



## GERMAN EDITIONS OF ADAM SMITH'S *WEALTH OF NATIONS*

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The first German edition of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was already published as early as 1776-78 in two volumes. The editor and translator of this edition, which was entitled *Untersuchungen der Natur und Ursachen von Nationalreichthümern*, was Johann Friedrich Schiller (1737-1814), a cousin of the famous poet Friedrich Schiller. However, the quality of the translation was heavily criticized, and until the early 1790s Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which was largely ignored by the cameralists, had only little impact on German economic discourse.

Due to the effects of the French Revolution and a new and better German translation by Christian Garve, entitled as *Untersuchung über die Natur und die Ursachen des Nationalreichthums* and published in two volumes in 1794-96, the Smithian doctrines were now perceived and discussed on a much broader scale. A particular role was played in this process by the two universities of Göttingen and Königsberg (see Winkel 1986). Georg Sartorius (1765-1828) taught Smithian ideas from 1792 onwards. He wrote a long review essay of the new German edition of the *Wealth of Nations* whose essential ideas entered into his own textbook (Sartorius 1806). As the University in the Kingdom of Hanover, Göttingen had a high number of British students, including princes, for which special lectures had to be given. However, among the students were also many Germans who later became liberal reformers or well-known economists such as Johann Heinrich von Thünen (1783-1850) who studied with Sartorius in 1803-04. Among the first generation of eminent German economists who became enthusiastic Smithians were also Gottlieb Hufeland (1760-1817), who first used the term *Volkswirtschaftslehre*, and Ludwig Heinrich von Jakob (1759-1827), who coined the expression *Nationalökonomie* (Jakob 1805). It should be pointed out that the use of the terms 'Volkswirtschaftslehre' or 'Nationalökonomie' had no nationalist connotation, an interpretation which entered only later by authors such as Adam Müller and others who dismissed Smith's approach as 'cosmopolitan'.

Since the mid-eighteenth century Königsberg had been an important place for trade and commerce where British industrial products were exchanged against agricultural products from Eastern Prussia and a wider hinterland. In the 'city of enlightenment' of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) it was particularly his friend Christian Jacob Kraus (1753-1807) who taught 'practical philosophy' and was an important mediator of Smithian doctrines and liberal ideas. With the implementation of the Stein-Hardenberg reforms in 1807 after Prussia's defeat against Napoleon many of his former students who had entered the higher ranks of the civil service became main carriers of the liberal policies.

The next major step has been the new German translation of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* by Max Stirner which was published in three volumes in 1846-47. The Stirner translation became the standard for the next century. Thus the later editions by H. Schmidt, J. Jastrow, and even by Ernst Grünfeld in Heinrich Waentig's renowned and influential "*Sammlung sozialwissenschaftlicher Meister*" were all based explicitly on Stirner's translation (see the detailed overview of the earlier German editions which had been put together meticulously in the new German edition by Erich and Monika Streissler 1999: 71-73 and 898).

Against the background of the bicentennial of the *Wealth of Nations* two new translations were published in then divided Germany:

- *Eine Untersuchung über das Wesen und die Ursachen des Reichthums der Nationen*, translated and introduced by Peter Thal and published by the Akademie Verlag in East-Berlin in three volumes in 1963 (<sup>2</sup>1976), 1975 and 1984, and



- a new West German edition *Der Wohlstand der Nationen. Eine Untersuchung seiner Natur und seiner Ursachen*, translated and edited by Horst Claus Recktenwald, and published by the renowned Beck Verlag in Munich in 1974. Available as a cheap paperback edition since 1978 this version is still dominating the market with regard to sales figures.

Some of the interpretations given by the two respective editors are highly instructive as to how contemporary politics and the 'Zeitgeist' have influenced the reception of Smithian doctrines ever since the original publications. Thus Recktenwald points out in his article 'Adam Smith today and tomorrow' that the *Wealth of Nations* contains "a peaceful message which stands in sharp contradiction to the dialectics and the inhumane class struggle in Karl Marx" (Recktenwald 1975: 7; author's translation). On the other hand, Peter Thal, the editor of the East German edition, does not only point out the link from Smith via Ricardo to Marx and "the importance of the doctrines of Adam Smith as the theoretical root of Marxist-Leninist economics" but also goes as far as to state "that Smith's work lives on in the proletarian political economics; yes only here his true scientific elements have found a lasting monument" (Thal 1963: II-III; author's translations).

Despite these and some other reminiscences to the communist regime, Thal's introduction is full of insightful passages. It also has to be said that the Thal translation was a remarkable achievement and in comparison with the Recktenwald edition is clearly superior. The Recktenwald translation had been criticized devastatingly by Monika Streissler (1976: 711; author's translation) for "(i) simply bad German, (ii) mistranslations of words and phrases, (iii) errors due to the technique used when preparing the manuscript, and (iv) distortions of whole sentences". Streissler, who gave many illuminating examples of misrepresentations from Book I came to the conclusion that Recktenwald's "text deviates partly past recognition from the English original" (Ibid: 710; author's translation) and recommended that a group of translators should engage in a new German translation of the *Wealth of Nations* taking Stirner's useful translation as their point of departure (Ibid: 715).

Twenty-three years later this new German translation, done by Monika Streissler herself and edited and introduced by her husband Erich W. Streissler, was published, entitled *Untersuchung über Wesen und Ursachen des Reichtums der Völker* (1999). It is the first German translation of the *Wealth of Nations* which is based on the 1976 Glasgow edition although the extensive apparatus of notes by Roy Harold Campbell and Andrew S. Skinner has been shortened substantially. Monika Streissler also thanks other colleagues, in particular Heinz Rieter, for checking the manuscript and suggesting several improvements. No doubt, the Streissler translation is excellent as is the production of the book by the publisher. Unfortunately, the pricing policy and Gresham's law have prevented a wider distribution among students and the general public compared to the Recktenwald edition. However, the pagination is questionable. It is a little bit odd that Smith's original text only starts on page 77 (!). The very useful and knowledgeable introductory essays by the editor Erich Streissler and the translator Monika Streissler should have received separate Roman page numbers. The new title *Reichtum der Völker*, instead of *Wohlstand* (or *Reichtum*) *der Nationen*, is difficult to get used to. Despite some rationale being given by Monika Streissler (1999: 73), the change of the title is not fully convincing and has not been successful among historians of economic thought in the German language area. On the other hand, the different translations of the title indicate the sometimes insurmountable difficulties even careful and scrupulous translators have to face.

#### **APPENDIX: GERMAN TRANSLATIONS OF ADAM SMITH'S *WEALTH OF NATIONS* (1776) – AN OVERVIEW**

The following list is taken from Streissler and Streissler (1999: 898).

- Transl. by J. F. Schiller and C. A. Wichmann (1776-1778) as *Untersuchungen der Natur und Ursachen von Nationalreichthümern*, 2 vls. Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich. 3rd vl. published 1792, based on 3rd ed. of 1784.



- Transl. of the 4th ed. 1786 by Christian Garve (1794-96) as *Untersuchung über die Natur und die Ursachen des Nationalreichthums*, 2 vls., Breslau: W. G. Korn.
  - o 1796-1799: reprint, 4 vls., Frankfurt & Leipzig.
  - o 1799: 2nd ed., 3 vls, ed. by A. Dörrien, Breslau & Leipzig: W. G. Korn.
  - o 1810: 3rd ed., 3 vls., ed. by A. Dörrien, Breslau & Leipzig: W. G. Korn
  - o 1814: new edition, 3 vls., ed. by A. Dörrien, Wien: B. P. Bauer.
- Transl. by Max Stirner (1846-1847) as *Untersuchungen über das Wesen und die Ursachen des Nationalreichthums*, 3 vls., Leipzig: Otto Wigand.
  - o 1910: ed. by H. Schmidt, 2 vls., Leipzig: A. Kröner.
  - o 1920: ed. by J. Jastrow, 2 vls., Berlin & Leipzig: W. de Gruyter.
  - o 1924: 2nd ed. by J. Jastrow, 2 vls., Berlin & Leipzig: W. de Gruyter.
  - o 1924: 2nd ed. by H. Schmidt, 2 vls., Leipzig: A. Kröner.
- Transl. by C. W. Asher (1861), 2 vls., Stuttgart: J. Engelhorn.
- Transl. by Franz Stöpel (1878) as *Untersuchung über das Wesen und die Ursachen des Volkswohlstandes*, 4 vls. in 1 vl., Berlin: Expedition des Merkur.
  - o 1905-1907: 2nd ed., 2 vls., ed. by R. Prager, Berlin: R. L. Prager.
- Transl. and ed. by W. Loewenthal, 2 vls., Berlin: E. Staude. 2nd ed. 1882, 2 vls.
- Transl. of the 4th ed. 1786 by Ernst Grünfeld, based on the transl. by M. Stirner, ed. by Heinrich Waentig (1908-1923), as *Eine Untersuchung über Natur und Wesen des Volkswohlstandes*, 3 vls., Jena: Gustav Fischer.
  - o 1920: 2nd ed. vl. 1, 1st ed. vl. 2, Jena: Gustav Fischer.
  - o 1923: 3rd ed. vl. 1, 2nd ed. vl. 2, 1st ed. vl. 3, 3 vls., Jena: Gustav Fischer.
  - o 1926: 3rd ed. vl. 2, 3 vls., Jena: Gustav Fischer.
- Transl. and with an introduction by Peter Thal (1963-1984) as *Eine Untersuchung über das Wesen und die Ursachen des Reichtums der Nationen*, 3 vls., vl. 2 1975, vl. 3 1984, Berlin (East): Akademie-Verlag.
- Transl. of the 5th ed. 1789 and ed. by Horst Claus Recktenwald (1974) as *Der Wohlstand der Nationen. Eine Untersuchung seiner Natur und seiner Ursachen*, München: C. H. Beck.
  - o Revised paperback ed. since 1978, München: dtv.
- Transl. of the "Glasgow Edition" 1976 by Monika Streissler, ed. and with an introduction by Erich W. Streissler (1999) as *Untersuchung über Wesen und Ursachen des Reichtums der Völker*, 2 vls., Düsseldorf: Verlag Wirtschaft und Finanzen.

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Hufeland, Gottlieb (1807-13), *Neue Grundlegung der Staatswirthschaftskunst*, 2 vls., Gießen and Wetzlar: Tasche und Müller.

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Recktenwald, Horst Claus (1975), 'Adam Smith heute und morgen', *Kyklos*, 28(1): 5-22.

Sartorius, Georg (1806), *Abhandlungen, die Elemente des National-Reichtums und die Staatswirthschaft betreffend*, Göttingen: Johann Friedrich Röwer.

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Winkel, Harald (1986), 'Adam Smith und die deutsche Nationalökonomie 1776-1820', in Harald Scherf (ed.), *Studien zur Entwicklung der ökonomischen Theorie V*, Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik Vol. 115/V, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, pp. 81-109.

