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

Rita Aldenhoff-Hübinger

Abstract

The Inaugural Lecture Max Weber gave when he started his career at Freiburg University in 1894–95 has often been regarded as the central document of his nationalist convictions. This article shows that this is only half the truth. In fact, Weber began to reflect on the methodological basis of social sciences as early as 1895, precisely because of his extremely strong nationalist views. The first part of the article discusses Weber’s argumentation, the second part analyses the immediate context in the 1890s and the economic discourse. This shows that a debate on value-judgements in social sciences was already under way - anticipating the debate of 1909–1913 with Max Weber and Werner Sombart on the one hand, and Gustav Schmoller as the main protagonist of the German Historical School of political economy on the other hand.

Keywords: agrarianism, economics, German Historical School of political economy, methodology, value-judgement, value-relation.

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


©Max Weber Studies 2004, Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University, Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT, UK.
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 discourse since 1872 and had founded the ‘Association for Social Reform’ (Verein für Sozialpolitik). As early as the 1880s, it was Carl Menger, the head of the ‘Austrian School’ of the theory of marginal utility, who questioned the German Historical School’s claim to sole representation in the field of economics. Far more serious was the crisis that the historical school underwent around 1900; it led to a completely new orientation of the concept of the social sciences. The critique did not come from theorists from outside but from the younger generation and representatives of the Historical School itself. Max Weber, as well as Werner Sombart, attacked its claim not only to analyze but also to suggest the goals of politics on the basis of a stable value-orientation (which meant, in this case, social policy). The connection between politics or practice on the one hand and social sciences on the other hand was questioned and seen in another light. Weber tried to establish a new definition of this relationship, yet he did not completely cut off the connection between both spheres.2

The debate about values and ideals in political economy started in the 1890s. Max Weber was the main protagonist, and in this context it was above all the inaugural address of 1895 that pointed the way. It is not only a document of his political views but also the starting point for his methodological thinking. The revival of the debate 14 years later gave Weber the opportunity to formulate a more precise answer, after having read the neo-Kantians, especially Heinrich Rickert, and having accepted central theoretical aspects of the Carl Menger school.

2. In this regard Weber has been often misinterpreted. For the history of his reception see Gangolf Hübinger, Jürgen Osterhammel and Wolfgang Welz, ‘Max Weber und die wissenschaftliche Politik nach 1945’, Zeitschrift für Politik 37 (1990), pp. 181-204 (190-96).
1. **The three classical lines of interpretation**

There are three classical interpretations of Max Weber’s inaugural address. Wolfgang J. Mommsen underlines the nationalist attitude not only of the young but also of the late Weber, in whose thinking political views had always been an autonomous factor. According to Mommsen, Weber took the opportunity in his inaugural address to point out his nationalist standpoint, having no access to a political party or forum. Weber showed not only his qualifications in economics but developed above all his political programme, which remained basically the same until the First World War.³

Wilhelm Hennis, on the other hand, who recently reprinted his interpretation of the Freiburg Address, sees Weber in the tradition of practical philosophy, which investigates the values and the purposes of life.⁴ Hennis has been joined in his interpretation by Cathérine Colliot-Thélène who also underlines the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche on Weber and sees him as the most important exponent of the German Historical School of political economy and not as its main younger critic.⁵

The third line of interpretation — and this is the one I follow — stresses methodological implications and reflections. Wolfgang Schluchter emphasizes that in the inaugural address Weber had marked his nationalism as a subjective standpoint and thus relativized it; in addition, Weber had already formulated the hypothesis that there are different spheres (reality and values), on the one hand, and an incompatibility of different and final aims in the realm of values themselves on the other hand.⁶ For Kari Palonen too, what is significant about Weber’s inaugural lecture, is its epistemology. Palonen considers Weber a ‘nominalist’ to the degree that Weber emphasizes the subjective core of value-judgements and ideals.


and rejects the possibility of deducing them from the subject matter itself.\textsuperscript{7}

Weber himself set the stage for the domination of the nationalist interpretation of his inaugural address and the neglect of his methodological reflections. The contemporaries who listened directly to his address were terrified by the ‘brutality of his opinions’,\textsuperscript{8} and this interpretation obviously has been adopted by most of the later readers. Yet, they forget that Weber omitted the methodological part from his speech; he only added it on later in the published version. So there are two versions of the lecture, differing significantly. The published version consists of three parts. First is empirical research on agricultural labourers and peasants in the Prussian province West-Prussia, which belonged to the Polish regions annexed by Prussia. In this part, Weber argues that the Polish farmers and agricultural labourers, because of their lower standard of living, tended to displace the Germans. In the second part, he reflects on the question of the relationship between empirical research and its results, on the one hand, and the valuation of these results as the basis for the political consequences, on the other hand. The third part contains his reflections on the role of the German bourgeoisie in the context of the German Empire and a nationalist policy.\textsuperscript{9}

It was important paragraphs specifically of the second part that Weber omitted in his speech in Freiburg on the 13th of May 1895.\textsuperscript{10} So in the liberal German south-west where Freiburg is located, Weber appeared mainly as an imperialist Prussian with strong anti-Polish sentiments. It is only in the preface, which Weber added later on to the published version, that he relativizes his political convictions as a ‘“subjective” standpoint from which one judges economic phenomena’.\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, the original title Weber gave to his lecture was ‘Nationality in Domestic Economics’ (‘Die Nationalität in der Volkswirtschaft’) stressing the political


\textsuperscript{8} Letter to Alfred Weber, 17 May 1895, quoted in MWG I/4, p. 538.


\textsuperscript{10} Weber, ‘The Nation State’, pp. 17-20 (MWG I/4, pp. 561-65). In the preface Weber states that he omitted these pages in the original version ‘for reasons of time and in view of my audience’.

aspect; for the published version he changed the title to ‘The Nation State and Economic Policy’ (‘Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik’), ‘Volkswirtschaftspolitik’ meaning the German academic discipline, not the policy itself.

Weber did not only use the academic form of the inaugural address to make clear his scientific and political positions in a discipline which was quite new for him, but he does analyze in the second (printed) part of his lecture the relationship of both spheres. That these methodological reflections were crucial for him, although he omitted them in his speech, is shown later by the fact that he mentioned his own inaugural lecture under methodological aspects in an outline for his students of 1898. He also let his publisher send a copy of the address to the philosopher Georg Simmel in Berlin, surely not to demonstrate to Simmel his nationalist views but to show him his methodological reflections. In the first part of this article, I want to analyze these reflections closer and then, in the second part, put them in the direct context of contemporary debates in economics in the 1890s.

2. The methodological part

It is important to know that Weber in this methodological (second) part of his lecture does not refer to the whole discipline of economics but only to a special section of it. At Freiburg, Weber became Professor of Economics and Finance (Nationalökonomie und Finanzwissenschaft). So he had to teach General Theoretical Economics, Practical Economics, Finance and History. This was the usual program to be read at the universities at that time. In the summer semester of 1895, when he made his inaugural address, he taught ‘Praktische Nationalökonomie (Volkswirtschaftspolitik)’ (Practical Economics/Economic Policy). So, he obviously had a good and a critical look at the basis of his new discipline at that time. In the methodological part of his inaugural address he referred only to Practical Economics or Economic Policy as a science which was expected

12. The address had been announced under this title in the university press and the daily press in Freiburg. Weber himself used this title in a letter to his publisher, see MWG I/4, p. 537.
14. MWG I/4, p. 539.
to deliver guidelines for state policy. He asks for the basis of judgement precisely in this field of knowledge whereas it is not his aim to extend the practical character of Economic Policy to the theoretical section of the economic discipline.\textsuperscript{16} To avoid any misunderstanding in this regard, Weber changed the title of his address, as already mentioned, to ‘Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik’ (my emphasis), meaning the academic discipline and not the policy itself.

When Weber asks whether it is possible for an economist to deduce values and political aims by extracting them from his empirical studies, he is dealing with his own problem; studying the situation of the rural workers in the East-Elbian provinces of Prussia had provoked this question.

Weber refers to these early studies in the first part of his inaugural lecture. As a young scholar he had examined particularly the situation of the German farm-labourers and farmers in the Eastern parts of Prussia and found out that the patriarchal system was dissolving and definitely lost. This meant the development also of a capitalist system in the countryside with entrepreneurs, on the one hand, and a more or less homogenous class of labourers, on the other hand. Capitalism meant denationalization because the Prussian ‘Junkers’ were forced to hire Polish workers to lower their cost of production.\textsuperscript{17} The results of Weber’s studies for the ‘Association for Social Reform’ and for the ‘Protestant Social Congress’ led him to ask about the position an economist should or could take in view of these facts.

For Weber as a political thinker it is clear: he does not want a denationalization of the German east and the annexed Polish regions; therefore he argues for Germanization and for the closure of the borders against Polish workers from the Russian and Austrian parts of Poland. But as a social scientist he has to ask about the basis of such value-judgements.


\textsuperscript{17} For an excellent interpretation still, see Martin Riesebrodt, ‘From Patriarchalism to Capitalism: The Theoretical Context of Max Weber’s Agrarian Studies (1892-3)’, in Tribe, \textit{Reading Weber}, pp. 131-57. Without new aspects, see Cornelius Torp, \textit{Max Weber und die preußischen Junker} (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1998). To the context see also in this volume Ola Agevall’s contribution.
First of all, he asks whether ‘such nationalist value judgements’ are to be regarded ‘as prejudices’, and if yes, whether, on the other hand, ‘the economic way of looking at things’ could ‘apply its own specific criterion of value to economic facts, free of any influence from emotional reflexes? And what is this criterion of value “peculiar” to economic policy?’ (pp. 13, 14). His answer is well known. For the academic discipline Practical Economy, there is no specific value inherent in the facts themselves. Criticizing implicitly the German Historical School of political economy, he declares that a specific ideal deriving ‘of its own from its subject matter’ is impossible. ‘The notion that there are such things as independent economic or “socio-political” ideals shows itself clearly to be an optical illusion as soon as one tries to discover from the literature produced by our science just what its “own” bases for evaluation are. What we find is a chaos of different evaluative criteria, some eudaemonistic, some ethical’ (p. 18). On the other side it would be an error to think that we would be ‘able to refrain entirely from making conscious value judgements of our own’. In this case ‘we fall prey to unexamined instincts, sympathies and antipathies’; a circular argument could be the result because ‘we unconsciously allow the starting point for our analyses and explanations of economic events to determine our judgement of those events’ (p. 19).

Weber gives two examples of circular arguments, and here he addresses himself explicitly to ‘the dead and living masters’ (p. 19) of the German Historical School: Wilhelm Roscher, Karl Knies and Gustav Schmoller. Economic development is viewed ‘from above, looking down from the heights of the administrative history of the larger German states, and pursuing the genesis of the way they have viewed and administered economic and social affairs. In this case we involuntarily become their apologists’ (p. 19). This critique is, of course, meant for Gustav Schmoller and his investigations of Prussian state history and bureaucracy. On the other hand, economic development can be viewed ‘from below, seeing the great spectacle of the emancipatory struggles of rising classes emerging from the chaos of conflicts of economic interest’ (p. 20). But also in this case there would be the danger of becoming apologists of the victorious classes.

When it is impossible to avoid value-judgements and a particular perspective in analyzing social, economic and historical developments, what should the scholar do? He must, first of all, recognize ‘that the ideals we introduce into the subject matter of our science are not peculiar to it, nor are they produced by this science itself; rather they are the old, general types of human ideals’ (p. 19). Therefore it is crucial for the scholar to reflect on his ideals in the process of research in order to clarify in his own mind and for others ‘the ultimate subjective core of his judgements’
There is a lack of conscious self-scrutiny, the writer is unaware of the internal contradictions of his judgement, and where he seeks to formulate his specifically “economic” principle of judgement in general terms he becomes vague and unspecific’ (p. 19).

This notion of scholarly self-inspection is not only important for Weber’s conviction that ideals are independent and cannot be derived from the matters themselves, but also that there are different spheres of values not compatible with one another. This means that, even as early as 1895, Weber distinguishes clearly not only between reality and values, but also between different spheres of value. Consequently, he distinguishes policy, meaning to him nationalist policy, in strong terms from the sphere of ethics, the sphere followed by the German Historical School defending social reform and justice: ‘The criteria of value which political economists have naively identified or given prominence to have alternated between the technical economic problem of the production of goods and the problem of their distribution (“social justice”)’ (p. 15). There are also other texts in the 1890s where Weber underlines the incompatibility especially of the spheres of policy and ethics (for example in his argument against the clergyman and founder of a new political party, Friedrich Naumann).

In 1913, in his report concerning the debate on values in the ‘Association for Social Reform’, Weber reconsidered the arguments in his inaugural address. He found his lecture in many respects ‘immature’ and distanced himself from ‘many important arguments’. Which were the arguments still important to him in respect to the relationship policy/practice and social sciences? Of fundamental importance was the recognition that deriving values or ethical aims, or even political programmes from the subject matter itself was impossible. In this way, Weber denied competent political influence to the discipline in which he was just beginning to teach as a professor. He also addressed, at the same time, a much more extensive problem. He touched on the philosophical problem of ‘life’ and ‘science’. The answer he gave is clear: neither ‘science’ is allowed to give ‘life’ the direction of what to do, nor is ‘life’ allowed to prejudice scientific results. Both spheres have to be independ-


19. For Weber’s most vehement attack against Naumann, see MWG I/4, pp. 619-22.

Not only the sharp separation of ‘life’ and ‘science’ is still important to him, it is also the recognition that there are in the section ‘life’ different spheres of value incompatible with each other. What consequences has Weber drawn from these two fundamental recognitions for the methodological procedures in the field of knowledge?

‘Life’ and ‘science’ have to be independent from each other, yet a complete separation is impossible. Therefore it is absolutely necessary for the scholar to make clear his own values and to inspect his research in this regard. Continual transparency and self-inspection also mean continual orientation of facts to values without judging the facts. It was only after the turn of the century that Weber formulated this relation more precisely, joining central elements of Neo-Kantianism and Heinrich Rickert, the head of its South-west German school. Rickert’s methodological reflections had been basic to Weber’s theory of value-relation or value-orientation: It is only the value-relation that constitutes spheres of knowledge out of an infinite reality. But one can be certain of more than this: as early as 1895, in his inaugural address, Weber formulated this problem of value-relation implicitly when he stressed the factors self-inspection and transparency in the process of research and when he underlined the importance of ‘different points of departure for economic analysis’ (p. 19).

There is also another consequence drawn by Weber on the methodological level. As there are different and incompatible values, the scholar has to clarify ‘the ultimate subjective core of his judgements’ for himself and for others (p. 18). In 1909, at the conference of the ‘Association for Social Reform’ where the discussion about value-judgements started again in reference to questions of economic productivity, Weber gave an explanation of what he meant. For a theoretically thinking scholar it must be the central task to analyze value-judgements systematically in order to discover their final and irreducible positions, positions incompatible with each other. Only when the scholar is clear about these


23. In this point I differ from W. Schluchter, Religion und Lebensführung, p. 176, who sees in the Inaugural Address no distinction at all made by Weber between value-judgement and value-orientation.
‘axioms’ can the empirical research be done and point the direction to the realization of aims.24

3. The discussion about value-judgements in the 1890s

To assess the methodological importance of the inaugural address it is crucial to examine the debate on value-judgements in its direct contemporary context. Whereas the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche has been analyzed often, the subject-specific discourse in economics has been neglected.25

Weber formulated the methodological part of his inaugural address in regard to the German Historical School of political economy. How far was he right or wrong in criticizing it? This question will be discussed here using its most prominent members as examples: Gustav Schmoller, Lujo Brentano and Werner Sombart.

In 1911 Schmoller published a revised version of his article of 1893 ‘Die Volkswirtschaft, die Volkswirtschaftslehre und ihre Methode’ (‘Economy, Political Economy and its Methods’). In 1911 he made some significant supplements in regard to Weber’s and Sombart’s reproaches concerning his methods: ‘Now I have to add with Marshall [Alfred Marshall] that from the “Sein” we have to learn “das Werden”’.26 It might appear as if Schmoller had taken this position only after Weber’s and Sombart’s attack on him from 1909, but a closer look at the original version of his article in 1893 shows that Weber was right in criticizing Schmoller already in his 1895 inaugural address.

It was Schmoller’s conviction, since the methodological debates with Carl Menger in the 1880s, that it is possible to achieve a better comprehension of the ‘whole’ and to arrive at a ‘purified view of the world’ by means of exact social sciences. According to him, the starting point of every research was a look at the ‘whole’. In this context it is without question for him that all theories and systems in economics are bound to value-judgements, to the degree that they take the ‘whole’ as a starting point and build up models for the future. He cites as examples Adolph Wagner, the state-socialist economist, Lujo Brentano favouring trade-

26. Gustav von Schmoller, Die Volkswirtschaft, die Volkswirtschaftslehre und ihre Methode (ed. August Skalweit; Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1949), p. 77. I refer to this edition (and not to the originals printed in the Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften) because Schmoller’s later additions here are clearly annotated.
unionism, and the ‘Association for Social Reform’ itself. For Schmoller, therefore, there were no doubts about value-judgements in social sciences, not only concerning the ideals of the future and its social models, but also the interpretation of the past as ‘great historical events’. But these interpretations were only of provisional character for him.27

From these attempts, Schmoller clearly delimits the process of research in a strict sense. The exact social sciences have to refrain from constructing ideals of what to do. Moreover, the scholar has to proceed in three steps: (1) observe the phenomena precisely, (2) define and classify them, and (3) explain their causes. Only by this procedure can political economy obtain objective results which can correct prejudices and ideals and plan the future: ‘The results of this systematic, empirical investigation are the same for every scholar proceeding in the right way; there is no more doubt and swaying in this area any more. The more the thinker proceeds in this way, the more he can achieve definite results by comprehending the whole. His view of the whole, his ideals will be more purified, his acting will be more perfect, his sight of the future more apt.’28

For Carl Menger, it was one of the ‘errors of historicism’29 to believe in such scientific progress on the basis of induction; and this was precisely the point Weber, too, criticized in his inaugural address: to comprehend reality in its totality. Here is to be found the fundamental difference between Weber’s thinking and that of the Historical School of political economy. Of course, Schmoller was aware of the distinction between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’; he also rejected professors’ proclaiming political aims in the lecture room (‘Professorenprophetie’), but in contrast to Weber he was convinced that there was the possibility in social sciences, thanks to exacting procedures, of understanding economic factors in their total context and building upon this recognition a perfect (‘purified’) view of the world with a compelling orientation for the future. It was exactly this assumption that Weber denied. He was on Menger’s side, when in his essay on objectivity of 1904 he denounced sharply ‘many, also excellent, representatives of the Historical School’,30 insisting on this error.

There was still another fundamental difference between Schmoller and Weber in the sphere of values. For Schmoller it was no problem at all to reconcile different values; when he became the rector at the University of Berlin in 1897 he mentioned the ‘old established ethical-religious ideals and the juridical state imperatives’ in the same breath.\(^{31}\) For Weber, trying to make clear the incompatibility of different values, such a statement would have been impossible. Here was indeed, besides their difference in the field of knowledge, an important disagreement in their world-view.

What conclusions should we draw from all of this? \textit{Already in the 1890s there was a debate under way on value-judgement and objectivity in social sciences.} Schmoller was convinced of the possibility of scientific progress and the possibility to create, on the basis of objective knowledge, a perfect system of science, which generates out of itself (socio-) political ideals and aims for the future. That is exactly what Weber had criticized in his inaugural address: the incompatibility of different values and the impossibility of grounding values on scientific research.

Another scholar belonging to the Historical School and participating in this early debate on value-judgement was Lujo Brentano. In 1896 he published the article ‘The Differences in the Opinions of the Economists’. This article was reprinted in 1911 under the title ‘On Value-judgement in Economics’.\(^{32}\) Brentano belonged to the left wing of the ‘Association for Social Reform’ and orientated his socio-political ideas towards the British model of self-help. In this respect he belonged politically to Weber’s and Werner Sombart’s group, but in his methodological argument he supported Schmoller’s and the Historical School’s standpoint in the field of value-judgements.

Brentano notices first of all that every scholar is marked by the nation, the social class and the family he comes from.\(^{33}\) These special interests would arouse in the researcher’s mind, at every moment, associated ideas distracting him from the original subject matter. Yet, this risk arises so frequently because of the complexity of the economic phenomena. They can, however, be overcome by a circumspect and systematic proceeding. In contrast, the open political partisanship of the scholar would really threaten the independence of economics as a science. In the past,

\begin{itemize}
\item \(^{31}\) Gustav Schmoller, \textit{Wechselnde Theorien und feststehende Wahrheiten im Gebiete der Staats- und Socialwissenschaften und die heutige deutsche Volkswirthschaftslehre} (Berlin: W. Büxenstein, 1897), p. 32.
\item \(^{33}\) Also for the following: Brentano, ‘Meinungsverschiedenheiten’, pp. 243-46.
\end{itemize}
there had been little real progress in economics because economists had often served political ideas. As partisans of free-trade liberalism, of socialism or of the great land-owners, economists had propagated political ideas instead of confining themselves to the analysis of their subject matter. Thus their political opinions influenced and devalued the results of their research. The process of research should not be guided by political orientation, but the other way round: political judgements about present and future developments should derive from an objectively proceeding science. This is exactly Schmoller’s point of view. Brentano stresses his plea by means of an example out of his own field of research and for which his name is still famous: the movement of the British working class and its organizations. He states that only his research in this field had led him to specific judgements. Brentano’s claim here shows clearly the German Historical School’s ideal of a social policy based on supposedly objective scientific research. Brentano writes: ‘The experience of all times shows that the greatest wisdom is justice and that the best basis for the preservation of the existing social order is legislation which lets the sun shine and the wind blow equally for all classes’.34

Werner Sombart had been, besides Max Weber, the sharpest critic of this position as early as the 1890s. In his article of 1897,35 Sombart stresses that science cannot found any ideals, that the scientific position toward ideals can only be genetic or critical: ‘social science can only analyze the ideal in its necessity or liberty. It can only explain its genesis causally: genetic examination; or it can estimate or judge its value and significance: critical examination.’ According to Sombart, it is a part of critical examination to uncover errors and contradictions in the ideal itself. It is also necessary to examine the connections of one ideal with other ideals and whether there is a dependence on final aims. Sombart applies this method to the analysis of the ideals used in social policy. In contrast to the Historical School he rejects social justice as an ethical standard because it does not belong to science itself but comes from outside. On the contrary, he favours ‘productivity’ as an ideal in economics but without critical examination of this notion, just as he did twelve years later, at the meeting of the ‘Association for Social Reform’, when he and Weber began the debate on value-judgements. For Sombart, social policy should not support all groups equally but above all the class representing economic progress in the direction of more productivity growth.36

36. Sombart, ‘Ideale’, p. 44.
Sombart rejects Weber’s inaugural address to the degree that it shows Weber’s ideal of the German nation, but he sees also the parallels between their methodological thinking, above all the shared critique of the German Historical School of political economy. Likewise they had, according to Sombart, the ‘call for economic strength’ in common, meaning the call for capitalist development with a politically strong bourgeoisie exercising effective influence on the government.  

This direct reception shows that Weber’s inaugural address was not only the starting point for a nationalist debate. It was, beyond that, also the starting point for a methodological debate that was crucial for the formation of the social sciences around the turn of the century. It set a signal for younger economists to come together and revise the methodological basis of their science and its established leaders. Together with his Address, Weber cited Sombart’s article on ideals in social policy in his ‘Outline of Lectures in General (“Theoretical”) Economics’ in 1898. In 1904, the development of Weber’s position on value-judgements and objectivity came to a certain closure, when he decided to cooperate directly with Werner Sombart and the economist Edgar Jaffé. They took over the journal ‘Archiv für soziale Gesetzgebung’, founded by the Social Democrat Heinrich Braun, who wanted to bring more transparency to German social policy and laws by collecting background information and statistics. The new editors changed the title to ‘Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik’. This meant also a change in the journal’s programme. They no longer wanted a mere collection of materials, but a new focus on the cultural consequences of capitalist development. The introduction and the first chapter of the article on objectivity, written by Weber at the suggestion of his co-editors and published in the first volume of the new ‘Archiv’, expressed the view of all three editors, that it can never be the task of empirical science to formulate norms and ideals prescribing the direction of practical action.

As all of these developments suggest, Weber’s discussions with colleagues about value-judgements began as early as the 1890s. The debate and the evolution of Weber’s ideas on this topic, especially in connection with the discipline of economy, crystallized into a specific form in 1904 and achieved a provisional closure that held until the beginning of the ‘Werturteilsstreit’ in 1909.

38. Max Weber, Grundriss, p. 27 (already mentioned above, n. 13).