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From Max Weber to Public Sociology

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Vorlesung

In the multiple debates around public sociology little attention has been paid to sociology's canonical figures. The political and methodological writings of Max Weber are among the most interesting and complex in responding to issues raised by "public sociology". Two opposed views are commonly found: Weber as advocate of "value free sociology" detached from the world it describes versus Weber as "engaged intellectual" who saw moral and political issues as the *raison d'être* of social science. This antinomy can only be addressed by first resituating Weber in the context of his times – his involvement in university politics, association politics and nation-state politics – and then interrogating the divergence between his methodological pronouncements and his political practice. Taking cognizance of history, methodology and practice, and working with Weber's three distinctions: between fact and value, between science and politics, between ethic of responsibility and ethic of absolute ends, this paper asks how Weber might approach the dilemmas of public sociology today.