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

Ola Agevall

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