

The Covid-19 Crisis: a Conflict between Rationalities

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Translation of his intervention in *A Hundred Years after Max Weber's Death*
<<https://sociologiauba.wixsite.com/socioaudiovisual/max-weber-100-anos>>

Based on Max Weber, we can say that the current crisis is a crisis between two spheres, each with its own logic.

On the one hand, the sphere of knowledge, that is, the role of scientists, epidemiologists, etc., and on the other hand, the sphere of the economy. What is new, what brings novelty to this crisis in which we are submerged, is that after forty years of neoliberal globalization, something absolutely external to the economic sphere, a virus, exposes the consequences of decades in which the economic logic, the logic of capital, expanded unlimitedly, without other spheres being able to curb its expansion.

The globalized, neoliberal reason is the instrumental reason in which the economic sphere managed to impose itself. In other words, everything becomes a commodity. And within this whole, health, like any other commodity, becomes something that is viable as long as it sheds a positive accounting balance.

This is what Max Weber refers to when he says that capitalism is the most determining power of our modern destiny, the *schicksalsvollsten Macht*, in the 'Introduction' to the Collected Essays in Sociology of Religion. And also, above all, what Weber analyzes in the second chapter of what it was the first part of *Economy and Society*, that is, the part written after WWI, in which Weber shows that, in its purest, most rational form, capitalism, the economy, tends to develop leaving aside all political and social variables, that is, everything that is not the mere accounting, the mere calculation of benefits. In other words, it is pure instrumental rationality: accounting and maximization of profits obtained. In other words, this is capitalism in its neoliberal form, which led to a global attack, since the eighties, on the health and living conditions of billions of people in the world.

In this sense, the *stahlhartes Gehäuse* Michael Löwy talks about in his intervention, that is, what Parsons turned into the *iron cage*, is capitalism, as Löwy states. And what locks us in this cage, is the increasing difficulty of breaking with an established discourse on this inevitability: 'There is no alternative', in Margaret Thatcher's words. That is to say, it is not possible to consolidate a discourse that

gives priority to other variables, to other rationalities, other than that of the logic of capital.

Weber tells us, in a very witty phrase, that 'the calculation of consistent rationalism has not easily come out even with nothing left over'. And as such, this neoliberal rationality proved to be absolutely vulnerable to the pandemic.

The social consequences of this crisis are still difficult to estimate. But it is interesting that this Covid-19 crisis put on guard emblematic neoliberal media, such as the *Financial Times* or *the Economist*. For example, the past week - we are currently in mid-May - *The Economist* made an analysis of the American labor market and emphatically called for the US government to apply 'aggressive' policies - using the word 'aggressive' - on the labor market to prevent two lost decades from coming.

For this reason, the coronavirus crisis is probably an opportunity to highlight the need to break this iron cage, to confront that economic rationality, the logic of capital, which is only unsettled by great historical events. With its obscene concentration on wealth, it should be partially dominated by a rationality that is articulated by other variables, basically, by the will to create a fairer society.

A century after Weber's death due to the so-called 'Spanish flu', an unfortunate alignment between his days and ours finds us commemorating this centenary in the context of a new pandemic. And not being able, as a result of that pandemic, to share discussions with colleagues at congresses and conferences, which were already scheduled and, naturally, had to be suspended.

We hope, in this sense, that this video, prepared by the Chair of Weberian Thinking at the University of Buenos Aires, will contribute to opening discussions and reflections that can be partially supported by the legacy of Max Weber. Thank you very much.

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Translated by Georgina Graziano