

Book Reviews

A NEW AND IMPORTANT TRANSLATION OF WEBER

The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Max Weber, 2002. Third edition. New Introduction and Translation by Stephen Kalberg. Oxford: Blackwell; ISBN 0631230815, pbk, 266 pp., £9.99.

Max Weber's seminal work, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, undeniably and essentially concerned with patterns and trends in societies, concurrently, it can be argued, addresses personal dispositions, the understanding of lives through time. It is perhaps not widely known that Weber, within the copious endnotes to his classic and perpetually controversial work, acknowledges the worth of biography in examining the characteristics of ascetic Protestantism. While rejecting the approach himself, he, nonetheless, speaks unambiguously of 'the stimulating task of illuminating the ascetic Protestant style of life ... through biographies' (p. 225). Indeed, it seems as if he is directly inviting biographical analysis of cotton manufacturer extraordinaire, John Rylands (1801–88), when he suggests that, 'in the nineteenth century, the classical representatives of [the spirit of capitalism] were the Manchester or Rhineland-Westphalia upstart newcomers to wealth from modest circumstances' (p. 27). In all respects, Nonconformist entrepreneur John Rylands, 'Cotton King' of Manchester, fits the bill. Historian, D.A. Farnie, asserts that 'no other businessman approaches so closely to the ideal type of self-made man' (1973: 93). For Weber it was Benjamin Franklin's character that represented the quintessential ideal type capitalist entrepreneur.

Stephen Kalberg's recent translation of *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, is long overdue. In all respects it is impressive and an invaluable resource for modern Weberian students, not least those interested in a life history approach to research. Previously, the only English version was Talcott Parsons' 1930 translation. This new edition does not disappoint. Parsons, Kalberg asserts, directed his work at those 'steeped in a liberal arts canon' (p. v). Today's readership, he argues, is more general, less conversant with great works from previous generations. His aim has been to produce a text easily accessible to a wide audience – scholars, teachers, students but also the general reader. Simultaneously, he has sought to promote readability, while retaining 'reliability of meaning and precision of intention, in respect to Weber's fine-grained causal lines of argument' (p. v). In this, he is wholly successful.

By way of introduction, an invaluable 54-page commentary examines the on-going controversy surrounding this most famous of Weber's works:

- the man and his central concerns;
- organizational axes and intellectual context;
- origins of the Protestant Ethic (PE) and Weber's analysis;
- the capacity of the PE to displace economic traditionalism, 'push' to modern capitalism, the pathway from the PE to the spirit of capitalism; and
- PE as an example of Weber's sociology.

Also within this new volume are two importantly related Weberian essays. *The Protestant sects and the spirit of capitalism* (1906) (a far less scholarly work than *PE*, says Kalberg), translated by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mill, included by virtue of its complementary nature and its review of differences in belief and conduct between Catholics, Lutherans and Puritans. 'Prefatory remarks' to *Collected essays in the sociology of religion* (1920), newly translated by Kalberg, written late in 1919 as a general introduction to Weber's *Collected essays in the sociology of religion* series (1920). Parsons placed them before *PE* under the title 'Author's Introduction'. This, Kalberg claims (notwithstanding a translator's explanation), has led generations of readers to incorrectly regard this essay as a direct introduction to *PE*.

As noted, an important goal for Kalberg is accessibility to Weber's text. This he achieves through a variety of means. For example, a comprehensive glossary of terms, historical and those key to Weber's analysis, is a most welcome aid to a fuller understanding of the text. Each is helpfully printed in bold when first encountered. Weber's extensive endnotes, essential for the reader who seeks deeper insights and understanding of the arguments, are included in full, together with further clarifications from Kalberg himself, marked [sk]. Additional assistance in accessing endnotes (incidentally longer than the text itself) is a chapter by chapter sampling of major subjects/themes. Translations of foreign language words and phrases are placed in brackets within the text. Bracketed inserts are also used to good effect to extend partial information in the original text, not infrequently biographical. For example: 'The doctrine of predestination shattered [Johan von] Oldenbarneveltdt's [1547–1619] struggle [against the Dutch state],¹² and the schism in the Anglican Church became irrevocable under [the anti-Puritan monarch] James I [1566–1625] ...' (p. 56). Endnote 12 (p. 192), an addition from Kalberg, provides further biographical detail: 'Oldenbarnevelt was a Dutch diplomat. He negotiated the 1609 armistice with Spain and was executed after conflicts with state

authorities [sk].’ Another useful aid to study is the introduction of sub-divisions within chapters.

While Kalberg’s translation of familiar passages may initially jar on the senses and seem less poetic than Parsons’ rendering, reflection recognizes a welcome opportunity to re-assess and re-evaluate Weber’s analysis. For example, Parsons’ translation of the concluding paragraph, Chapter 4 *The religious foundations of worldly asceticism*, reads: ‘Christian asceticism ... strode into the market-place of life, slammed the door of the monastery behind it, and undertook to penetrate just that daily routine of life with its methodicalness, to fashion it into a life in the world, but neither of nor for this world’ (p. 154).

Kalberg translates:

Christian asceticism slammed the gates of the cloister, entered into the hustle and bustle of life, and undertook a new task: to saturate mundane, *everyday* life with its methodicalness. In the process, it sought to reorganize practical life into a rational life *in* the world rather than, as earlier, in the monastery. Yet this rational life in the world, was *not of* this world or *for* this world.

(p. 101)

Parsons’ translation does no more than allude to Weber’s central theory of an ‘elective affinity’, the contingent nature of a perceived relationship between Protestant ethics and the spirit of modern capitalism: ‘... we can only proceed by investigating whether and at what points certain correlations between forms of religious belief and practical ethics can be worked out’ (p. 91). Kalberg is more direct:

... we can only proceed in the following manner. *First*, we will investigate whether (and in what ways) specific ‘elective affinities’ (*Wahlverwandtschaften*) between certain forms of religious belief and a vocational ethic (*Berufsethik*) are discernible. Doing so will allow us, whenever possible, to illuminate the type of influence that the religious movement, as a consequence of these elective affinities, had upon the development of economic culture. In addition, the general *direction* of this influence upon economic culture, as a consequence of these elective affinities, can be clarified.

(pp. 49–50)

Again, contrast Parsons – ‘Calvinism, in comparison, appears to be more closely related to the hard legalism and the active enterprise of bourgeois-capitalistic entrepreneurs’ (p. 139), and Kalberg – ‘In comparison, the virtues cultivated by Calvinism appear to stand in a relationship of greater elective affinity to the restrained, strict and active posture of capitalist employers of the middle class’ (p. 89). In an extensive endnote rivalling Weber himself, Kalberg robustly challenges Parson’s ‘iron cage’ translation, which, he says, has obtained unjustifiable myth-like status

within sociological circles. His own translation reads: ‘Yet fate allowed a steel-hard casing (*stahlhartes Gehäuse*) to be forged from this coat’ (p. 123). He presents a range of arguments, what he refers to as ‘substantive reasons’ for preferring ‘casing’ over ‘cage’ (pp. 245–46).

Essentially, Kalberg achieves his goal of providing an indispensable, up-to-date resource for the scholar, teacher, student while, at the same time presenting the general, albeit serious reader with an engaging version of this most outstanding of Weber’s works.

REFERENCES

- Farnie, D.A. 1973: John Rylands of Manchester. *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 56: 93–129.
- Weber, M. 1930: *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. New York: Scribner’s. There have been a number of reissues of this translation from a variety of publishers.

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AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF NARRATIVE

Narrative analysis: studying the development of individuals in society. C. Daiute and C. Lightfoot, editors, 2004. Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage; ISBN 0761927972, pbk, 300 pp., £27.00.

Narrative analysis has an obvious appeal to all of us interested in auto/biography. The use of narratives is one way in which people make sense of life and a central concern of the book is human development seen as social process. Thus, the appeal of narrative analysis to researchers is, according to the editors, its ability to examine people’s lives holistically, to examine how social histories not only influence identity and development but also provide insights into the relations between the self and society, and to allow notions of value into the research process. Most of the book, in fact, aims to identify and evaluate the rationales, practices, caveats and values of the many approaches involved in narrative analysis. Its structure is given by three ways of conceptualizing the subject. The first sees narrative analysis as a root metaphor. The second recognizes that narratives are culturally developed ways of organizing experience and knowledge, while the third goes further and conceptualizes forms of discourse as embodiments of cultural values and personal subjectivities. Each concept has a separate section.