

Science, Values, and the Empirical Argument in Max Weber's Freiburger Antrittsrede

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Abstract

Max Weber's inaugural address in Freiburg, *The Nation State and Economic Policy*, is as important as it is contested. It has been used as a key to an understanding of both Weber's political and methodological thought. The minutiae of the empirical part of the lecture, however, has received less attention. This article provides a detailed reconstruction of the largely implicit explanatory scheme in the inaugural address. It sets out to show how Weber's analysis of a social transformation in rural West Prussia – from a patriarchal to a capitalist employment regime – relates to the specific explanandum of the study. The reconstructed explanatory scheme is then used to interpret Weber's views of the relations between science, values and politics.

Keywords: Employment regime, patriarchalism, capitalism, value freedom.

1. Introduction

Max Weber's 1895 inaugural address in Freiburg, *The Nation State and Economic Policy*, elicited strong reactions in Weber's own days, and it has continued to be hotly contested in recent scholarship. Thus, when *The Nation State and Economic Policy*, along with Weber's other works on the conditions of the agrarian workers, appeared in the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* (MWG I/4), Günther Roth asked 'how much damage it can do to Weber's reputation' (Roth 1993: 150). The question is no doubt a warranted one, if we consider its opening passages:

What I intend is firstly to illustrate, from just one example, the role played by physical and psychological *racial differences between nationalities in the struggle for existence*. I should then like to add some reflections on the situations of states which rest on national foundations – as ours does – in the framework of a consideration of economic policy (Weber 1994: 2, italics added).

On the face of it, this declaration of intent seems to be a crude specimen of scientific racism. There is, however, ample evidence that Weber was opposed to explanations in terms of race. A case in point is