

Max Weber's Inaugural Address of 1895 in the Context of the Contemporary Debates in Political Economy*

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'We do not want...to shape the conditions of life in a way that makes people feel good, but such that, under the pressure of the unavoidable struggle for life, the best in them, the physical and psychological qualities that we want to save for our nation, will be preserved. Well...these are value-judgements, and they are changeable. Anyway, there is an irrational element'.¹

Weber's statement does not date, as one might expect, from the period between 1909 and 1913 when the debate on value-judgements in the social sciences (the so-called 'Werturteilsstreit') achieved its highest level. It dates from 1894, from Weber's early writings, when he gave a conference at the fifth meeting of the 'Protestant Social Congress' (Evangelisch-sozialer Kongress). At that time, he had just received the offer of a professorship in Economics and Finance at the University of Freiburg. Similar to 1909, when 'sociology' as a new discipline was established, Weber was already reflecting in 1894 on the problems of value-judgement when he changed his original discipline (law) and became involved in economics. In both cases, he criticized the established German Historical School of political economy and its famous leaders such as Gustav Schmoller, who had dominated economic dis-

* This article is based mainly on my investigations of Max Weber's early writings. See *Max Weber. Landarbeiterfrage, Nationalstaat und Volkswirtschaftspolitik. Schriften und Reden 1892-1899* (Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe I/4) (ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen in collaboration with Rita Aldenhoff; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993). In this volume the Inaugural Address has been published and commented on, see pp. 535-74. For my discussion see also: Rita Aldenhoff, 'Nationalökonomie, Nationalstaat und Werturteile. Wissenschaftskritik in Max Webers Freiburger Antrittsrede im Kontext der Wissenschaftsdebatten in den 1890er Jahren', in G. Sprenger (ed.), *Deutsche Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie um 1900* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), pp. 79-90. My grateful thanks to Bruce Boeckel, who helped me to formulate my ideas in English.

1. Max Weber, 'Die deutschen Landarbeiter', in MWG I/4, pp. 313-45 (340). (My translation.)