

# INTRODUCTION TO KNUT WICKSELL'S "THE THEORY OF POPULATION, ITS COMPOSITION AND CHANGES"

Wicksell's "The Theory of Population, its Composition and Changes" is published here for the first time in English. It was originally the first chapter in the first Swedish edition of his *Lectures on Political Economy, Volume I* (1901). Wicksell was of the express opinion that a standard textbook on political economy should begin with a chapter on population.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Wicksell's interest in this field was indeed very strong; he considered the problem of population to be "the most important and at the same time the most neglected of all social problems".

However, Wicksell's population chapter did not appear in the later editions of his *Lectures*. In 1910, the chapter—in slightly rewritten form—was published separately as a pamphlet in the Swedish student association Verdandi's pamphlet series. As indicated in Wicksell's own preface below, he prepared this edition in Ystad prison, while serving a two-month sentence for blasphemy. When the second edition of *Lectures on Political Economy* appeared in 1911, "The Theory of Population, its Composition and Changes" was listed in the table of contents as the first chapter of the book, but the chapter itself was omitted and the reader was referred to the 1910 pamphlet. The population chapter was also omitted from the subsequent editions of Wicksell's *Lectures*, including the English edition of 1934 by L. Robbins (which was based on the third Swedish edition). This translation of the 1910 pamphlet version of Wicksell's population chapter is by Professor Göran Ohlin, Uppsala.<sup>2</sup> Surely, the reader will find that the chapter is not only of historical interest, but that Wicksell's thoughts on the population problem are indeed relevant and of interest also today.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Introduction in his *Lectures on Political Economy*. He writes here "... it will be found that the theory of population, which can never be omitted from a complete treatise on political economy, can never find a suitable place in the system unless it forms an introduction to the whole" (p. 6).

<sup>2</sup> Knut Wicksell's population chapter was republished in Swedish with a few alterations by his son, Sven Wicksell, in 1926. Here, however, we have chosen to translate Knut Wicksell's own last version of it. Reference should also be made to Monica S. Fong's article in *History of Political Economy* (1976), pp. 311–323, "Knut Wicksell's 'The Two Population Questions'." In her article, Fong comments on Wicksell's writings on population and social problems, and presents a translation of the eighth (and last) section of Wicksell's population chapter.