



READING MAX WEBER
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I was born in Germany and spent my early teens in a primitive village in Upper Franconia, which remains an important memory for me. I had little secondary schooling before my family emigrated to the United States in 1949. From a public secondary school in Jersey, I went to Amherst College on a program designed to get me to MIT in three years for a combined BA and BS degree. After completing the science program that was to prepare me for MIT, I allowed myself to read widely in the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, I so enjoyed that amateur experience that I betrayed my father's expectations, went to Harvard, rather than MIT, and majored in "German and intellectual history", which I defined as encompassing anything that interested me.

Of painful interest to me was the shocking history of the German academic community from 1890 to 1933, which I took up in a doctoral dissertation (completed in 1960) that ultimately became my first book: *The Decline of the German Mandarins* (1969). I had married my college love in 1957 (almost 45 years ago), began teaching full-time at Harvard three years later, moved to Indiana University (1966–1969), Boston University (1970–1984), and a Mellon Professorship at the University of Pittsburgh (1984–2002). My Mandarin thesis has stayed with me throughout my life, and so has its hero. Max Weber, who swam alone against a tide of irrationalism, self-delusion, and inhumanity that made the most "elevated" thinkers on the planet indirectly responsible for the most bestial crimes of the twentieth century.

I was left with problems. *In practice*, I felt obliged to take radical action when I confronted academic conditions partly comparable to those Weber faced, as I did both in Indiana and in Boston. In theory I had to ask to what extent those conditions were in principle peculiar to Germany. I addressed this question in my second and third books: *Education and Society in Modern Europe* (1979), and *Fields of Knowledge* (1992), both comparative studies.

My *Fields* book led me back by way of Pierre Bourdieu to Max Weber, beginning with Max Weber's *Methodology* (1997) and eventually to a broader rereading of Weber that still engages me.

Initially invited to the Wissenschaftskolleg for 1997/98, I fell prey to liver disease instead. My prospects of survival seemed slim for a time, which brought on an internal review of my life, along with the writing (during the slow recovery from a successful liver transplant operation) of a personal memoir titled *Trouble in Academe* (1999) and of *Toward a Social History of Knowledge* (2000), a collection of essays. It was important to me that Wolf Lepenies maintained an open-ended invitation to the Wissenschaftskolleg throughout my illness.

When Mary and I arrived in Berlin in October 2001, I brought along several chapters of a book on Max Weber, and I have been adding to these chapters ever since. On the other hand, some of what I brought with me has now been discarded. Indeed, my whole project has undergone a series of crises and revisions during my stay here. I recently completed the opening portion of what I no longer consider the eighth and last chapter of the book. So I really got quite a bit of writing done, and I also recast my work, in what I take to be the Wiko tradition. My working title is now *Reading Max Weber*, and the projected book has become a more personal work, a completion of the circle I opened in my first book. I will easily be able to complete it by the fall of this year, so as to send it out to potential readers. If I find a publisher for it, it will certainly meet, both in Germany and in the United States, with some fierce objections. But so was my *Mandarins* book at first.

It would be nice if I could truthfully claim that intellectual exchanges with my fellow Fellows helped me to recast my manuscript on Weber, but that is not what happened. Instead I found myself more and more exclusively preoccupied with my own project, with Max Weber, and with my relationship to him. I am no longer young, and my inquiries have taken on a logic of their own. I had some very helpful last-minute advice from Peter Galison on portions of my text; but I otherwise really worked alone. I attended the presentations of all current Fellows while in Berlin, saw former colleagues and graduate

students, agreed to do some lecturing within Berlin (but no where else in Germany), and stayed for some ancillary events at the Kolleg. I accepted invitations to lecture in Granada and in St. Petersburg, mainly as a tourist.

Mary and I had a number of friends visit us while we were here, and we greatly enjoyed touring Berlin, whether with them or by ourselves.

At the Wissenschaftskolleg itself, however, I often thought it best to mind my own business. In particular, I felt embarrassed about a tendency I have to lecture, and I believe it was my attempt to control that propensity that caused me to intervene in our seminars – when I intervened at all – with a brevity, concentration, and intensity that made me largely unintelligible. I *did* react whenever I felt that a colleague’s position threatened some aspect of Weber’s position or mine, mainly on such methodological issues as the inductive statistical (rather than deductive nomological) form of causal analysis in the historical disciplines; or the interpretation of human actions and beliefs by means of the hypothetical attribution of rationality; or the need for explicitly formulated “ideal types” to model the human motives, actions, and beliefs one wants to isolate for explanation. One odd consequence of my posture was that I generally enjoyed the presentations of our natural scientists more than those of colleagues working in fields closer to my own. Let me nevertheless thank every member of this fellowship year for keeping away from the self-destructive rhetoric of the new cultural relativism and subjectivism. The “cultural wars” still waged in American departments of English, Literature, and “Cultural Studies” did not infect the Wissenschaftskolleg, and I am truly grateful.

That brings me at last to more cheerful thoughts. For despite my private worries, both Mary and I have had a wonderful time here. We made good friends; we came to feel attached to many of my colleagues here, including some whose intellectual positions I do not share. Mary and I also enjoyed the wonderful children that surrounded us all the year and we deeply appreciate the kindness and affection we constantly met with from the splendid staff of the Wissenschaftskolleg. We thank you, and we really find it *very* hard to leave.