

PHD THESIS SUMMARY:

The language of Max Weber. A sociological enquiry (in German: Die Sprache Max Webers. Eine soziologische Untersuchung)

ACHIM SEIFFARTH

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University of Marburg

When Max Weber entered the field of historical and economical research, he might have felt like entering a battlefield. There had been a lot of fighting about the methodology of economics in nineteenth century Germany and Austria, both between historical (Roscher) and abstract approaches (Menger), as well as within these currents themselves.

In the German speaking world, economists had to defend their right to study their own discipline using their own conceptual means. Even philologists like August Boeckh claimed that they should be the ones who had to study economics—at least the one of Ancient times. But more importantly, the historians from the historicist school had founded their own discipline of narrative economic studies following Ranke's teaching of how scholars should consider historical events, and how the single episodes of human history are connected. According to them, in the end, divine providence is governing the whole of history and every single episode. Authors like Wilhelm Roscher were firmly convinced that the economy should be considered with these tools of historiography.

My doctoral thesis about the language of Max Weber analyzes how Weber tried to find his own particular position between economy, history, and psychology (all of these had pertained to the field of philosophy), and how in the end he founded his own discipline, interpretative sociology, and why this branch of human knowledge remains linked to his name and his written works. The examination follows Weber's most important publications from his doctoral thesis to the end. It does so by analyzing his writings pragmatically and with constant reference to the social field in which Weber moves. The surprising fact is that Weber succeeded in founding his sociology without being member of a university. He acts as author, as editor, as advisor to colleagues and as founding member of the German sociological society (DGS) without any institutional backing.

In Seiffarth's analysis we can see how, between 1900 and 1904, Weber, originally a student of Roscher and Mommsen, distanced himself from the historicist school by evidencing the religious foundation of its teachings. By doing so, Weber believed that he had eliminated Hegel and Marx as well. After Weber's first methodological writings the field of social and economic studies seems to be freed from old authorities. But the rejection of the historicist view results in a crisis of narration. How can a scholar present history if he cannot believe that every historical episode could be narrated in a meaningful way, i.e., in one somehow linked to providence? Weber, as I propose, chooses the form of the German essay in his works about the history of religion and especially in the 'Protestant ethics'. This form is similar to some parts of Robert Musil's "Man without qualities", enriched in the footnotes by a series of independent small essays. Later on, Weber will integrate not only literary texts into his texts, but he will also adopt concepts from Plato (e.g., the soul being composed of three parts and the *daimon*) and try to narrate his own myth of modern times: "The old gods...". Not only his constant reference in his writings to himself as a person, but also the style of the works of our classic of sociology links his writings to Weber's name and personal history.

With his new discipline, Weber rejects all concurrent versions of a social science and every attempt of psychologists like Wilhelm Wundt to explain the social sphere. He tries to integrate economic theory as represented by Carl Menger, stating that his 'ideal types' were exactly the concepts needed by Menger. Similarly, he proceeds with Gottl's attempts of a foundation of economic theory in our everyday life.

Weber started with the study of the history of law and of economics. In the end, he attempted to propose sociology as nothing less than a universal approach to human life, including the economy.

Achim Seiffarth is assistant professor for German and rhetorics at the University College Roosevelt at Middelburg (UC of Utrecht University). He obtained his PhD in philosophy from the University of Marburg in October 2015, under the supervision of Dirk Kaesler. Seiffarth has a MA in philosophy, sociology, and German literature from the Technical University of Berlin (1988).

Contact e-mail: <achim.seiffarth@ucr.nl>