

The Nature of Unintended Consequence in Max Weber's thesis on Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

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1. Aim

This paper examines M. Weber's thesis on Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism especially on its logic of the birth of the spirit of capitalism as unintended consequence of the practice of Protestant ethics.

2. Methods

For this purpose, I first make clear that there are two elements in Weber's ideal type of "ethic of ascetic Protestantism," namely, "double predestination" and "association (Sekte) formation". These two elements have historically different sources: the former is an ethical principle represented by the Calvinism and the latter by the Baptism. Second, I point out that Weber's ideal type of "calling ethic of ascetic Protestantism" loses these two elements in its definition. Baxter was responsible for this. Although Weber depicts Baxter as a representative of Calvinism, it is difficult to think of it that way. The calling ethic of ascetic Protestantism has its potential feature that Weber did not pay much attention to. It is an ethical requirement that the money earned should eventually be donated. It is this ethical view that liberates people to pursue economic profit and requires complete donation of the earned to charitable organizations at the same time. The idea that combines these two features would be "the neo-conservative agency with public economic ethics." This idea is totally different from the idea of autonomy of the liberal citizens which is derived from Weber's ideal type of "ethic of ascetic Protestantism".

3. Results

We found that there is a big gap between "ethic of ascetic Protestantism" and "calling ethic of ascetic Protestantism." However, the calling ethic of ascetic Protestantism is almost the same as Weber's "spirit of capitalism", though there are three differences between them: (1) Replacement of "public good as glory of God" with "public welfare", (2) Canceling ethical demands (such as not playing sports) on how to spend leisure time and (3) Development of "liberation of profit pursuit" into "obligation to invest for profit". Although Weber's "spirit of capitalism" has no stipulation on what to do with earned money, it includes caring for the happiness of children and grandchildren or one's own social prosperity and power via the earned money in its wider definition. These elements suggest that there is a neo-conservative orientation in the idea of the spirit of capitalism in Weber's definition. In our interpretation, the thing that has been described as an unintended consequence in the logic of Weber's thesis can be properly understood through the definitional gap between the two ideal types on the ascetic Protestantism.