

A Max Weber 'Wish List'

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It has been one hundred years since Max Weber died and we are still wondering how much do we really know him. There is no doubt that thousands of books and articles have been written about him and he has been the topic of hundreds of conference panels. But I wonder how much we understand his thinking. I was trained as a philosopher so I tend to subscribe to Socrates' claim that the beginning of wisdom is realizing what one does not know. But I have been considered to be a Weber expert so there is some tension between what people think I know and what I have been trained to think. And, what I think is that there are many aspects of Weber's thinking that I don't seem to understand. Some of this is because my own efforts have not been focused on a specific area and some of it is because of others not having a particular interest in those areas. In what follows, I set out six areas that I am convinced need serious investigation. This list is entirely subjective and it is not exhaustive, but it may propel some scholars to focus on a specific area and it might prompt others to formulate their own Weber 'wish list.' There is a seventh wish, but that applies mostly to others and I will give my reasons for that later. Taken all together, this is my Weber 'Wish List.'

Max Weber has long been regarded not only as a major sociologist, but he has been revered as one of the founders of sociology. There is no question regarding the veracity of both claims, but this focus on Weber as sociologist hinders our ability to recognize that he was not trained as a sociologist and resisted being labeled as one for most of his life. Whereas Ferdinand Tönnies and Georg Simmel were educated in philosophy, they had no similar reservation about calling much of their writings 'sociology.' In contrast, Weber was trained in law and he did not regard what he wrote as sociology. Instead, he considered himself a member of the disciple of 'political economy.' This is what he taught at Freiburg and then at Heidelberg. When Weber, Sombart, and Jaffé renamed the journal, they did not call it sociology. Instead, it carried the title *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* and the emphasis was on social economics and social politics. Even at Munich, Weber's focus was not so much on sociology, but specifically on economic sociology. Weber's life-long preoccupation with political economy prompts my first wish:

There have been some scholars, notably Keith Tribe, Lawrence Scaff, and Rita Aldenhoff-Hübinger who have devoted considerable efforts to uncovering the Weber before Weber's sociology. To fulfill

this wish, scholars need to examine Weber's lectures which are now available in the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*. There is a total of seven volumes and all but one treats some form of economics and that exception is Band III/7—*Allgemeine Staatslehre und Politik (Staatssoziologie)*. This relatively thin volume contains a wealth of information and will be addressed later. Similarly, Band III/6—*Abriß der universalen Sozial-und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* will also be dealt with, but like the 'Staatssoziologie', it belongs to Weber's last years. Instead, the focus of this first wish is on Weber's early lectures and include the years when he joined the faculty at Freiburg in a new discipline. Weber was able to build upon some of his previous work for the Vereine für Sozialpolitik but this was limited primarily to his lecture course on 'Agrarrecht und Agrargeschichte' that he gave once at Freiburg and the course on 'Agrarpolitik' that he also gave only once at Heidelberg. Both lecture courses are now available in *MWG III/5*. Then there was his Freiburg course 'Die deutsche Arbeiterfrage in Stadt und Land' (*MWG III/4*) that drew heavily on his agrarian research but also pointed to his growing recognition that Germany's future lay in the development of capitalistic enterprise. This leaves three volumes, all of which are devoted to economic matters and all are crucial for understanding Weber's approach to social-economic issues. There is the recently released volume on 'Praktische Nationalökonomik (Volkwirtschaftspolitik)' and 'Finanzwissenschaft.' The first is found in *MWG III/2* and the second in *MWG III/3*. It is too early for me to give any account of the first volume but the second tells us much about Weber's understanding of the intersection between economics and policy. But the most revealing volume is the 'Allgemeine und theoretische Nationalökonomik' (*MWG III/1*). This is important on at least three counts: It contains his first course on economics, it is one that he gave in different forms multiple times, and it contains his course on the history of national economics. It shows Weber as he began to find his way in his new discipline and how he quickly mastered some extremely difficult material. In other words, it is through these early lectures that we become acquainted with Weber as political economist and before Weber's sociology. Thus, these lectures are ripe for investigating and the results would help clarify Weber's attitude to the German Historical School as well as the Austrian School of economics. It would yield answers to the questions of how much did he borrow from Carl Menger and Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk and what was his actual opinion of Gustav Schmoller and Lujo Brentano. And, it might offer clarification regarding the 'Methodenstreit.'

A second wish is that we have a better understanding of the process of how we have learned about Weber. Lawrence Scaff has taken the lead in this but his account primarily covers America. I would like to see more investigation into what led Frank Knight to translate Weber's Munich lectures and

what prompted him to omit the first chapter. Similarly, I would like to know what the impulse was for Talcott Parsons to translate the *Protestantische Ethik* instead of some of Weber's writings on economics. It would also be important to know why Parsons placed the 'Einleitung' in front of PE, which gave a much different picture of what Weber had intended that work to be. It might also be helpful to explore Parsons' early work comparing Weber and Werner Sombart and to investigate the scholarly connections between Parsons, Knight, and Edward Shils.

This association leads to another wish which is to reconsider the traditional connection of Weber with Neo-Kantianism. It was a belief started most likely by Heinrich Rickert himself and was certainly then promoted by Alexander von Schelting, Knight, Parsons, Shils, and many others. This belief has been around for so long and has been entrenched, so it is almost a dogma that Weber learned Neo-Kantianism from Heinrich Rickert. For a long time, I had also believed it. But the passage 'I have read Rickert and he is very good' leaves out Weber's qualifications. And, the recent publication of the Nervi Fragments undercuts it by showing that Weber was more interested in the writings of others than he was Rickert's preoccupation with concept formation in the 'Geisteswissenschaften.' The critical reexamination of Weber's methodological sources would help clarify what he thought about historians and the philosophy of history. This would entail a careful investigation of not just Simmel but Eduard Meyer. It is one thing to dismiss Simmel as an unintelligible sociologist but it is another to ignore Meyer. He was regarded as one of the great historians and Weber read him while a young boy and relied on him after his illness. Weber's comment that one can learn far more from the mistakes of a great thinker than one can from the truths discovered from a scholarly nullity speaks volumes. Perhaps, a better and fuller understanding of Weber's interests will aid us in reading the Roscher and Knies essays. Furthermore, a comparison of Weber's complimentary essay on Meyer with his harsh critique of Rudolf Stammler would likely yield a more accurate account of Weber's methodology.

This leads to a wish about Weber and methodology. There is no doubt that Weber's methodological writings are a source of discomfit to many—the context is missing, the terms are unclear, and the style is simply maddening. Yet, Weber spent much of his scholarly life in attempting to set out a methodology so that should be a clear indication of the value that he placed on method and it should be a sufficient push to make us spend the time and the effort to discover what his methodology might be. This would involve investigating what Weber meant by causality. The paper on causality by Stephen Turner and Regis Factor is a classic but like Weber's writings, it has largely been neglected. And, many of those scholars who have written books on Weber's methodology have often failed to shed much light. This is partially because when those books were written, the *MWG*

volumes had not been published. And, this is partially because too often the scholars appeared to have approached Weber with a number of preconceived notions. This is evident in the discussions of cause, chance, and probability which tended to be ignored or misunderstood. Yet, Weber's notion of 'Ursache' comes from historians, like Eduard Meyer, his use of 'Chance' comes from economists, like Carl Menger, and his use of 'Wahrscheinlichkeit' comes from physiologists, like Johannes von Kries. In Weber's later writings, the notion of 'Verstehen' plays a prominent role. But do we really understand what he meant by it and how is it similar to and different from Dilthey's concept? An answer to that may help clarify Weber's apparent dissatisfaction with Dilthey's philosophy. Then we have Weber's ideal type, which always gets mentioned but is rarely investigated (Uta Gerhardt's work is an exception).

As with 'ideal type', Weber's concept of charisma is often mentioned but rarely understood. I have found first hand that scholars do not know its history, cannot adequately explain it, and misuse it in their own writings. Thus, this wish is divided into three parts. First, I would like it if scholars would take Weber at his word and investigate the two sources that he explicitly cites. Rudolf Sohm was not only the source for Weber's notion of charisma but provided much of the justification for thinking that the Protestant Church was the true heir to the Early Church. This investigation is worthy in itself but it might clear up the confusion regarding the debate between Sohm and Adolf Harnack. It also might explain the disagreement between Harnack's impressive student Karl Holl and Weber's close friend and colleague Ernst Troeltsch. And, an examination of Holl's early work would also clarify why Weber regarded charisma as an irrational type of leadership. Given that Weber stated in his 'Staatssoziologie' that charisma was one of the two great powers, it would seem appropriate that scholars should investigate Weber's concept of charisma almost as much as they have examined his notion of rationality.

An investigation would also help clarify how charisma fits into Weber's three-fold classification of 'Herrschaft'. It would explain in what ways it is similar to traditional 'Herrschaft' and in what manner it is like bureaucratic 'Herrschaft.' It would help clarify why he thought it so temporal and it might give us a better understanding of what he thought of its transference and the concept of 'Amtscharisma.'

Finally, a fuller examination of what Weber thought charisma was and how it functioned might help put a stop to the expansive modern usage. When charisma is used to name a car, a boat, a person, a beauty parlor, then it has lost much of its meaning. And, when people say that this and that politician has ample charisma, they rob it of its powerful impact. Perhaps it is my age showing but I

still believe that words really do have meaning and that Alice was poking fun at those who insist that words mean what they say they mean. Of all the words that Weber has bequeathed to scholarship, 'charisma' may be the most used and abused.

Then there is my wish regarding Weber's later writings. Wolfgang Mommsen challenged the notion that Weber was a liberal but recent research has suggested that Weber's political philosophy was more nuanced than his early defenders as well as he later detractors had maintained. So, his war writings and his later political pamphlets still need to be examined and those results might clarify Weber's relations with such political leaders as Kurt Eisner and Ernst Toller. And, an examination of his 'Staatssoziologie' along with the recent work on Carl Schmitt's notebooks might help put to rest the claim that Schmitt could be considered a legitimate disciple of Weber.

Then there is the work known as *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. The general editors of the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* have done a fantastic job in shepherding through the 47 volumes. And, the editors of the individual volumes have also made extraordinary efforts in explaining the historical context for those works and in clarifying the functions of those writings. It is hard to believe that the first volume was published in 1984 and the final one will appear in 2020. So, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Mohr Siebeck Verlag and to the editors. But we still do not have a full comprehension of the background of many writings and this is especially true regarding the work known as *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Wolfgang Schluchter has done an admirable job and should be commended, but there is much that we still do not know. This applies to the entire work and especially to the parts that Weber had written before the war. It is also applicable to the (later) first part. The editors of *MWG I/23* have done rather credible jobs as has Keith Tribe in the massive Introduction to his translation, but the difficulty of the work, the complex context, and the vocabulary make it imperative that there be more study. Finally, we need to have a fuller sense of what Weber envisioned the *Grundriss der Sozialökonomik* to be and how *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* was intended to fit in that scheme.

Finally, I offer a more personal wish and that is that more people would try to introduce Weber to undergraduate and beginning graduate students. It has been my experience in teaching undergraduates and even many graduate students, that they have very little understanding of Weber's work. Yet, Weber's thinking has so much to offer: in politics, there is his distinction between living for politics and living from politics and his emphasis on political responsibility. His conviction regarding the necessity of value freedom and his recognition of the difficulty of putting it into practice. His belief in political realism and the need to call out the literary revolutionaries as

the imposters that they are. In social-economics, there is his attempt to explain social interaction and the realization of the importance of both historical evidence and theoretical constructs. In methodology, there is his conception of adequate causality and his notion of ideal types. And, his emphasis on chance and opportunity. In brief, Weber's conception of the world is a belief in possibilities with the recognition of human imperfections. These are all things that undergraduates can not only understand, but can also appreciate. If Weber speaks to you, as he has to me; then there is no reason to think that Weber cannot speak to these students. This wish is similar to the other six, in that Weber needs to be recognized as not only one of the great sociologists, but one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century. Thus, this is my 'Max Weber Wish List' –for at least the next hundred years.

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