

Excerpts from Jörg Strübing: „Das interpretative Paradigma und die Wissenschaft der Interpretation – wider den ‚Physikneid‘ in der Soziologie“.

A review of Reiner Keller's textbook „The interpretive paradigm. An introduction.“

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[...] What Reiner Keller, who teaches in Augsburg, provides [with this book] is nothing less than a complete balance of the project of interpretive theory and the fruits of its research – from the beginnings of the Chicago School up to and including the post-structuralist 'turn' and cultural studies.

The interpretive paradigm concept creates a highly suitable integrating framework for a number of theoretical lines of thought and empirical research traditions. The common methodological element emphasized by this concept is that social reality must continually and repeatedly be produced through interactions that can only occur because the participating actors generate meaning through reciprocal interpretations and in doing so organize their actions in such a way as to coordinate it with other participants. [...] However, Keller goes back much further than expected [...] the point of origin for his considerations is indeed Max Weber's dual designation of sociology as a cultural science but also as a "science of reality". [...] Using Weber as a primary point of access makes it quite easy to think of the North American theories and the phenomenological tradition, which is heavily influenced by Weber, Husserl, and Schütz and is home to Berger and Luckmann's social constructivism, as connected to one another. However, Keller's integrative theoretical project does not stop here: as is to be expected from one of the leading German discourse analysts, he goes on to systematically describe the common references between interactionist situation analysis and the purposeful investigation of discourses. [...]

A number of attributes clearly identify this book as appropriate for use as a textbook. In addition to the systematic presentation of content, this pertains, above all, to the exercises concluding each section that go far beyond inviting the mere recital of information [...] Anyone who wishes to delve into the theory and practice of interpretive sociology will find many salient opportunities to approach and fully comprehend this topic here. [...] Each of the [four main] perspectives is discussed regarding its leading theoretical arguments, but also in view of internal distinctions and historical lines of development. This makes it easy to recognize how individual theoretical entities emerge from others or generate a synthesis of various perspectives. [...]

The author has succeeded in providing not only an excellently executed textbook, but also a book that has long been sorely missed, being able to both clearly structure the field in question and provide a comprehensive overview without foregoing the opportunity to offer new insight regarding certain elements. In light of the fact that they are presented in an introductory context, several topics and their respective presentation will surely present a challenge to the novice. This includes, for example, the distinction between different post-structuralist positions given at the beginning of this book. On the other hand, however, the various arguments are never crude in the manner we have unfortunately become accustomed to through several other introductions to sociology. On the contrary: time and again, Keller uncovers the common connections between different schools of thought that are usually discussed in regard to their supposedly irreconcilable differences, which is often symptomatic of an overemphasis on their

respective rhetorics of distinction. [...] For those interested in reading more, useful references to further literature are provided [...]

What makes Keller's book a good read is that [...] the perspectives in question are always treated in line with the continuity or discontinuity of the theoretical argument and with its empirical yield. Especially for sociology beginners, this approach makes the "meaning" of each theoretical perspective very easy to relate to by showing the consequences of its application in research, thereby emphasizing how they differ from other perspectives. If the second edition, which will surely be commissioned soon, were to receive a proper index, this book could take its rightful place in the sociological bookcase as an important work of reference to be consulted even after earning one's degree.