

Old Arguments, New Circumstances: On the Relevance and Irrelevance of Max Weber's Vision of Modern Politics

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I want to revisit Weber's views on the relationship between capitalism, freedom, democracy and the nation in order to examine the question of the continuing validity, or otherwise, of his analysis for contemporary conditions. While we may still learn a lot from the way Weber tackled the complexities of these relations, have the framing institutional conditions changed so much that his substantive claims are no longer valid or useful? Whereas we can locate Weber in a long line of liberal justifications of the market—of capitalism—on the grounds that the latter both creates wealth and fosters democracy, he represents a point of transition in which those arguments get translated into the language of contemporary social science. This may account for his more contingent, pragmatic and provisional affirmation of the link between capitalism and democracy, which led David Beetham to characterize Weber as a “liberal without liberal values”. It is this relocation of arguments for capitalism and democracy in contingent social conditions that makes the issue of the institutional framing relevant. If these conditions no longer hold, then Weber's arguments fall with them. Before we examine this question in a contemporary context, we need to reconstruct the original arguments.

Key Words: Max Weber, capitalism, democracy, global competition

舊論新局：韋伯對現代政治的識見 於今之適用與不適用處

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摘 要

在這篇論文裡我打算重探韋伯對資本主義、自由、民主與民族間關係的看法，以檢視他的分析對當代的情勢是否仍具有效力，還是已不再有效。雖然我們仍然可以從韋伯處理這些複雜關係的方式中學到很多，但塑造這些關係的制度條件是否已經大幅改變，而使得韋伯的主要觀點不再有效或有用？我們一方面可以將韋伯置於那種以資本主義創造財富並促進民主為由，而正當化市場——資本主義——的自由主義之悠久傳統中，但他其實代表著一個轉捩點，從他以後，前述觀點被轉譯成當代社會科學的語言。這或許能說明為何他會對資本主義與民主間的關連，抱持較為偶然性、實用性及有條件的肯定。大衛·比頓（David Beetham）因而將韋伯描述成一個「沒有自由主義價值的自由派」（Beetham, 1989: 312）。正是因為支持資本主義與民主的主張，被重新置入偶然形成的社會關係中，因而使得形塑兩者的背景制度框架變得重要。如果這些背景條件不再成立，則韋伯的論點也就隨之失效。在我們以當代的脈絡檢視這項問題之前，我們必須重構原始的論點。

關鍵字：馬克斯·韋伯、資本主義、民主、全球競爭