

Jochen Streb

Obituary for Eckart Schremmer

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Prof. Dr. Eckart Schremmer (1934–2025) war eine bereichernde Persönlichkeit der Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte in Deutschland. Von 1968 bis 2002 lehrte und forschte der gebürtige Stuttgarter an der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg. Geprägt von frühen internationalen Erfahrungen erforschte er verschiedene Themenfelder wie die Industrialisierung im ländlichen Raum und die Steuer- und Geldgeschichte Europas. Forschungsaufenthalte führten ihn nach Japan sowie an die Universitäten Stanford und Harvard. Seit 1997 war er Mitglied der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, viele Jahre lang war er Vorstand der Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Zu seinen wichtigsten Veröffentlichungen zählen *Die Wirtschaft Bayerns vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum Beginn der Industrialisierung* (1970) sowie *Steuern und Staatsfinanzen während der Industrialisierung Europas. England, Frankreich, Preußen und das Deutsche Reich 1800 bis 1914* (1994). Professor Schremmer bleibt bei seinen Studentinnen und Studenten in besonderer Erinnerung durch seine engagierte Lehre, viele fächerübergreifende und anregende Diskussionen, sowie die Motivation für neue Methoden und Forschungen stets offen zu sein.

“Can you feel it?” (“Spüren Sie es?”) – Professor Dr. Eckart Schremmer liked to use this rhetorical question in his lectures to ensure that his students not only understood the bare facts of German economic history but could also empathize with the predicaments of historical people who were often constrained by poor institutions while struggling to achieve their economic goals. Schremmer’s didactic vision was to use economic history as an example to teach his students how to think in economic terms. By putting themselves in the shoes of historical household members, entrepreneurs, or even politicians, students were to learn what it means to make economically sound decisions. Students greatly appreciated this teaching concept. Although his lectures began twice a week at eight o’clock in the morning, they were well attended. At the end of their studies, many students praised Professor Schremmer’s lectures and seminars as some of the most interesting and instructive they had attended during their time at the

University of Heidelberg. The admiration was mutual. Eckart Schremmer remained an enthusiastic university lecturer until the age of 69.

On June 27, 2025, Eckart Schremmer passed away at the age of 91 at his last place of residence in the Black Forest. I would like to take this sad occasion to remember his achievements in research and teaching at the University of Heidelberg. My account is based largely on personal recollection because I had the honor of learning from Eckart Schremmer as a student and young researcher for almost two decades.

Eckart Schremmer was born on May 15, 1934, in Stuttgart. He started elementary school in Berlin during the war, then moved to Münsingen in the Alb region before finally returning to Stuttgart in 1948, where he attended Wilhelms-gymnasium. An academic career was not initially part of his life plan. After graduating from high school in 1953, he first completed a technical-commercial apprenticeship at Daimler-Benz AG. He had a keen curiosity about foreign countries and cultures and the frequent trips abroad that went with it were a recurring theme in Eckart Schremmer's life. He spent part of his high school years in Sweden and Switzerland, and after completing his apprenticeship, he did internships in Paris, Istanbul, and Ankara. While young Eckart Schremmer's international activities may seem normal to many students today, just one decade after the Second World War, such international mobility was still very unusual for a young German. Following these formative experiences at home and abroad, Schremmer studied economics, history, and philosophy with the primary goal of qualifying for a position at an international organization. He studied at several universities, including Stuttgart, and finished with a double degree from the University of Munich and the Université Internationale de Sciences Comparées Luxembourg. During his time as a university lecturer, Professor Schremmer spent extended periods in Japan, as well as at Stanford and Harvard.

Frequent trips are even more enjoyable when you have a favorite base camp to return to. Eckart Schremmer found just such a place in the Kurpfalz region. Shortly after completing his postdoctoral thesis in Munich, the University of Heidelberg offered him the position of professor of economic history in December 1967. He accepted this offer despite a competing offer from the University of Regensburg. The high academic reputation that Eckart Schremmer acquired in the following decades is proven by subsequent offers from the universities in Göttingen, Vienna, and Kiel. He also served as chairman of the reputable *Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* for eight years and was appointed a corresponding member of the Saxon Academy of Sciences in Leipzig in 1997.

Since his postdoctoral research on the economic history of Bavaria, Eckart Schremmer had been investigating whether the spread of commercial production in rural areas accelerated the transition to industrialization.¹ Unlike the advocates of proto-industrialization, he assumed that in some regions, such as Bavaria, the expansion of craftsmen and part-time farmers in rural areas stabilized the economy and thus society, thereby delaying industrialization. A second focus of Eckart Schremmer's research was the development of national tax systems and their influence on industrialization in Europe.² In particular, he hypothesized that traditional direct tax systems systematically underestimated the taxable income of fast growing and innovative industrial companies and thus promoted their growth through undertaxation. Eckart Schremmer was also very interested in money and currency issues, with a particular focus on pre-industrial coinage systems and the transition to fiat money.³

Professor Schremmer impressed many of his doctoral students with his insatiable scientific curiosity. When he wanted to learn something new, he would spend hours with us in special "doctoral seminars" discussing the hot topic of the day, which sometimes had nothing to do with economic history at all. I remember one long afternoon we spent discussing John Rawls' "Theory of Justice", while at other times we talked about the concept of Pareto optimality or the idea of a direct consumption tax. The most important thing Eckart Schremmer taught me was to always be open to new methods and content, even across subject boundaries.

When Eckart Schremmer retired in 2002, Heidelberg's Economics Department closed his chair because of budget constraints. This was at a time when many German economists believed that economic history had nothing important to offer to their profession. This only changed with the Great Recession and the *empirical turn* in economics that took place at around the same time. Eckart Schremmer was saddened by the loss of his chair, but he was very pleased about the positive developments in his field over the past two decades.

My doctoral supervisor remained sharp-minded until the very end. When I last spoke to him on the phone in early June this year, he had plans to write a book on the challenging years of German reunification.⁴ Unfortunately, this will

1 E. Schremmer, *Die Wirtschaft Bayerns vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum Beginn der Industrialisierung*. Bergbau, Gewerbe, Handel, Munich 1970.

2 E. Schremmer, *Steuern und Staatsfinanzen während der Industrialisierung Europas*. England, Frankreich, Preußen und das Deutsche Reich 1800 bis 1914, Berlin 1994.

3 E. Schremmer, *Über „stabiles Geld“*. Eine wirtschaftshistorische Sicht, Dortmund 1992.

4 A pilot study of the planned book has been E. Schremmer, *Zwischen Integration und Desintegration: Die Vereinigung der beiden Teile Deutschlands*, St. Katharinen 1995.

no longer happen. With Eckart Schremmer's passing, German economic history has lost an outstanding researcher and teacher of the second half of the 20th century. I will not forget him.

Jochen Streb, University of Mannheim