Max Weber

*Selections in translation*
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Preface

Max Weber (1864–1920) has come to be widely regarded as the most important European social theorist of the twentieth century. But his writings have only slowly and sporadically become available in English, and have still not been translated in full. This is due in part to the scope and quantity of his work and in part to the interests and purposes of his various editors and translators. But whatever the reasons, there remains a need for a selection which will, so far as is possible within a single volume, give the English-speaking reader an overall picture of Weber’s contribution to the remarkably wide range of topics in the social sciences to which he addressed himself over his career. Any selection of this kind will of course be personal and arbitrary. Weber is a difficult author with whom to come to terms. Not only was his major work, Economy and Society, incomplete at the time of his death, but much of his earlier writing is unsystematic and on occasion polemical. It has seemed to me better to include a smaller number of longer, continuous extracts than the other way round; and I have been guided in my choice by the wish to cover not only the most significant and influential of Weber’s writings but also some of those which have not been translated into English elsewhere. But these aims inevitably conflict, and the result cannot be other than a compromise.

I have also thought it right to keep my own comments to a minimum in order to leave as much as possible of the available space for Weber’s own words. Weber is one of those authors who, like Marx, will continue to have as many interpreters as he has readers, and those approaching him for the first time are better advised to make up their minds about him for themselves than to rely on editorial commentary. I have, however, written a brief introduction to each group of selections and appended a summary biography of Weber, together with some suggestions for further reading. These suggestions do not cover more than a fraction of what has by now been written about Weber in English. But they do cover what I think will be found most useful by anyone who wishes to follow up their reading of this volume with more detailed study of one or another aspect of Weber’s life and work.

Eric Matthews has sought, in his translation, to keep as close to the original text as is compatible with reasonably idiomatic English. This has
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meant some modification in punctuation, sentence structure and the use of italics. Also, Weber’s paragraphs have been broken up wherever they are much longer than would be found in an English text. Because of having decided, on principle, against editorial footnotes, we have sometimes had recourse to paraphrase of allusions with which Weber seems to have assumed that his readers would be familiar. But we have not otherwise sought to soften the difficulties already present in the original. The translation was done without reference to other previous translations, where these exist, and I have not attempted any systematic comparison between them. But where I have compared selected passages, I am bound to say that I have each time found Eric Matthews’ translation not only more readable but also more accurate. Weber is not an easy author by any standards. But English-speaking readers who complain of his difficulty can hardly be blamed if his translators have rendered him more obscure than he already is.

Where semi-technical terms are concerned, we have tried as far as possible to be consistent in using the same English term throughout. Thus, for example, we have adopted ‘enterprise’ for the German Betrieb and retained ‘undertaking’ for Unternehmung even where there is little or no detectable difference between the two. But where there does arise a conflict of usage, we have abandoned consistency in favour of whatever different English term is required, in our view, by the context. Thus, Stand is rendered as ‘status group’ almost throughout, in contrast with ‘class’ (Klasse) and the more general ‘stratum’ (Schicht); but where a reference to ‘the Junker Estate’ can only be naturally rendered as such, we have discarded ‘status group’ without compunction. Similarly, we have rendered Stadt as ‘city’ in most contexts, even where writers in English on China, or the Roman Empire, or the late Middle Ages in Northern Italy or Germany might be more likely to use ‘town’; but we have not insisted on retaining it to the point at which the proverbial contrast between ‘town and country’ would have to be turned into a quite unnatural ‘city and country’. Where the term in question is in, or directly derived from, a language other than German, we have adopted whichever of three alternatives seemed most appropriate for the non-specialist reader. Duma, for example, seems to us a term which can be left to stand as it is in the context of a discussion of Russia in 1905. But for Zzemstvo, which Weber left as it is, we have thought it better to use ‘Council’ although making it clear by inserting (Zzemstvo) in parentheses on its first appearance that this is what we have done; and where a sufficiently precise paraphrase is available, we have adopted the third alternative of putting it directly into the text even if Weber has not: thus Decuriones become ‘municipal councillors’ on the grounds that non-specialist readers may well never have heard of ‘decurions’ while
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specialists will not (we hope) regard the paraphrase as a distortion. Again, this strategy represents a deliberate compromise, and there are bound to be cases where some readers will feel that the wrong alternative has been chosen. But these examples should at any rate give a fair idea of the principles by which our own decisions have been guided.

Our thanks are due to Dr Jeremy Mynott of the Cambridge University Press, who first engineered our collaboration and saw it through to fruition with patience and understanding; to Dr Peter Garnsey for valuable advice on how best to try to render the selection on the Ancient World; to Dr Anthony Giddens for his comments on the choice of selections and suggestions for further reading; to Dr Paul Gorner for help on many difficult points of German history, language and literature; to Guy Stock, who corrected a particularly glaring error in the draft of one selection; and to Mrs Joan Smith, Logic Department Secretary at the University of Aberdeen, for her invaluable assistance in making the text of the translations presentable.

Trinity College, Cambridge
February 1977

W. G. R.
Publisher’s note

In view of the range of literature references in the text, it has not always been feasible to trace which edition Weber was using. In general, titles of English works have been cited in English, but in cases where Weber refers to German editions of works originally published in English his own page references have been retained. German titles have been left in German in the footnotes, but have been translated into English in the text.

Many of the name references in Weber’s footnotes are purely bibliographical and it has not therefore seemed useful to index them all. Entries have been selected only when the reference includes some contribution to the discussion in the main text.
Biographical Summary

1864 Born at Erfurt, Thuringia.
1869 Family moves to Berlin.
1882 Student at Heidelberg.
1883 First period of military service at Strasburg.
1884–85 Student at Berlin.
1885–86 Student at Göttingen.
1888 Joins Association for Social Policy.
1889 Doctoral dissertation on medieval trading companies.
1891 Habilitation dissertation on agrarian history of Rome.
1892 Engaged to Marianne Schnitger. Teaches law in Berlin. Publishes major study of labour relations in agriculture in Eastern Germany.
1893 Marriage.
1894 Professor of Political Economy at Freiburg. Publishes first part of article on stock exchange and further article on agricultural labour in Eastern Germany.
1895 Inaugural Lecture. Travels in England and Scotland.
1896 Succeeds Knies as Professor of Economics at Heidelberg. Publishes lecture on decline of Rome and second part of article on stock exchange.
1897 Publishes essay on ancient economic history. Father dies. Nervous breakdown.
1899 Attempts to resume teaching. Further breakdown.
1902 Begins writing on methodology.
1903 Honorary professorship at Heidelberg. Publishes article on Roscher and Knies. Begins work on ‘Protestant Ethic’.
1904 Visits the United States. Gives lecture at Congress in St Louis on German rural society. Undertakes jointly with Edgar Jaffé and Werner Sombart editorship of Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik and publishes editorial on ‘Objectivity’. Also publishes articles on entitlement of landed estates and on social structure of ancient Germany.
1905 Publishes two-part article on ‘Protestant Ethic’. Disputes with Schmoller over value-judgments in economics at meeting of Association for Social Policy.
1906 Publishes articles on Protestant sects, on the logic of social science and on contemporary political events in Russia.
1907 Publishes methodological critique of Rudolf Stammler. Begins work on empirical study of industrial workers for Association for Social Policy.
1908–9 Publishes articles on methodological problems of industrial worker study.
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1909    Publishes major, revised essay on ancient economic history.
1910    Attends first conference of German Sociological Society.
1910–14 Works on Economy and Society.
1913    Publishes article on ‘interpretative’ sociology.
1914    Participates in Association for Social Policy’s closed debate on value-judgments in social science. Reserve officer in charge of military hospitals
1916    Publishes at length on sociology of religion including ‘Confucianism and Taoism’ and ‘Hinduism and Buddhism’.
1917    Extensive political journalism including article on Russia. Publishes contribution to 1914 debate on values and essay on ‘Ancient Judaism’.
1918    Professor of Sociology at Vienna. Lecture to Austrian officers on ‘Socialism’. Consultant to drafting commission for Weimar constitution. Refuses nomination for seat in National Assembly. Publishes further long article on political situation in Germany.
1919    Professor of Sociology at Munich. Mother dies. Lectures on ‘Politics as a Vocation’ and ‘Science as a Vocation’ to student audiences.
1919–20 Lecture course on general economic history.