

Reflections on a Life



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strategy of empirical work, I then had more or less to teach myself, when my switch to sociology made it necessary, although the experiences of the war and the postwar years, and my medical studies, probably helped.

Thus armed against dubious modes of thought, I went to Heidelberg. From my time there as a student I had the best memories of that lively little town. And I could see more clearly than when I had been there earlier where I was actually trying to go, what I wanted to accomplish with my life. I had the example of my university teachers before me. My wishes had long been drawn in this direction, and now I had gained the confidence that I could do it: teach and pursue research. I knew that I was a good teacher; among my fellow students I had got a reputation for being able to explain complicated subjects in a simple way. I enjoyed teaching. As regards research, I had little more than my dissertation as evidence of my ability. And that had been a difficult task. I had confidence in my intellectual capabilities, and I wasn't lacking in ideas. But the concentrated intellectual work demanded by the dissertation had been very difficult. I only realized later that about 90 per cent of all young people have difficulty writing their first major piece of research; and sometimes the second and third or even the tenth, for that matter. I could have wished someone had told me so at the time. You think, of course, 'I am the only one who has such difficulty in writing my dissertation (or whatever it might be); everyone else finds it quite easy.' But that's not how it is. So I say it now. The difficulties are perfectly normal. One just has to keep going. I knew that I was lucky in myself. I never found the work very easy, but I had staying power, I stuck at it.

In Heidelberg I was quite quickly drawn into the vortex of academic events. Heidelberg at that time was a preindustrial university town in the old style, which means that the university dominated the town. A considerable proportion of its inhabitants made a living from the university, even if indirectly. Students were a prominent factor in the everyday scene. But Germany's transformation from an imperial realm into a re-