

Changing Theories and Fixed Truths in the Field of State and Social Sciences and Contemporary German Political Economy*

By Gustav Schmoller**

Esteemed guests, revered audience!

By assuming the position of rector at the University of Berlin and since I am obliged to begin this position with an academic speech, I ask your permission to speak about a major question of principle and to share my views on it with you. This question has preoccupied me as one of the most central questions throughout my entire scientific work: It is not as pronounced in many other sciences as it is in that of the state, society, and political economy, but simultaneously bears significant impact on university policy by playing an important role in recommendations and appointments pertaining hereto, and which has the greatest significance for the entire development of science and university teaching.

I mean the contrast of historically changing and vacillating theories, of systems and streams of scholarship¹ to the fixed results of knowledge about which disputes and competing views can no longer exist.

I.

If we consider the theories about the emergence of the state as they have dominated political thought from ancient times until today; if we contemplate

* Translated by Mark McAdam, Stefan Kolev, and Erwin Dekker. 1897. “Wechselnde Theorien und feststehende Wahrheiten im Gebiete der Staats- und Socialwissenschaften und die heutige deutsche Volkswirtschaftslehre.” *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft im Deutschen Reich* 21 (IV): 1387–408. Inaugural lecture on the occasion of ascendancy to the rectorate held in the auditorium of the Königliche Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin on October 15, 1897.

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