

THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF THE CAPITALIST WORLD. MAX WEBER'S VISION

Professor, PhD Dorel Dumitru CHIRIȚESCU
“Constantin Brâncuși” University of Târgu-Jiu

ABSTRACT. WITH MAX WEBER, THE DEBATE ABOUT CAPITAL AND CAPITALISM MOVES INTO ANOTHER AREA, A MORE SUBTLE ONE, GIVEN THE CULTURAL FEATURES OF CERTAIN POPULATIONS, FEATURES THAT HAVE ENABLED THE APPEARANCE OF CAPITALISM IN ITS MODERN FORM. UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF CAPITALISM PUTS US IN A POSITION TO HIGHLIGHT A CERTAIN GIVEN CHARACTER OF THIS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION. IF MARX WAS RIGHT CRITICIZING ITS ECONOMIC DIMENSION, FROM THE CULTURAL POINT OF VIEW, CAPITALISM IS NOT CHALLENGEABLE. BY WEBER, WE UNDERSTAND THAT OUR WORLD IS MORE COMPLEX AND MANY OF OUR GESTURES OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION HAVE EXISTED FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. RELIGION IS THE MATRIX, THE BASIS OF ANY CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS. THROUGH ITS CULTURAL DIMENSION WE UNDERSTAND THAT OUR WORLD IS A NORMAL WORLD EQUALLY BUILT IN RELATION TO OURSELVES.

KEYWORDS: MAX WEBER, CAPITALISM, CAPITALIST ECONOMY, RELIGION, MORALITY, MORAL VALUES, CAPITALIST CULTURE, SOCIAL BEHAVIOR, CALVINISM, REFORMATION.

Introduction

Anthony Giddens highlights in his work “Sociology” that Max Weber was one of the fierce critics of Karl Marx. “In his opinion (it is about Max Weber) the non-economic factors have played a key role in the development of modern societies. The work “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” argues that religious values - especially those related to Puritanism - were of fundamental importance in creating the capitalist perspective. This perspective has not emerged as Marx argued from the economic changes itself” (Giddens 2001, 616). It is here about the delimitation that the author gives us and we will take it into account during this debate.

Content of the debate

There are two different angles from which the two authors regard capitalism and the capitalist world. “After Weber, capitalism - a distinct type of business organization - is only one of many major factors that shape the social development in the modern era” (Giddens, 2001, 616). Making a comparison between Marx and Weber, Giddens highlights a set of predominantly Marxist ideas and a different set of predominantly Weber ideas. Those predominantly Marxist

would be as follows (Giddens, 2001.617): the main engine of modern development is the expansion of the capitalist economy mechanisms; modern societies are dominated by inequalities of class, fundamental by their nature; the major divisions of power, such as those affecting the differentiated positions of men and women, ultimately derives from economic inequalities; modern societies as we know them today are of transitional type - we can expect them to be radically reorganized in the future; Socialism one way or another type will finally replace capitalism; worldwide spread of Western influence is mainly the results of expansionist tendencies of capitalist activities. The predominantly Weber ideas that Giddens speaks of are the following: the main engine of modern development is the rationalization of production; classes are just one of many types of inequality in the modern societies; in the economic system, power is separable from other resources; rationalization will undoubtedly continue to progress over time in all spheres of social life; all modern societies depend on the same basic ways of social and economic organization; the global impact of West comes from its domination over the industrial resources, along with the superiority of military power.

This seen, the debate about the end of capitalism, brought up in present by the economic crisis from 2008, goes to other frameworks. We will have another world where man is another person. The world from then will be the effect and the purpose of man's efforts since then. It is obvious that the human morality changes and the man of the future will not resemble to that of today. Cultural features are the basis of the social construction and determine the peculiarities of the social construction. We are talking here about an apparent determinism. Weber is not afraid to tell that the capitalist world is a world of money and enrichment for the simple reason that money and enrichment are not assessment criteria of capitalism because money has also played a key role in other types of social organizations. Watching it, we realize that our world comes from an extremely complex cultural matrix.

Basically, capitalism does not invent money, even if the use of money in capitalism takes on new meanings and contents. Here's what Weber says: “The entrepreneurship”, “the desire of earnings”, of monetary gain, earning as much cash have nothing in itself to do with capitalism. This desire has existed and exists to waiters, physicians, coachmen, cocottes, venal officials, soldiers, thieves, crusaders, roulette players, beggars. We could say that it is present in “all sorts and conditions of men” (people of different types and conditions n.n.), in all epochs, in all countries, wherever for this desire has existed and exists the objective possibility in one way or another” (Weber, 1993, 8). Since the start of the work the reader is removed from the Marxist idea that capitalism is money and greed, by the simple finding that both money and greed existed long before capitalism. In Weber, profit is not an end in itself but the finality of any actions and activities. Capitalism should not be confused with greed, for the simple reason that the finality of labor means profits and greed is only a character flaw. If there are greedy (and are!!! n.n), then people are always greedy and they are not made greedy by capitalism. Pursuit of gain is natural and normal, common feature of the person that works. “A “capitalist” economic act must be first of all one that is based on the expectation of a gain by using the exchange opportunities, thus on peaceful chances of gain” (Weber, 1993, 9). Weber’s capitalism is a world based on gain and permanent calculation of the chances of gain, by ”gain” understanding the difference between “the success evaluated in cash and the expense valued in cash“ (Weber 1993, 10). By calculating capital, Weber understands the rational, scientific and conscious use of the mathematical and accounting instruments to permanently determine the extent to which the activity is profitable.

Capital calculation means rationality and confidence in human rationality. The basic element of capitalism is considered to be capitalist, rational organization of free labor by Weber. Riches and advantages of some states over others also existed in other geographical areas and in other historical periods, only that their mobilization through rational organization of work was made just by Europe since the sixteenth century. Free labor is that which enables a precise economic calculation, by placing the desires and capacities of each of us on the market. Another specific feature of Weber capitalism is the continued development of technical possibilities. Science, technique, research and development are the decisive factors contributing to the promotion and development of capitalism.

The fundamental question raised by Weber in his analysis is the relationship between the social organization way, the social behavior and its cultural-religious type roots. Here's how Weber himself states it: “An examination either summary of the professional statistics of a mixed country from the confessional point of view, too often puts out a living phenomenon discussed in the press and in the Catholic literature and in the Catholic meetings in Germany: predominantly Protestant character of the possession of capital and employers and also of the highly skilled workers and especially of the personnel with technical and commercial higher education in the modern enterprises” (Weber 1993, 23). From the start, Weber warns that the explanations in this situation do not fall entirely on the confessional affiliation, but rather the confessional affiliation may be considered at some point as an effect of the economic development. In other words, the fact that rich people will be declared as part of the Reform does not mean that their fortunes were acquired because of the affiliation to Protestantism. At least as a starting point in the analysis of the context of social rifts that Reform produced, the warning is valid. Fortunes were previously created, only the declaration of their holders as Protestants occurred later. In this case the original question concerning the Protestant affiliation of capital and the capitalist elite could be resumed under the following form: “The following historical question arises then: what grounds had this particularly emphasized predisposition of the economically developed regions for a clerical revolution?” (Weber 1993, 24). One explanation would be that pertaining to the restrictions imposed by the Church in the use of money and wealth and that we analyzed in another part of the paper. Clerical dogmatism no longer fitted the new reality of the economic, commercial and technical explosion. The rich people of Europe wanted a larger understanding of faith in God and they used their influence to change the habits and the institution itself. Another explanation, which I did not put out in this work, refers to the more intense conflict between the kings, monarchs and princes and the Pope of Rome. Secular power demanded its rights before an increasingly weaker ecclesiastical power. There was a permanent war of the two powers in the epoch. Without going into details of historical nature, we say that worldly wealth and worldly power will demand their rights. It was a conflict caused by the growing power of kings, power coming from trade and capitalist typical manifestations.

We leave the explanations of historical nature, very important indeed, and we emphasize Weber's completion to the above historical question: “The answer is not as simple as it might first believe” (Weber 1993, 24). If Reform meant removing the domination of Church over secular life, then we can say that the secular power claimed victory by Reform, and the economic prosperity through capitalism later is only one result, an effect of this victory. Weber emphasizes the different behavior of Protestant to the other cults. To better understand the religious context of the emergence and imposition of capitalism we must emphasize that people of the time were

deeply concerned with the problem of their way of life on earth, convinced that the purity of their earthy lives will help them present with their heads held high in front of God and even to gain divine benevolence. Basically, the life here was preparing the afterlife. Because of this asceticism or refraining from worldly things or the measure of consumption and living on earth was a characteristic state of the Protestant Christian communities. According to Weber (Weber 1993, 108) the historical carriers of the ascetic spirit are mainly the following four directions of Protestant thinking: Calvinism, pietism, Methodism and sects originated in Anabaptist movement.

As regards Calvinism, Weber shows that “its most characteristic dogma was the one considered then and is generally today the doctrine on election by grace” (Weber 1993, 111). According to this doctrine “God does not exist for people, but people exist for God and all that is going on - even the undoubtedly fact for Calvin, that only some people are called to be saved - can have its meaning only as a means for the purpose of self-glorification of the greatness of God” (Weber 1993, 114). For the common Protestant there is no possibility to communicate with the divine, and his fate is shrouded in mysteries which are not accessible. Everyone is separated from God by an unbridgeable gap. Therefore Weber believes that in “his pathetic inhumanity, this teaching must especially have an effect over the mood of a generation that dedicates to its grandiose consistency, the feeling of a tremendous inner loneliness of the individual” (Weber, 1993 115). As a result, the individual is left with the asceticism, the inside silence and work to be pleasing God. In this way work, own human effort is placed at the base of Protestant Christian life. Labor cult will develop the civilization in which we live. Modern West is based on this cult. For these reasons, the career and work are important landmarks of earthly life for Protestants. For Calvinists work “acquires a strange material-impersonal character: that of rational service of social cosmos that surrounds us” (Weber 1993, 119).

Conclusions

Weberian Capitalism is a world of work in debt of people and God. Man exceeds the isolation and misery by work and he values himself as a being of the earth and the cosmos also by work. There is an impersonal social utility that man is subject to and serves it. Work is also a unique opportunity to socialize, to humanly get closer and to build social relations. This is the motivation and satisfaction of man in this world. This is why laziness is a great sin and a reprehensible state. Man attains holiness through involvement and purity, as divinity pleases. The idler is a person on the edge of the community. The task of a good Christian is to be ascetic and work for God's glory. Everything happens for God and in favor of God, and man has no other duty than to obey the divine laws. Even if wealth accumulation is not a sin, it occurs only as a result of this work and not for man's greed. Wealth production is a result of man's attempts to gain the benevolence of divinity. We are dealing here with man becoming relaxed in front of money. The detachment protects the man against sufferings and sins. There is no haughtiness or ostentation in mastering wealth, but only natural and naturalness.

Bibliography

1. Dahl, Robert (2002), Democracy and its critics, European Institute Publishing House, Iași
2. de la Bastide, Henri (1994), Four trips in the heart of civilizations, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest
3. de Montbrial, Thierry (2003), Action and world system, Expert Publishing House, Bucharest
4. Friedman, Milton (1995), Capitalism and freedom, Enciclopedică Publishing House, Bucharest
5. Fukuyama, Francis (2002), The great rupture. Human nature and restoring the social order, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest
6. Fukuyama, Francis (1992), The end of history and the last man, Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest
7. Fukuyama, Francis (2004), The construction of states. The world order in the XXI century, Antet Publishing House
8. Galbraith, John Kenneth (1997), *The perfect society. Topical: man's good*, Euro Song & Book Publishing House, Bucharest
9. Gauchet, Marcel (2006), The disenchantment of the world. A political history of religion, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest
10. Giddens, Anthony (2001), Sociology, ALL Publishing House, Bucharest
11. Lévi-Strauss, Claude, Race and history (2001), Fides Publishing House, Iași
12. Lewis, C.S. (2012), About miracles. The four loves. The problem of pain, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest
13. Lips, Iulius (1958), The origin of things. A history of human culture, Științifică Publishing House, Bucharest
14. Weber, Max (1993), The Protestant ethic and the spirit of Capitalism, Humanitas Publishing House, București.