

**Why Does Max Weber Not Define a Concept of 'Political Action' in his 'Basic Sociological Concepts'?: Simultaneously a Commentary on Some Aspects of Kari Palonen's Writings on Max Weber**

Michael Th. Greven

The question of 'Weber's Relevance as a Theorist of Politics' can be – and has already been in numerous publications – answered in at least two different contexts; either by means of historical reconstruction of his writings during the time of their origin as part of a 'history of political concepts' or with respect to some present problems of political theory.<sup>1</sup> My contribution is more of the second type. Naturally, even a more systematic approach such as this cannot neglect the historical context and background, from which Weber's writing arose. To this day the claim of their actual relevance consequently requires the demonstration of some lasting common ground, or at least sincere similarities in this respect.

The thesis of my contribution is that such a common ground can be found in the appearance and development of a specific perception of the modern society as a *political society*.<sup>2</sup> This society, for the first time in

1. Given the well-known difficulties of translations of German concepts into English – especially where Max Weber is concerned – I use my own translations throughout this text – and sometimes add the German concepts; for the context of political science, Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited* (Chatham: Seven Bridges Press, 1987), in chapter 7.2, discusses the popular false and – at least for a German – irritating English translations of Weber's theoretical vocabulary in detail – especially *Herrschaft* = Authority – and states that: 'the misinterpretation of "Herrschaft" resulted in a catastrophe for the whole semantic field of terms like "Autorität", "Macht", "Gewalt" und "Zwang"' (p. 188 of the German edition, Darmstadt 1992, my translation); Sven Eliaeson, in *Max Weber's Methodologies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), frequently refers to problematic translations: '...it seems to me that any translation almost requires a presupposed metaposition. Many fissures in Weber's image are due to Anglo-Saxon dependence on translations; it is well known that there are a number of concepts that simply do not lend themselves to translation' (pp. 146-47).

2. In this paper I will refer without further notice to my books *Die politische Gesellschaft. Kontingenz und Dezision als Probleme des Regierens und der Demokratie*