I would like to mention Karl Mannheim, Siegfried Landshut, Hans Freyer and Alfred Schütz as being—at least in hindsight—of particular importance. They all mentioned Max Weber in their own writings most favorably and tried to enlarge on Weber’s perspectives and methodological approach. However, the impact of these authors upon the propagation of Max Weber as a classic of sociology was quite limited, to say the least. Mannheim, Landshut and Schütz were driven out of the German speaking academic system and do not seem to have propagated Weber in their new environments, and Freyer did not pursue his admiration of Weber after 1933.

It was only in the course of the (re)discovery of Weber after World War II that interpretations of Weber’s life and work became important. These derived, directly or indirectly, from persons and groups that were—more or less—directly influenced by Max Weber during his lifetime.

These groups involved people connected particularly to the Heidelberg period of Weber’s life, such as Marianne Weber, Karl Jaspers, Siegmund Hellmann, Melchior Palyi, Karl Loewenstein, Eduard Baumgarten, Carl Brinkmann, Paul Honigsheim, Alexander von Schelting, Georg (von) Lukács, Helmut Plessner, Ernst Troeltsch, Theodor Heuss, Robert Michels, Hans Gerth, Max Rheinstein,

Ephraim Fischhoff, and, with crucial peculiarities, Johannes Winckelmann. We shall return to two of them in the third part of this paper.

Through these thinkers, who were directly or indirectly influenced by Weber himself, and who therefore still stood under the spell of Max Weber “the man”, or rather “the myth of Heidelberg”, a glorification and stylization of Max Weber as an “intellectual aristocrat”, a “titan”, a “demon”, and a “genius” arose which made a distanced and critical view difficult and which hindered an unbiased approach to Weber's work rather than facilitated it. Moreover, the majority of these editors, translators and interpreters were not sociologists. The interest in Weber's universal historical framework was frequently a distraction from the sociological content of the work.

Adjacent to this rather emotionally tinted reception another discussion arose which became very influential for the post-war reception of Weber in Germany. It was during the Heidelberg sociological convention that the then relatively young Cologne historian Wolfgang J. Mommsen presented the main theses of his dissertation (Mommsen 1959), in which he hinted at a link of ideas between Max Weber's concept of “plebiscitarian leadership democracy” (*plebiszitäre Führerdemokratie*) and the ideological development of the Nazi state. And it was in Heidelberg that the then Associate Professor of Philosophy, Jürgen Habermas, who was also quite young at the time, joined Mommsen's side: “*Wir hier in Deutschland, immer noch auf der Suche nach Alibis*” cannot forget, he exclaimed, that Weber's vision of a “caesaristic leadership” has had disastrous consequences in Weimar Germany: “*Wirkungsgeschichtlich betrachtet, hat das dezisionistische Element in Webers Soziologie den Bann der Ideologie nicht gebrochen, sondern verstärkt.*”¹ (Habermas 1965: 81)

It took the 73-year-old Karl Loewenstein, Max Weber's student during his Munich period, to rise during the *Gedächtnisfeier* of Munich University one month after the Heidelberg convention and defend his revered teacher against such “audacious historical smearing” by “certain young people” equipped with a “substantial degree of intellectual dishonesty” (Loewenstein 1966: 142). Without any doubt, this so-called *Ahnherrschaftsdebatte* (debate over ideological ancestry) has impregnated the history of Weber's reception within German post-war sociology quite measurably.

This brings us to a further characteristic of today's picture of Weber the “classic.” While noting the contrast between the relative lack of impact and “failure” of Weber during his lifetime and his eminent international prominence and “classicism” since 1964, it is nevertheless remarkable that his reception today is still characterized by a surprisingly high degree of selectivity. It is still mostly only that part of his work which was published after 1904, i.e. the famous “Protestant Ethic” and the article on “Objectivity” (1904), which are generally recognized in sociology. The division of Weber's life into distinct periods as lawyer, agrarian historian, political economist, religious expert, cultural historian, sociologist, philosopher, politician, social researcher, academic theoretician etc. denies its demonstrable continuities and consequently makes a comprehensive understanding difficult, even for many so-called Weber-experts.

This problematic pattern of reception is particularly effective in two different ways: (1) Weber's plan for an “interpretative sociology” has been separated from his substantive work, and has been dealt with in isolation and misunderstood as “the” Weberian sociology; and (2) the whole wealth of

¹ “From an historical point of view, the decisive element in Weber's sociology did not break the spell of ideology, but strengthened it.”

research material has been detached from Weber's writings on the methodology of the social sciences such that the two are not understood as being linked to one another.

Another outcome of this high degree of selectivity is the fragmentation of the entire oeuvre into so-called “instructive pieces.” It is doubtless this that leads us to today's quantitatively most important impression of Weber the sociological “classic”. No internationally recognized work in the sociology of bureaucracy, domination, music, religion, the city, or political parties etc. will fail to mention the name of Max Weber as one of the decisive historical precursors of social science. The overwhelming majority of such ritualized obeisance before Weber the “classic”, however, has no function other than that of legitimizing its own undertaking. Weber the sociological classic serves to establish the identity in both content and methodology of a discipline, of a research intention and of the writer.

The present state of the German reception of Weber

Almost 100 years after Weber's death we can state clearly that Weber's work has passed the “test of time”. Since 1945 we can see a preoccupation with Weber, which has been gradually growing internationally. This continuing and increasing reference to Weber's works, and the equally strengthened concern with him, is not actually a *renaissance*. Weber's reception and influence during his own lifetime was much less strong and “canonical” than in the period after 1945. Weber did not stand at the center of his contemporary sociological discourse, which stands very much in contrast to his present status. Questions can even be asked as to whether Weber himself would have liked the development that made him and his work a classic of an academic discipline called “sociology”!

The present reception of Weber in Germany has been shaped mainly by two developments: the ongoing production of the collected edition of the *Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe* (MWG); and the ongoing debate between the disciplines about to which Max Weber “really” belongs.

After some preparatory talks in the autumn of 1974, a group of main editors of a new and complete edition of Max Weber's writings, letters and lectures was founded in June 1975. The original board consisted of the sociologists Horst Baier (Konstanz) and M. Rainer Lepsius (Heidelberg), the philosopher Hermann Lübbe (Zürich), the historian Wolfgang J. Mommsen (Düsseldorf), the sociologist Wolfgang Schluchter (Heidelberg) and the private scholar Johannes Winckelmann (Rottach-Egern). In May 1981 a first outline of the edition, explaining the general design and the state of preparations of the MWG, was published; a revised version of this prospectus was published in February 1984. It indicates three sections—Writings and Speeches, Letters and Lectures—with 22 volumes for the section “Writings and Speeches” alone! After Lübbe's withdrawal and Winckelmann's death in November 1985, the remaining editors were Baier, Lepsius, Mommsen and Schluchter who bore the responsibility for this enormous undertaking, which has received considerable support from *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, *Werner-Reimers-Stiftung*, *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften* and the Tübingen publishers, Mohr-Siebeck. With this substantial support, and an impressive amount of intellectual and material resources at the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Munich and the Arbeitsstellen of the remaining editors—of whom Lepsius and Mommsen have passed away during the last years—42 volumes have been published to date.

Not least with regard to various reactions to this editorial enterprise, another aspect of the present reception of Weber can be illustrated; Max Weber still remains an “embattled classic”. His work is

hotly contested within sociology as well as between disciplines, in particular between sociology and its neighboring disciplines such as history, philosophy and political science.

Of particular note was the discussion within German history during the “International History Congress” in Stuttgart in 1985, when the importance and potential use of Weberian concepts and findings for present and future historical research were debated and the papers given were later published in a collection (Kocka ed. 1986). Long before this event, though, Weber had been used as a legitimizing figure within newer German social history in its fight against traditional historical approaches as well as against some more quantitative, systems theory oriented approaches. Even today, Weber quite often serves to defend social history against predominantly narrative methods of presentation adorned by the label of “neo-history.” In this context Weber quite often helps as a model for synthesizing great masses of single case studies into a historical panorama of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* from the perspective of universal history.

Next to this discussion between disciplines about the “right” use of Weber's work and methods, another discourse can be identified, namely that within and between different national, sociological interpretative communities. As a good representation of this considerable discussion, attention may be drawn to a collection of essays that have become quite influential within the German debate. It comprises the papers presented at a conference of the “Theory Section” of the German Sociological Society in Kassel in June 1986 (Weiß 1989). In this volume a provisional summary has been attempted of the present state of work on Weber in several areas.

Ever since there has been a—sometimes quite passionate—fight over the somewhat cryptic question as to who might best administer Weber's heritage. This revolves around the issue of the “correct” disciplinary location of Weber's work as a whole, as well as around some more specific questions such as whether Weber was a tragic, pessimistic Nietzschean (Hennis 1987: 167–191) or a “Liberal” with high regard for the British model of liberal personal development (Mommsen 1989). As in Heidelberg in 1964, the 1986 Kassel conference turned into a battle for the figurehead claimed by several disciplines within the realm of the social sciences. This battle has been fought among sociologists, historians, philosophers and political scientists over who actually has a legitimate claim to Max Weber; this internationally acclaimed saint of wisdom.

Besides the significance as a totem offering identity to several disciplines and groups of scholars, Weber has gained some political symbolic value for another historical debate in Germany. After the self-dissolution of the “German Democratic Republic”—and with it the project of a Marxist-Leninist social science in Germany—the image of Max Weber as the prototype of a “bourgeois sociologist”, and by that almost a professional anti-Marxist, collapsed. Starting as far back as Georg Lukács' 1954 *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Lukács 1954; Kaesler 1997), this image that had been reproduced for decades was that of the most important social scientist to have been produced by the German bourgeoisie, but one stigmatized as “anti-Marx” or, at best, as a “negative genius” (Jürgen Kuczynski).

Under the banner of the necessary “appropriation of our whole heritage of learning” (Helmut Steiner), shortly before the self-dissolving of the GDR in 1989 even Marxist-Leninist sociology in East Germany had just begun to cautiously approach the person and work of Max Weber from a position other than hostility. At a conference in Erfurt on the occasion of Weber's 125th birthday, a collection of papers on Weber in the then influential *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* (Küttler et al. 1989) and the first publication of the most important texts of Max Weber (Weber 1989) were proof of a change of thinking. Suddenly the work of Max Weber included “some important suggestions and

ways of thinking that may be worthwhile for a Marxist to accept critically.” (Küttler and Hauer 1989: 6). With the de facto disappearance of Marxist-Leninist sociology in Germany, this freshly developed line of an alternative reception of Weber in Germany also vanished.

Who fashioned the sociological “Classic” Max Weber, what were their driving interests, and which roles did they play?

In this chapter I intend, first to present a general overview of those individuals who—in my opinion—have to be mentioned as those responsible for the fashioning of the sociological classic Max Weber, and second, to concentrate upon three individuals among them who—in my personal view—have to be seen as absolutely crucial in this endeavor. With reference only to these three central “makers”, I shall make a few remarks about their quite distinct ideas, interests and roles in this undertaking.

From any established sociology of science perspective, not in the least from a Weberian angle, we ask ourselves: Which persons are accountable for the gradual fashioning of the “classic” of sociology, Max Weber? What were their “interests”—“idealistic” and “material”—in so doing? Who were the people without whom we would not have access to the published work of this German scholar today, but also the preconceived knowledge that we are dealing with the work and ideas of one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century, at least for sociology? What kind of roles did these people play in this concerted effort, not without bitter fights among them?

In order to give a first, preliminary—and incomplete—answer, I would like to offer an attempt of compiling some sort of “pedigree” of the “makers” of Weber, the sociological mastermind.

In this “pedigree” one finds forty-three individuals, one woman and forty-two men, without whom, I think, we would not be dealing with the sociological classic, Max Weber, today. As one can see, they come from different national backgrounds, although naturally with a strong German bias, they belong to a broad spectrum of academic generations, ranging from 1870 to 1950 as well as to a broad spectrum of disciplines.

Of course, it would be quite tempting—and not totally without some delicate debates—to comment upon the individual contribution of each of the forty-three. However, and not merely for reasons of limited space, I shall not venture into this controversial task.

I prefer to concentrate instead upon the three people whose most crucial role in the gradual fashioning of the sociological “classic” Max Weber is beyond question: Marianne Weber; Johannes Winckelmann; and Talcott Parsons. Without these three individuals, two of whom were not even professional academic scholars, you would not be reading a paper discussing Max Weber the sociological mastermind.

It is, of course, with **Marianne Weber** that the story of the gradual fashioning of the classic Max Weber must begin. Her role could be characterized as that of **trustee**.

She was not only the caretaker of a heritage that had been left behind, however. Indeed, it was she who created this heritage in the first place. Without her producing the four collections mentioned, together with the (re) construction of the three volumes of his writings on world religions, and the construction of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, there are legitimate questions as to whether the very idea of a Weberian oeuvre would have developed at all. We should never forget that when Max Weber

died in June 1920, only two books bearing his name stood on the bookshelves of his contemporaries: his dissertation of 1889 (Weber 1889); and his *Habilitation*-thesis of 1891 (Weber 1891).

This is not the right place to go into too much detail about who this woman was and what her interests were in devoting her whole life after Weber's death to the creation and adoration of her late husband's work and life. She was convinced of the ultimate success of her endeavors without the slightest doubts: "*Sein Ruhm ist meines Erachtens erst im Beginn seines Aufstiegs. Die Menschen werden erstaunen, wenn sie seine Werke (10–12 Bände) mit Händen greifen. Ich lebe für seine irdische Verewigung.*"² (Baumgarten 1964: 605). The salvation of the greater part of the unfinished bits and pieces and putting them together so as to present an (almost) finished "work" was the one major contribution of Weber's widow. Next to this (re) creation of a voluminous scholarly work stands the portrayal of the life of the author of this great work, the portrayal of an outer and inner development of a scholarly mastermind by writing and publishing the *Lebensbild* in 1926 (Weber Marianne 1926).

Not only are the achievements of Marianne Weber well known, we also know about the problems involved in these two roles, editor of the collected works and portrayer of the *Lebensbild*. The *Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe* has successfully begun to take care of many problems relating to her role as editor. As to Marianne Weber's portrayal of Weber's life, several attempts to supplement hers have been under way; the "touch up" of Weber's life in her great book required correction and this has been effected (Kaesler 1989; Kaesler 2000; Kaesler 2014).

What Marianne Weber had started immediately after Weber's death, **Johannes Ferdinand Winckelmann** continued after 1950. His role could also be characterized as that of a trustee, but in his case it was much more the role of **promoter** of Max Weber's work and its importance during the 1950s, and right into the late 1970s.

As Johannes Winckelmann may not be as familiar as Marianne Weber and Talcott Parsons, allow me to elaborate him more than the other two. As someone who attended the seminars of Winckelmann during the greater part of his own studies at Munich University (1965–1972), I think I am in a position to judge upon the ideas and interests that motivated this self-declared caretaker and promoter of Max Weber's work. It had been his firm conviction that Weber's work would offer a better understanding of the universal historical development of modernity than any other sociological concept, in particular any Marxist approach. His sole interest in Max Weber concentrated upon the writings, his interest in the life of Max Weber, in particular in Weber's private life ("*Tantengeschichten*") was close to nil, and his criticism of any such attempts tended to become fierce.

How did this former judge and life-long civil servant—first in various courts of the *Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg* (1927–1938), then in the Reichswirtschaftsministerium (1938–1945) and then at the Hessische Landeszentralbank (1946–1951)—get so much on the Weber-track that even as early as November 1945 he was able to write of himself: "*Ich betrachte mich als Schüler des weit über Deutschland hinaus bekannten demokratischen Hochschullehrers Professor Dr. Max Weber, dessen wissenschaftliche und politische Lehren ich mir weitgehend zu Eigen machte, da sie meinen*

² "His fame is, in my opinion, only at the beginning of his ascent. People will be astonished when they hold his works (10–12 volumes) in their hands. I live for his earthly perpetuation."

eigenen Intentionen und Erfahrungen entsprachen und von weltweiten Gesichtspunkten getragen waren."³ (Winckelmann 1945: 1–2)

According to his own account it was as a first-year student at Marburg University in the summer of 1919 that he had read the two small brochures of *Wissenschaft als Beruf* and *Politik als Beruf* and through them had found his "way to Weber". His desire to study under Weber in Munich could not be fulfilled, because when he arrived there in *Wintersemester* 1920/21 Weber had already died. This did not stop his eager interest in Weber's work such that by May 1925 he had already initiated a correspondence with Marianne Weber about his own editorial suggestions (Borchardt 2000: 16), but things had to wait until the end of World War II. As early as 1949 we find his first Weber publication (Winckelmann 1949), then as editor of the second edition of *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* in April 1951 he eventually entered the arena of Weber-scholars. By 1985, the year of his death, we were able to reconstruct the enormous achievements of this restless, influential and tricky propagator of Weber's work, who created a whole network of institutions—such as the *Max-Weber-Gesellschaft*, the *Max-Weber-Archiv* (1960–1966), the *Max-Weber-Institut* (1966–1976), and the *Max-Weber-Arbeitsstelle* at the *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften* (since 1978). And the story could—and should—be told of his astonishing success at spinning personal networks that went up as high as the former *Bundespräsident* Theodor Heuss. I shall abstain from this story for today, and once again not only because of restricted space.

It may be said as some sort of interim balance, however, that Winckelmann's success in terms of the academic level in promoting and propagating the importance of Max Weber as a classic of sociology in post-war (West) Germany altogether was quite limited. Although Winckelmann's editions were on the market with the two volumes of the "Protestant Ethics"-texts becoming best-sellers, as well as his most influential collection of Weber-texts with *Kröner-Verlag* (First edition 1956, 6th edition 1992), with almost 50 000 copies sold, it was not until 1964 that Weber attained a certain degree of importance in academic and even public circles. But Winckelmann fought with growing success with his editions, his institutional letterheads and by creating a complex network of people and institutions that supported the gradual institutionalization of research on Max Weber. The beginning of the work on the *Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe*, with its *Geschäftsstelle* at the *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften* in Munich, and the creation of the network of the additional four *Max-Weber-Arbeitsstellen*, in many ways marked the climax of his endeavors over the last twenty years of this life, devoted to Max Weber. (Kaesler 2006)

To sum up Winckelmann's role and motives in contributing to the fashioning of the sociological classic Weber, one might best quote from a letter by Karl Loewenstein dated June 14, 1963 in which he supported the plan to promote the then private scholar Dr. Winckelmann to *Honorary Professor* of Munich University. Loewenstein wrote: "*Herr Dr. Winckelmann hat [...] dazu beigetragen, einen der Großen des deutschen Geisteslebens der Nachwelt schlackenfrei zu übermitteln. Nur diejenigen, die sich selbst mit dem monumentalen Werk Webers beschäftigt haben, können ermessen, welche*

³ "I regard myself as a student of Professor Max Weber, a democratic scholar well known beyond Germany, and whose scientific and political doctrines I have largely embraced because they corresponded to my own intentions and experiences and were directed by a global point of view."

Devotion und auch Selbstentäußerung dazu gehört, sein ganzes Leben in den Dienst des Weber-Bildes zu stellen."⁴

It is not necessary to say as much about **Talcott Parsons**, the third major “maker” of the sociological classic Max Weber, as about Winckelmann. The role of Parsons and his structural-functionalism for international sociology has been researched in detail. Without this man and his work it is impossible to understand Western sociology during the period from 1940 to 1970. And, as mentioned before, during those thirty years the name of Max Weber and Parsons’ interpretation of Weber’s work, together with his own translations of central Weber-texts into English, became (almost) as important as Parsons himself and his work. In order to describe Parsons’ role in the fashioning of the sociological classic Max Weber we propose to see in him the—most influential—**interpreter** of the sociologist Weber.

What were Parsons’ interests in this? The story of him utilizing Weber’s analysis of the origins and effects of capitalism during the first phase of his foundation of his own dealing with capitalism is well known (Jensen 1980: 12–14), as are his (re)constructive attempts to synthesize the works of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto and Alfred Marshall, to which he later added a whole set of additional European thinkers such as Freud, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Piaget. Instead of reproducing the familiar account of the theoretical and strategic use Parsons made of Weber, as one of those European thinkers for the foundation of his own action-theory based approach I prefer to turn to his re-import of Weber to Europe, and Germany in particular, and to a story reconstructed by our Heidelberg colleague Uta Gerhardt:

Parsons, together with Reinhard Bendix and Benjamin Nelson, had decided in 1962—two years prior to the *Soziologentag*—that they wished to contradict the critical view on Weber as it prevailed in the early 1960s in Germany. Parsons together with Bendix and Nelson arranged a meeting with Otto Stammer, then President of the German Sociological Association and convenor elect of the Heidelberg *Soziologentag*, two years in advance of the *Soziologentag*. On the occasion of the Sixth Congress of the International Sociological Association, which took place in Washington in 1962, Bendix, Nelson, and Parsons met Stammer (whom they had invited to Washington by the President of ISA, for the purpose), to guarantee that their contributions were to be placed in prominent positions in the *Soziologentag* programme. They corresponded with each other since 1961, to plan their action that was to counteract the criticism against Weber to be expected at Heidelberg from speakers related to the Frankfurt School. (Gerhardt 2001: 338)

Very much in contrast to the *Gedächtnisfeier* of Munich University of June 1964, which—mainly due to the persistent endeavors of Johannes Winckelmann—became virtually a university initiative, the Heidelberg *Soziologentag* appears to have been an event mainly engineered by Parsons, together with Reinhard Bendix and Benjamin Nelson, and only then supported by Heidelberg University and the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie*. So much for the state of Max Weber as a mastermind of German sociology in the 1960s!

I shall end this presentation with these short remarks about the three most important makers of the sociological classic Max Weber: Marianne Weber the trustee; Johannes Winckelmann the promoter; and Talcott Parsons the interpreter and international propagandist. These three individuals in their

⁴“Dr. Winckelmann has [...] contributed to the transfer of the work of one of the greater ones of German intellectual life to posterity. Only those who have occupied themselves with the monumental work of Weber can appreciate the devotion and self-emptying of his whole life in the service of Weber's image.”

distinct roles can be held chiefly responsible for the development that has led to our seeing in Max Weber—whose work stood in the serious danger of descending into oblivion at the time of his premature death—one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century, perhaps quoted more often than Karl Marx these days.

It might be worth noting, though, that if we look at the whole gallery of those people who began this propagating Weber's work before 1964, many of them were academic "outsiders" for whom upholding Weber's legacy also became a matter of personal legitimization, mostly with very limited success. The almost tragic figures like Eduard Baumgarten, Hans Gerth, Benjamin Nelson and, to a lesser degree, Johannes Winckelmann might prove this suspicion. Could it be, one might ask, that these outsiders themselves felt some sort of *Wahlverwandtschaft*, an "elected affinity", to a man who, for the greater part of his own life, had been an outsider and *Querdenker* himself, and whose scholarly career during his own lifetime also was more of a failure than a grand success?

Another concluding thought. Taking a sociology of science approach, it would be rewarding to go through the whole list of those forty-three individuals identified as of prominent importance for the fashioning of the sociological classic Max Weber and regroup them in an ideal typical way along at least two factions. There are those who saw the preservation and cultivation of Weber's work alone as their main aim of their dealing with his work. This, of course, started with Marianne Weber and carried on, with Winckelmann as someone of particular importance after World War II. One might also distinguish from this group of Weber-scholars those whose main aim was the further development and continuation of Weber's theoretical achievements by integrating it into their *own* theoretical designs. This strand of Weber-scholarship had, of course, its most prominent and influential representative after World War II in Talcott Parsons, and in more recent times names like those of Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens might well be worth mentioning.

Looking at these two groups, one might ask how well communication—and reciprocal appreciation—between them has been developed, and whether one might not state an imminent danger of them drifting apart, and away from fruitful cooperation?

In any case both of these "invisible colleges" of international Weber-scholars—those who care more for the cultivation and historical contextualization of Weber's work, as well as those who concentrate more upon a theoretical continuation of Weber's work—prove that Max Weber may quite rightly be called "a living classic"!

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The fabrication of the sociological classic Max Weber

1920–1945

MARIANNE WEBER (1870–1954)

Melchior Palyi / Karl Loewenstein / Jörg von
Kap-herr / Siegmund Hellmann

Karl Jaspers (1883–1969)

Alexander von Schelting (1894–1963)

Karl Mannheim (1893–1947)

Siegfried Landshut (1897–1968)

Hans Freyer (1887–1969)

Alfred Schütz (1899–1959)

1945–1964

Reinhard Bendix (1916–1991)

Benjamin Nelson (1911–1977)

Hans H. Gerth (1908–1978)

Paul Honigsheim (1885–1963)

Georg [von] Lukács (1885–1971)

Max Graf zu Solms (1893–1968)

Max Ernst Graf zu Solms (1910–1993)

Friedrich Tenbruck (1919–1994)

Eduard Baumgarten (1898–1982)

JOHANNES F. WINCKELMANN (1900–1985)

TALCOTT PARSONS (1902–1979)

15. Deutsche Soziologentag, Heidelberg, April 1964

"Max Weber und die Soziologie heute"

TALCOTT PARSONS

Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929)

Raymond Aron (1905–1983)

Wolfgang J. Mommsen (1930–2004)

Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979)

**Die Gedächtnisfeier der Ludwig-
Maximilians-Universität München,
June 1964**

Bernhard Pfister (1900–1987)

Johannes Winckelmann

Karl Bosl, Alois Dempf, Karl Engisch,
Emerich Francis, Herbert Franke, Karl
Loewenstein, Friedrich Lütge, Hans Maier,
Jacob Taubes, [Eric Voegelin, Alfred Müller-
Armack]

Guenther Roth (b. 1931)

Johannes Weiß (b. 1941)

Hubert Treiber (b. 1942)

Dirk Kaesler (b. 1944)

Stefan Breuer (b. 1948)

Wilhelm Hennis (1923-2012)

Jürgen Habermas

**The German Weber-reception
after 1964**

Johannes Winckelmann

Friedrich H. Tenbruck

Wolfgang J. Mommsen

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