INTRODUCTION

Max Weber's Calling to Knowledge and Action

> It might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the "truth" one could still barely endure.
>
> F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* paragraph 39

Max Weber has claim not only to being one of the founders of modern social science but also to being one of the most acute diagnosticians of the conditions of modernity in the West. The fifty-six years of his life saw the writing of an astonishing array of works, not only in the general field of political economy (ranging from ancient Rome through the Middle Ages to contemporary Europe and America), but also in philosophy, the methodology of social scientific investigation, musicology, the sociology of most of the world's major religions, social theory, and political science. Nor were his efforts purely "academic": as what we would now call a "public intellectual," his attentions included contemporary events. For instance, after the 1905 abortive revolution in Russia, he took six months to learn Russian so that he could read the sources in the original language and then produced several important analyses of those events. A man of impeccably bourgeois origins and upbringing, he was also at the intersection of several of the most progressive dimensions of German and European intellectual, cultural, and artistic life.

Weber is also one of the few scholars of a century ago with whom most contemporary social scientists still feel the need to come to terms. In preparing the (necessarily dramatically incomplete) Further Reading section of this volume, we were struck by how many modern scholars, as well as those of previous and later generations, have written on Weber, even, and perhaps notably, when he did not remain the

primary focus of the work for which they are best known.[1] Weber was and remains a giant—an unavoidable figure for serious scholars.

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Max Weber was born Karl Emil Maximilian Weber on April 21, 1864, the oldest of the eight children of Max and Helene Weber. His university studies at Heidelberg were interrupted in 1883 for a year of military service. He passed examinations for the civil service in 1886 and by 1891 took his *Habilitation* with a work on Roman agrarian history, thus qualifying himself as a university lecturer. In 1893 he was appointed to a chair as professor of law and economics at the University of Berlin, and he married his second cousin, Marianne Schnitger, the daughter of the country doctor Eduard Schnitger and Eleonore Weber. The next year he was called to a chair at the University of Freiburg in political science (*Staatswissenschaft*): his inaugural lecture was an analysis of the German situation entitled "The National State and Economic Policy."[2] The year 1897 saw the death of his father, from whom he had been estranged for some time. Shortly thereafter he moved to a new chair at the University of Heidelberg, but during the following year he sank into a clinical depression and took leave of his university duties. He did not begin to emerge from the depression until 1902.[3] On the occasion of a scientific congress at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, he visited the United States. Accepting a position as "honorary professor" at Heidelberg, he did not return to university duties, but writings nonetheless poured from his pen. Scholarly books and articles appeared continuously, including what became his most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* as did newspaper articles, reviews, and polemical exchanges.

His aims were not just "academic," although they were always pursued with a high degree of intellectual rigor. An important part of his work, as he conceived of it, was to promote the political

[1] For a full demonstration of this point, see Alan Sica, *Max Weber: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Transaction Publishers, forthcoming 2003).

[2] "Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik," in Max Weber, *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1958), pp. 7–30 (henceforth GPS), translated in Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, eds., *Weber: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1–28 (henceforth PW).

[3] For a provocative account of Weber's mental illness, see Arthur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber* (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1971).

education of the German public, an education he felt sadly lacking in the aftermath of the long rule of Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck, in Weber's later analysis, had by his very political genius given rise to a situation in which no one could possibly take his place and for which his policies had ensured that none would have adequate training in responsibility and political experience to assume leadership.[4] After examining what hopes there might be for political leadership from each of the German classes, he concluded his inaugural lecture with the assertion that none of them would be up to the dangers confronting Germany and that the country thus faced "a monstrous work of *political* education."[5] This concern remained with him throughout his life: by the end of World War I he had established himself as Germany's single most respected voice on public affairs.

To this end, in addition to his writings, he was actively involved with several political groups that ranged over the entire political spectrum. He never ran for nor held office himself, despite the fact that, as his wife wrote in his biography, he had "always admired the captain of a ship, who held the destiny of so many in his hand."[6] During World War I he not only saw (limited) service as a hospital orderly but also published a series of articles analyzing Germany's conduct, policies, and war aims. He accompanied the German delegation to Versailles for the peace talks and tried thereafter to persuade General Ludendorff to take public responsibility for the defeat. On June 14, 1920, he died of a lung infection consequent to influenza. He was the most influential intellectual in Germany at the time.

Like some of the other great thinkers of his time (Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud come most readily to mind), some aspects of his thought have passed into common parlance. When we speak of charismatic leaders or bewail bureaucracy, we do so in language that has its origin in Weber's work. When contemporary politicians or cultural critics call for a return to the "Protestant ethic" (or nondenominationally, the "work ethic"), they echo Weber's analysis, though as we shall see, generally without his sense of the tragic. He is one of the handful of thinkers whose thought has permanently shaped the way in which we think of our modern world.

[4] See the magisterial article "Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland" (1918) in GPS 126–336, translated in PW and in Max Weber, *Economy and Society,* vol. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978). See also Henry Kissinger, "Bismarck: The White Revolutionary," *Daedalus* 97, no. 3 (Summer 1961): 888–924, which takes over Weber's argument.

[5] "The National State and the National Economy," GPS 29.

[6] Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography* (New York: Wiley, 1975).

The "Vocation" Lectures

The lectures in this volume are work at (although not of) the end of Weber's life. They reflect and encapsulate the commanding central project of his entire career, as he understood himself to have pursued it. This project was to understand how it is that "in the West alone there have appeared cultural manifestations that—at least we like to tell ourselves this—in their development go in the direction of universal significance and validity."[7] Weber's explicit concerns in these works are with the nature and status of science—most especially its desire to claim final authority for itself—and of political claims and political action—most especially the desire to rest political matters on moral certainties or justification.[8] As he sought to discover how this development had occurred, however, so also did he endeavor to explicate what he understood as its importance to human life in the West.[9] This enterprise of a life's work is distilled into these lectures. They constitute not only the most succinct account of his knowledge, but they also express more clearly than anywhere else in his published material his understanding of his own vocation, his own life. As such they form a whole and constitute not so much a summary of his work as an exploration of its implications for human existence.[10]

Both of these lectures are about "vocation" or *Beruf*. The term has the everyday meaning of "profession" but carries with it also the resonances from its religious origin as "calling." Weber intends both meanings. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*[11] he recognizes the religious origins and tone of the word—a "task given

[7] Max Weber, *Religionssoziologie* (Mohr: Tübingen, 1988), vol. 1, p. 1: "gerade auf dem Boden des Okzidents, und nur hier, Kulturerscheinungen auftraten, welche doch—wie wenigstens wir uns gern vorstellen—in einer Entwicklungsrichtung von universeller Bedeutung und Gültigkeit lagen." This passage is problematically translated and misleadingly placed as the introduction to Talcott Parsons' edition and translation of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner's, 1958), p. 13 (henceforth PESC).

[8] For example, in "The Future Form of the German State," Weber accuses Woodrow Wilson of having brought not peace but "unending struggle" (GPS 349); see also "On the Matter of War Guilt," GPS 381 ff.

[9] On these matters see Harvey Goldman, *Politics, Death, and the Devil: Self and Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

[10] Joachim Vahland (*Max Webers entzauberte Welt* [Würzburg: Königsheim and Neumann, 2001]) insightfully uses the idea of Weber as a *Berufsmensch* to analyze his thought.

[11] *Religionssoziologie,* vol. 1, p. 63 (PESC 79 ff).

by God," as he terms it. Weber asserts that the concept of calling is particular to Protestantism and in a lengthy footnote goes to some pains to differentiate it from more cosmically and less individually ordered concepts in the Roman Catholicism of someone like St. Thomas Aquinas.[12] Just as importantly, however, Weber differentiates the Puritan or Calvinist notion of *Beruf* from the Lutheran conception of a calling as a "stroke of fate" (*Schickung*)—something that happens to one and into which one must fit and be content. In Calvinism, however, vocation is a "command of God to an individual to work to His glory."[13] In the "Science" lecture Weber tellingly used the word "*hingeben*" in relation to the youth who "gives over" his life to *Wissenschaft. Hingeben* carries connotations of sacrifice and is the term that a woman might use (or be thought to use) in speaking of "giving herself to a man." Vocation is thus both active and passive—one must freely give oneself to that which calls one, which by the acknowledgment of that call appears as and becomes one's own. As a free act, vocation is thus defining of the person; as a necessary act, it is expressive of the person. Vocational activity has as itself nothing of the instrumental; it is an end in itself (thus in some sense moral) but without reference to any grounding or act other than the freely chosen commitment of individuals to their own particular fates.

Both lectures were occasioned by invitations from Immanuel Birnbaum, rector of the University of Munich, to participate in a public forum series on "*geistige Arbeit als Beruf*"—"intellectual or spiritual work as a calling"—which had been organized by the Freistudentische Bund, a left-liberal student association. Whereas Weber seems to have been reluctant to give the second of his two lectures (see the discussion of the "Politics" lecture below), we have no reason to suspect any similar reluctance concerning the delivery of the "Science" lecture; indeed, it is hard to see how the organizers of the series could have come up with a topic more likely to engage Weber's intellectual passion. The immediate intellectual context of the lecture is provided, as Wolfgang Schluchter has noted, by Alexander Schwab's essay "Vocation and Youth," in which Schwab, a student of Weber's economist brother Alfred, had presented commitment to a calling as incompatible with conduct according to the proper ethos of science.[14] Weber was to take a different tack.

[12] Ibid., p. 70n5 (PESC 80).

[13] Ibid., p. 172 (PESC 170).

[14] See Wolfgang Schluchter, "The Question of the Dating of 'Science as a Vocation' and 'Politics as a Vocation,'" in Schluchter, 1981: 113–6.

In part as consequence of the fact that these lectures were originally published as separate pamphlets and then in two separate German volumes of Weber's works, one dedicated to his "political" writings and the other to his "scientific" work, and in part as consequence of a positivistic conceptual separation of "facts" from "values," the close relation of these lectures to each other has often been obscured. Wolfgang Schluchter is quite correct when, in his afterword to the *Studienausgabe* edition of the lectures, he notes that they are both "key texts to [Weber's] answers to the central questions of modern culture." These texts, he continues, are in fact neither to be assimilated with Weber's more explicitly methodological writings on the one hand, nor, on the other, to his more topical political articles. "They pursue another goal," he writes; "they are 'philosophical' texts, with which they lead at once to the acknowledgment of that which is [*Tatsachenerkenntnis*] and of the self and at the same time persuade the individual to responsible work in the service of a suprapersonal cause [*Sache*]."[15]

If these are "philosophical" texts, however, what kind of philosophy are they? One should think of them as a form of "radical Kantianism,"[16] and in this sense they are the inheritor and continuation of a line of philosophical inquiry that starts in the seventeenth century, achieves its classic formulation in Kant, and then provides a continuing counterpoint to the Hegelianism of the nineteenth century.[17] Kant sought in his *Critiques* to explore the conditions of how a given human activity was possible. Thus the first *Critique* (of Pure Reason) answers the question of "how is knowledge of nature possible" and proceeds not by giving one knowledge of nature but by making critically clear what has to be the case for such knowledge to

[15] Wolfgang Schluchter, "Nachwort," to Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf (1917/1919) Politik als Beruf (1919)*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Wolfgang Schluchter with the collaboration of Birgitt Morgenbrod (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994), p. 91. Schluchter is influenced by the dissertation of Dieter Henrich, *Die Einheit der Wissenschaftslehre Max Webers* (Tübingen, 1952), who in turn was influenced by Karl Löwith.

[16] Raymond Aron, in his introduction to a French edition of these lectures (*Le Savant et le Politique* [Paris: Plon, 1959], p. 55), calls Weber a Kantian. Vahland (see note 10) analyzes Weber as belonging to the Kantian and neo-Kantian tradition (esp. chapters 5 and 7).

[17] Weber in fact rarely mentions Hegel, and when he does he speaks with distress about the influence of Hegel on German and European thought. See Paul Honigsheim, *On Max Weber* (New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 12; see W. Schluchter, *The Rise of Western Rationalism: Max Weber's Developmental History,* trans. G. Roth (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 21.

in fact occur. Kant refers to such awareness of the conditions of knowledge as "transcendental." In this spirit, one might read Weber's lectures as having inherited this critical and transcendental[18] tradition and thus as respective answers to the questions "What can I possibly know?" and "What can I possibly do?"

What, however, makes Weber's work "*radical* Kantianism"? For something to be "radical" Kantianism, it must nonetheless participate in Kant's basic approach to philosophical activity, that is, the critique. One might identify several kinds of critique, each progressively more "radical."[19] The first level—apparent, one might say, in Montaigne, or in a different way in Hume—consists in the realization that humans make unpredictable and repeated errors in their understanding of the world, errors that the experience of the world does not automatically correct. Typically such errors consist in attributing categorical status to some activity of human understanding—thinking that such and such activity is, for instance, ultimately morally justified. Hume and Montaigne—to whose names one could add those of Pascal and Montesquieu, among many others—sought to establish the nature and kind of the most usual errors made in asserting judgments about the world, be they epistemological or practical. The position entailed by this level of critique is skepticism. Hume found that he could escape the skeptical mode and conclusions only by removing himself from philosophical reflection. Reason was itself no anchor because, as he wrote, it was not "contrary to reason for him to prefer the destruction of the whole world to prevent the merest scratching of his little finger."[20] As he wrote in the *Treatise of Human Nature:*

> Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, Nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when, after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to

[18] Technically Weber's is not "transcendental" since it remains beholden in his science to the "empirical world." We might call it "quasi-transcendental" or "heuristically transcendental."

[19] We are influenced here by Dieter Henrich, *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 71 ff.

[20] David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1985), book 2, part 3, section 3, p. 463.

these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further.[21]

Here the critique serves to establish an unbridgeable distance between philosophical thought and the conduct of life. For Humean skepticism, philosophy cannot be the realm from which one might expect a provision of adequate answers as to what to do. Weber shares this sense of the limitation of knowledge for the deepest questions of human existence.

A second level of critique comes in the realization that it is not just that the mind itself may make errors in its understanding of the world but that the source of these errors itself may be built into the paths that reason must follow by virtue of what it is. Thus famously in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Kant established that reason was itself limited and that this limitation was not a fault of reason but rather made it possible for rationality to exist at all. Two years later, in section 32 of the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, he gave his earlier argument a succinct formulation:

> Since the oldest days of philosophy inquirers into pure reason have conceived, besides the things of sense, or appearances (phenomena), which make up the sensible world, certain creations of the understanding [*Verstandeswesen*], called noumena, which should constitute an intelligible world. And as appearance and illusion were by those men identified (a thing which we may well excuse in an undeveloped epoch), actuality was only conceded to the creations of thought.
>
> And we indeed, rightly considering objects of sense as mere appearances, confess thereby that they are based upon a thing in itself, though we know not this thing in its internal constitution, but only know its appearances, viz., the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something. The understanding therefore, by assuming appearances, grants the existence of things in themselves also, and so far we may say, that the representation of such things as form the basis of phenomena, consequently of mere creations of the understanding, is not only admissible, but unavoidable.
>
> Our critical deduction by no means excludes things of that sort (noumena), but rather limits the principles of the Aesthetic (the science of the sensibility) to this, that they shall not extend to all things, as everything would then be turned into mere appearance, but that they shall only hold good of objects of possible experience. Hereby then objects of the understanding are granted, but with the inculcation of this rule which admits of no exception: "that we neither know nor can know anything at all definite of these pure objects of the understanding, because our pure concepts of the understanding as well as our pure intuitions extend to nothing but objects of possible experience, consequently to mere things of sense, and as soon as we leave this sphere these concepts retain no meaning whatever."[22]

[21] Ibid., book 1, part 4, section 7, p. 316.

Kant claims here what he had established earlier in the *Critique:* that all experience is experience of and only of appearances; that whatever it is that appearances are of is something that cannot be the object of experience; that we can only know how it is that we have experiences; and that it is in reflecting on how it is that we have experience of appearances that we can ground reason. This, then, is a second level of critique, in which secure knowledge is seen to be found only in the critical reflection upon insecure experience. It held that there was a realm of knowledge that, while necessary for human beings, was not accessible to human experience. In his theory of ideal types, Weber will attempt the construction of the equivalent of a noumenal realm for the purposes of making social science possible.[23] It is for this reason that we call his understanding "heuristically transcendental" (see note 18).

Kant's accomplishment was instantly recognized as the source of a radically new conception of philosophy—one that while admitting the full force of skepticism would nonetheless not remain mired in it. The *third* level of critique is its radicalization into the suspicion and argument that the structures of reason itself are also the *sources* of deceptions, deceptions made all the more powerful by the fact that we are unable to resist them. Nietzsche, who can stand in here for a stable of other nineteenth-century thinkers such as Novalis, Schiller, and Schopenhauer, summed up these developments in *Twilight of the Idols*. In sections three and four of "How the True World Finally Became a Fable" he writes:

> 3. The true world, unattainable, unprovable, unpromisable, but a consolation, an obligation, an imperative, merely by virtue of being thought. (The old sun basically, but glimpsed through fog and skepticism; the idea become sublime, pallid, Nordic, Königsbergian.)

[22] Immanual Kant, "Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics," in Carl Friedrich, ed., *Philosophy of Kant,* (New York: Modern Library, 1949), pp. 86–7.

[23] See the discussion of ideal types in Tracy B. Strong, "Max Weber and the Bourgeoisie," in Asher Horowitz and Terry Maley, eds., *The Barbarism of Reason* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

> 4. The true world—unattainable? In any case, unattained. And if it is unattained, it is also *unknown*. And hence it is not consoling, redeeming, or obligating either; to what could something unknown obligate us? . . . (Gray dawn. First yawnings of reason. Rooster's crow of positivism.)[24]

As noted, the first two kinds of critique are present in Weber's work, but it is important that he also participates at the third level. It is a dangerous level in that it is very easy to move from it to a kind of epistemological nihilism: rationality is to no avail, all is illusion and nothing has any meaning in itself.[25] This is what Nietzsche meant by the "Death of God": the human condition in which no action or claim could be understood as having reference to anything that transcended its mere existence. Weber reflects a sense of this danger from his earliest work on. In 1893, two years before his assumption of his first university appointment, while speaking on "The Agrarian Labor Question" he concludes his remarks by saying:

> You will perhaps not have completely escaped the impression that I have spoken under the weight of a certain resignation and that the challenges . . . I have sought to pose here are likewise the products of this resignation—and this is indeed the case. . . . We cannot bring back to life the naïve enthusiastic energy that animated the previous generation, for we are faced with tasks other than those our fathers had to solve. They built us a mighty house, and we are invited to take place there and be well therein. The tasks that confront us are of another kind.[26]

As he set it for himself, Weber's task was to face this increasingly widespread *Kulturpessimissus*—this incipient nihilism—head on, as

[24] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Richard Polt and with an Introduction by Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 23.

[25] It is the sense of this that leads Leo Strauss (mistakenly) to call Weber a "nihilist" in *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

[26] *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1924), pp. 467–8: "Sie werden vielleicht den Eindruck nicht ganz verloren haben, daß ich unter dem Druck einer gewissen Resignation gesprochen habe, und daß diejenigen Forderungen . . . welche ich versucht habe, hier aufzustellen, gleichfalls das Produkt einer solchen Resignation sind,—und das ist in der Tat der Fall. . . . Wir können die naive enthusiastische Tatkraft nicht wieder aufleben lassen, welche die Generation vor uns beseelte, weil wir vor Aufgaben anderer Art gestellt sind, als unsere Väter es seinerzeit gewesen sind. Sie haben um uns ein festes Haus gebaut, und wir sind eingeladen, darin Platz zu nehmen und es uns darin wohl sein zu lassen. Die Aufgaben, die uns gestellt, sind anderer Art."

he experienced it in politics, culture, science, and philosophy. The loss of the availability of meaning was for Weber an historical fact and would not disappear if one simply turned one's head away and wished for something else.

On "Science as a Vocation"

The lecture "Science as a Vocation" was delivered on November 7, 1917, some fourteen months before the presentation of "Politics as a Vocation," in a war-weary—but as yet undefeated—Germany and against the immediate political backdrop of both the February and October Russian revolutions and the entry of the United States into the war the preceding April.[27] In this highly charged political context, Max Weber offers a relentlessly frank diagnosis of the external and internal conditions comprising the fate of the scholar in the contemporary world—a topic whose ethical import was immediately apparent to his contemporaries.[28] To understand the character of this act of *parrhesia,* it is worth recalling Weber's remark to a student that a modern scholar must, if he is honest, admit that "he could not have accomplished crucial parts of his own work without the contributions of Marx and Nietzsche."[29] It is so because Marx and Nietzsche pose, respectively, two questions that provide pivotal orientation points for Weber's reflections on the fate of the modern scholar: "What is the relationship between science and politics?" and "What is the meaning and value of science?" Both of the topics raised by these questions are pressing for Weber. The first compels reflection on the issue of whether science can serve as a foundation for politics or any human action and, hence, whether scientific authority can underwrite political authority. Given Weber's own preeminent authority as a social scientist in Germany at this time, this is not simply a question concerning the pedagogic ethics of those of his contemporaries—both left-wing and right-wing—who

[27] Seven months after delivering "Science as a Vocation," Weber presented a lecture entitled "Socialism" to officers of the Austro-Hungarian army in a political context characterized by fears of Socialist revolution in Central European states.

[28] See Peter Lassman and Irving Velody, eds., *Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation"* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) for a selection of the most important engagements with Weber's lecture by his contemporaries.

[29] Cited in Eduard Baumgarten, *Max Weber, Werk und Person* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964), p. 554.

espoused a given political standpoint from the academic lectern, but also one of the relationship between Weber's own scholarly writings on political issues and his political writings as a citizen. If science cannot ground politics (as Weber resolutely concludes), this raises the second topic even more sharply: What is the meaning and value of scientific activity in the modern world? Just what is it that one is committed to, and bound by, in dedicating oneself to scientific work? It is in and through his engagements—at once passionate and sober—with these topics that Weber offers his account of science as a vocation in a lecture that is, simultaneously, a free-speaking meditation on the conditions, value, and limits of scientific work and an exemplary instance of such work.

Weber's lecture is composed in three movements: the external conditions of the vocation of science in the context of the increasing rationalization and bureaucratization of the university; the nature of the inner vocation for science given the (scientific) disenchantment of the world; and the role and value of the vocation of science for life under these fateful conditions of rationalization, bureaucratization, and disenchantment.

Each movement can be read as "making explicit" a given aspect of what it is to engage in scientific work under the conditions of our modern world and, simultaneously, as dispelling certain idols precisely by making explicit the forms of self-deception about the reality of our conditions that are presupposed in constituting these idols as idols. In this respect, Weber's lecture is concerned with cultivating the self-knowledge required by his audience if they are to acknowledge what is entailed by the commitment to scientific work. That this "clarity" is his aim is no accident since, as we will see, it is in the provision of such clarity concerning our possible stances toward and activities within the world that Weber locates the ethical value of scientific work.

It is important to note in this context that the word *Wissenschaft* carries with it a far broader reference than does the contemporary Anglo-Saxon term "science."[30] *Wissen* derives from Old Germanic words for wisdom, as opposed to "science," which derives from the Latin for knowledge.[31] *Wissenschaft* describes any organized body

[30] This paragraph is indebted to conversations with Professor Babette Babich and her paper, "Nietzsche's Critique of Scientific Reason and Scientific Culture: On 'Science as a Problem' and 'Nature as Chaos'" in Gregory M. Moore and Thomas Brobjer, eds. *Neitzsche and Science*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. 133–53.

[31] The first noted usages date back to the ninth century. It is worth nothing that among the meanings of "wise" is "song."

of knowledge the pursuit of which is social in the sense that it can be learned. Thus one can speak of studying *Kunstwissenschaft* rather than "art history" or *theologische Wissenschaft* rather than "theological studies." The German sense is best conveyed perhaps in an English expression like "she has it down to a science." Weber's lecture is addressed to all those who have disciplined or who would dedicate themselves to a particular area of knowledge.

1. The External Conditions of Science as a Vocation

Weber's opening reflections on the external conditions of scientific work in Germany in 1917 have not typically received the attention that they deserve.[32] On the face of it, Weber is simply offering a brief comparison between the employment and working practices of German and American universities and their effects with respect to academic career prospects, together with the observation that German universities—and German life in general—are increasingly becoming "Americanized." It is tempting in this context to skim over this section in order to plunge that much more quickly into the excitingly "existential" reflections of the rest of the lecture, in which Weber's gift for dramatic oratory is given fuller expression. Certainly Weber is all too aware of the presence of this temptation in his audience. Following his reflections on the external conditions of scientific work, he offers this acknowledgment: "But I believe that you really wish to hear about something else, about an *inner* vocation for science" (S 7). Why, then, has Weber chosen to begin with what he describes himself as "a pedantic approach"?

To make clear the compelling reason that leads Weber to open with these reflections—and its direct relation to the idealistic temptation that he discerns in his audience—we need to recognize that his starting point is to acknowledge that a significant aspect of what it means to engage in scientific work (or to embark on a scientific career) is to work within a set of university institutions that are subject to the processes of rationalization and bureaucratization

[32] An important exception to this rule is Peter Lassman and Irving Velody's essay "Max Weber on Science, Disenchantment and the Search of Meaning" in Lassman and Velody, *Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation,"* pp. 159–204, which contains an excellent discussion of Weber's remarks on this topic. See also Wolfgang Schluchter, *Wertfreiheit und Verantwortungsethik: zum Verhältnis von Wissenschaft und Politik bei Max Weber* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971).

characteristic of European cultural life at this time. The delineation of this fact is the point of his comparison of German and American universities, and it is a fact that has significant consequences for the fate of the individual scholar in Germany.[33]

Here Weber is responding to the reality of the slow but accelerating collapse of the Humboldtian vision of the university. In 1810 Wilhelm von Humboldt laid the basis for a university that would be oriented to research and teaching, funded from public coffers and committed to advancing the frontiers of knowledge for its own sake. In Humboldt's vision the university was to be free from interference from governmental authority. He called for *Freiheit der Lehre und des Lernens*—freedom of teaching and learning; indeed, it was the role of the government to promote freedom of research and teaching. To this extent the university was for all practical purposes to be self-governing and self-regulating.[34]

In Weber's understanding, this vision had been severely eroded, to the point of becoming effectively no more than the grin of the Cheshire cat. Weber's sketch of the consequences of this transformation begins by noting that it entails that the role of the university professor and of the assistant[35] are being reconfigured in managerial terms in the context of the development of the "state capitalist" character of university institutes (most obviously in the medical and natural sciences). A professor's position is increasing similar to that of a manager, while an assistant's situation is becoming markedly like that of a factory worker. This development is, in Weber's view, likely to become generalized across intellectual disciplines: "I am convinced that this development will continue to spread to disciplines like my own where the artisan is still the owner of his own resources (which amount essentially to the library), just as the old craftsman in the past owned the tools of his trade. This development

[33] Weber's concern with the condition of the German university and academic politics was an abiding one; thus it has been estimated that he wrote about twenty-five journalistic statements on this topic between 1908 and 1911. For an excellent discussion of this feature of Weber's work, see Wilhelm Hennis, "The Pitiless 'Sobriety of Judgment': Max Weber between Carl Menger and Gustav von Schmoller—the Academic Politics of Value Freedom," *History of the Human Sciences* 4, no. 1 (1991): 27–59.

[34] For an excellent short account see Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophy in Germany, 1831–1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 21–32.

[35] Although the U.S. terms assistant professor, associate professor, and professor have their origin in the German hierarchy, *Assistent* was then (and today even more so) much less prestigious than the corresponding American term.

is in full swing"(S 4). The moral of Weber's remarks has been appropriately drawn by Lassman and Velody:

> In this seemingly matter-of-fact way, Weber is here charting the decline in the position of the *Bildungsbürgertum* [the intellectual bourgeoisie] which is being undermined by a profound institutional transformation. . . . The Humboldtian ideal of the university has been overtaken by events and the idea of there being an intrinsic connection between science and culture is fast becoming an historical myth. In effect, Weber was, as he characteristically claimed, relentlessly stripping away the illusion that the modern university could be, if indeed it ever had been, an institution fashioned after the model propounded by Fichte and Humboldt.[36]

Thus, as Weber remarks: "Both in essence and appearance, the old *constitution* of the university has become a fiction" (S 4). However, Weber continues: "What has remained and has even been radically intensified is a feature peculiar to a university *career*. This is the fact that for a lecturer, let alone an assistant, to succeed in rising to the position of a full professor or even the head of an institute is purely a matter of *luck*. Chance is not the only factor, but its influence is quite exceptional" (S 4).

The central place of chance in the university career structure is, as Weber notes, partly due to the nature of academic selection practices, which, like professional selection practices in general, tend to select the second or third rather than "favorite" candidate (an issue that Weber takes to be of some scientific interest). However, this does not by itself account for the exceptionally large role of chance in academic life. Rather, explaining this exceptional feature of academic careers involves grasping that, under the actual conditions obtaining in German universities, the traditional ideal of the mutually supporting relationship of scholarship and teaching expressed in the personality of the lecturer is extrinsically problematic. Now Weber reminds us in passing that this ideal is also intrinsically problematic, because the ability to do significant research and the ability to teach well do not necessarily coincide: "A man can be both an outstanding scholar and an execrable teacher. I may remind you of the teaching activities of such men as Helmholtz or Ranke (S 5–6).[37]

[36] Lassman and Velody, "Max Weber on Science," 179.

[37] Hermann Helmholtz (1821–94) was one of the outstanding German scientists of the nineteenth century, notable for his contributions in both physics and physiology. His achievements include the formulation of the principle of the conservation of

But, Weber argues, it is the extrinsically problematic character of the traditional ideal under modern circumstances that accounts for the exceptional role of chance in academic careers. The traditional ideal is extrinsically problematic because it has given rise to a practice of appointing lecturers as both teachers and researchers, which, given the dissolution of the Humboldtian legitimation of scientific knowledge in terms of its cultural value, gives rise to a tendency to evaluate the lecturer in terms of the number of students attracted by his courses. Just as the politician must in the modern world compete for votes, so the lecturer must make himself attractive to students. As Weber puts it:

> [T]he number of enrolled students is a statistically tangible proof of success, whereas the qualities of a scholar are imponderable and frequently (and very naturally) a matter of dispute, particularly in the case of bold innovators.
>
> For this reason almost everyone succumbs to the idea that large student numbers are a blessing and a value in their own right. If a lecturer is said to be a bad teacher, this amounts in most cases to an academic death warrant, even if he is the greatest scholar in the world. But the question of whether an academic is a good teacher or a bad one is answered with reference to the frequency with which students honor him with their presence (S 6).

Yet, as Weber points out, "[I]t is also true that the fact that students flock to a teacher is determined largely by purely extraneous factors such as his personality or even his tone of voice—to a degree that might scarcely be thought possible" (S 6).

Thus, Weber concludes that "academic life is an utter gamble"—and it is with this conclusion that Weber's reason for beginning with this review of the external conditions of academic life becomes clear:

> When young students come to me to seek advice about qualifying as a lecturer, the responsibility of giving it is scarcely to be borne. Of course, if the student is a Jew, you can only say: *lasciate ogni speranza.*[38] But others, too, must be asked to examine their conscience: Do you believe that you can bear to see one mediocrity after another being promoted over your head year after year, without your

energy. Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) was a leading German historian whose search for historical objectivity greatly influenced historiography throughout Europe. Both had chairs in Berlin.

38 "Abandon all hope." Dante places these words over the entrance to Hell, in the *Inferno*. The sign continues with "*voi ch'entrate*" ("ye who enter here").

> becoming embittered and warped? Needless to say, you always receive the same answer: of course, I live only for my "vocation"—but I, at least, have found only a handful of people who have survived this process without injury to their personality. (S 7)

Weber concludes: "So much for the external conditions of a scholarly vocation."

In other words, the idealistic temptation that Weber discerns in his audience, the desire to focus on the inner vocation for science rather than on its external conditions, is just that temptation which reveals itself and its effects in the all-too-easy answer "Naturally, I live only for my 'vocation.'" By starting his lecture in a "pedantic" spirit of matter-of-factness, Weber is seeking to sober up his audience, to cultivate a certain pathos of distance in them, by demonstrating the potentially tragic consequences of failing to acknowledge the real conditions of scientific work in the modern university. To attend only to the inner dimension of science as a vocation, on Weber's account, is to increase one's vulnerability to the damage that the role of chance in academic life can engender. It is so precisely because the failure to recognize that one is exposed to luck in this way makes one liable to construe instances of this fate not as immanent features of the modern academic career but as examples of intentional injustice on the part of some agent (say, the university). Consequently, if one's luck is bad, one is liable to be increasingly consumed by feelings of resentment toward the agent or agents that one holds responsible for one's victimhood, and this twisting of one's soul in bitterness is a form of damage that the acknowledgment of the real conditions of academic life could have helped one to avoid or, at the very least, mitigate. In making plain the character of an academic career in the modern university, Weber is enjoining his audience to acknowledge the conditions that will ineluctably govern their professional lives if they embark on such a career.

2. The Commitment to Science

Having sobered up his audience, Weber turns to the more obviously intoxicating issue of the contemporary meaning of science as a vocation; it is worth noting, however, that in doing so, Weber immediately proposes a highly demanding account of what commitment to this vocation entails. Continuing his concern with external constraints on science as vocation, Weber begins by stressing that, today, scientific activity is necessarily specialized in character and

hence requires a certain capacity for self-restriction on the part of the scholar. Suddenly shifting into an Old Testament tone of almost prophetic fervor, he proclaims:

> And anyone who lacks the ability to don blinkers for once and to convince himself that the destiny of his soul depends upon whether he is right to make precisely this conjecture and no other at this point in his manuscript should keep well away from science. He will never be able to submit to what we may call the "experience" of science. In the absence of this strange intoxication that outsiders greet with a pitying smile, without this passion, this conviction that "millennia had to pass before you were born, and millennia more must wait in silence" to see if your conjecture will be confirmed—without this you do *not* possess this vocation for science and should turn your hand to something else. For nothing has any value for a human being as a human being unless he *can* pursue it with *passion.* (S 8)

So Weber sets the bar high: it is the fate of one's soul that is at stake. And we can see why, for it is only individuals who are capable of undergoing this "experience" of science who will be able to draw on this experience, on such epiphanic moments of frenzy, in resisting the force of (and hence overcoming) the exposure to feelings of *ressentiment* that Weber has already located as an almost inevitable feature of academic careers in the modern university. In one's undertaking of the "experience" of science, Weber is suggesting, one finds the ethical resources to resist being consumed by the feelings of *ressentiment* that naturally arise from seeing mediocrity promoted over one's head year after year. Note, though, that at a mundane level, this necessary epiphany consists in caring passionately about footnotes, as it were, and in specializing one's work. The above paragraph is not in praise of the generalist but of the specialist, whose speciality is in a deep sense his or her *own* specialty.

However, while such passion is a necessary condition of having a vocation for science, it is not a sufficient condition. On the contrary, entitlement to the claim that one possesses a vocation for science depends on one's commitment to two further conditions. The first of these commitments is to the necessity of working diligently while acknowledging that work, even combined with passion, cannot guarantee the generation of significant ideas. As Weber puts it:

> And for its part, work cannot replace inspiration or force it to appear, any more than passion can. Both work and passion, and especially both *together,* can entice an idea. Ideas come in their own good time, not when we want them. . . . At any rate, ideas come when they are least expected, rather than while you are racking your brains at your desk. But by the same token, they would not have made their appearance if we had not spent many hours pondering at our desks or brooding passionately over the problems facing us.
>
> However that may be, the scholar must resign himself to the element of chance that is involved in every kind of scientific endeavor. It is expressed in the question: Will inspiration come or not? A man may be an outstanding worker[39] and yet never have had a valuable idea of his own. (S 9)

Given this immanent risk of scientific work, we can see once again why Weber stresses the importance of passion for science; such passion provides resources not only for coping with bad luck with respect to the extrinsic risks of the profession of science but also with bad luck in relation to its intrinsic risks. The second of the additional commitments required is specified by Weber in terms of *personality,* having an idea of one's *own.* By "personality"—being one's own self—he refers to the subordination of oneself to the values and norms of one's vocation: "[I]n the realm of science, the only person to have 'personality' is the one who is *wholly devoted to his subject.* And this is true not just of science" (S 10). This appeal to the idea of personality, an idea that plays a significant role in Weber's thought more generally,[40] plays two related roles in this context.

First, it makes clear to his audience Weber's opposition to the "life as art" movement in late Wilhelmian and then later in Weimar culture, a movement associated with figures such as Stefan George valorizing *personal experience* as pure individuality guided by the idea of making oneself a work of art. Weber pours scorn on the cult of the idol of personal experience both generally (allowing a possible exception only for figures such as Goethe, who came along "once in a thousand years," and even then suggesting that such figures pay a

[39] To drive home the point about the proletarianization of the intellectual world, Weber refers to the intellectual as a "worker" four times in the essay.

[40] In *Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems of Historical Economics* (New York: Free Press, 1975), Weber specifies the concept of personality as "a constant and intrinsic relation to certain ultimate 'values' and 'meanings' of life" (p. 192). For consideration of Weber's use of this concept, see Ralph Schroeder, "'Personality' and 'Inner Distance': The Conception of the Individual in Max Weber's Sociology," *History of the Human Sciences* 4, no. 1 (1991): 61–78.

significant price for such a project) and particularly in relation to scientific work:

> [I]n the realm of science, however, we may say categorically that if a man appears on the stage as the impresario of the subject to which he devotes himself and if he attempts to legitimate himself by appealing to his "personal experience," this is not enough to turn him into a personality. Nor is it the sign of a personality to go on to ask: How can I show that I am more than just a mere "expert"? How can I manage to prove that I can say something in form or substance, that no one has ever said? This phenomenon has increased massively nowadays and always seems petty. It always diminishes the man who asks such questions instead of allowing his inner dedication to his task and to it alone to raise him to the height and the dignity of the cause he purports to serve. (S 10–11)

This is the case, Weber argues, in both science and art. But while in both cases personality requires the subordination of the self to the needs of the subject, the distinct natures of artistic and scientific work entail that the content of such personality in these fields is quite distinct—and this brings us to Weber's second point, namely, that whereas the artist can aspire to produce a work that is never surpassed, this is not the case with the scientist, whose work is destined precisely to be surpassed. Returning once more to the language of fate, Weber writes:

> A work of art that truly achieves "fulfillment" will never be surpassed; it will never grow old. The individual can assess its significance for himself personally in different ways. But no one will ever be able to say that a work that achieves genuine "fulfillment" in an artistic sense has been "superseded" by another work that likewise achieves "fulfillment."
>
> Contrast that with the realm of science, where we all know that what we have achieved will be obsolete in ten, twenty, or fifty years. That is the fate, indeed, that is the very *meaning* of scientific work. It is subject to and dedicated to this meaning in quite a specific sense, in contrast to every other element of culture of which the same might be said in general. Every scientific "fulfillment" gives birth to new "questions" and *cries out* to be surpassed and rendered obsolete. Everyone who wishes to serve science has to resign himself to this. The products of science can undoubtedly remain important for a long time, as "objects of pleasure" because of their artistic qualities, or as a means of training others in scientific work. But we must repeat: to be superseded scientifically is not simply our fate but our goal. We cannot work without living in hope that others will advance beyond us. (S 11)

Science is not art and can never endure: to live for science means never to accomplish anything of lasting value.[41] Weber's vision of the scientific enterprise here thus relates it, on the one hand, to what Marx saw as characteristic of capitalism—that commodities were produced only to be exchanged and not for use—and, on the other, to Nietzsche's analysis of the possibility of truth—that nothing in the way one pursued truth could possibly lead something to count as finally and definitively true.

Weber must therefore seek other motives or qualities that make science possible. He argues that to be entitled to claim that one has a vocation for science requires passion, diligence combined with the acknowledgment of the role of luck in intellectual activity, and personality, where the content of scientific personality requires acknowledgment precisely that it is the fate of science to be subject to progress such that one's work becomes obsolete. These are demanding criteria, but, in addition, the last of these criteria poses a very particular worry in Weber's view. He formulates this concern as follows: "In principle, this progress is infinite. This brings us to the *problem of the meaning* of science. For it is far from self-evident that a thing that is subject to such a law can itself be meaningful and rational. What is the point of engaging in something that neither comes, nor can come, to an end in reality?" (S 11–2).[42]

This worry is pressing for Weber, and he devotes the remainder of the essay to consideration of possible responses. Weber, it should also be said, found this personally problematic. After delivering the "Science" lecture, he found himself in conversation with his young friend Karl Jaspers and the Berlin jurist Richard Thoma. In replying to Thoma, who held that the message of the lecture entailed that Weber knew neither what scholarship meant nor why he engaged in it, Jaspers reports that Weber, "wounded visibly," said: "Well, if you

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[41] Though it cannot be explored here, this is also the theme that underlies Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy,* a theme that Nietzsche makes evident in the 1886 "Attempt at a Self-critique" that he adds to the second edition.

[42] Though Weber could not have known it here, the existence of the possibility of the destruction of the human species consequent to nuclear warfare poses a new problem for his position, which assumes that there *will be* a future, even if the worth of each individual act is undone. On this, see George Kateb, "Thinking about Human Extinction: (I) Nietzsche and Heidegger," *Raritan* 2 (Fall 1986): 1–28, and "Thinking about Human Extinction: (II) Emerson and Whitman," *Raritan* 3 (Winter 1987): 1–22, as well as Reinhard Bendix, "An Exchange of Letters between the Author and a Graduate Student," in *Force, Fate, and Freedom: On Historical Sociology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

insist: to see what one can bear, but it is better not to talk of such things."[43] His response recalls, perhaps purposively, Nietzsche's apothegm about "strength of spirit" that appears in the epigraph to this Introduction.

3. The Disenchantment of the World

Weber's starting point for his reflection on the problem of the meaning and value of science begins by acknowledging that scientific progress is "the most important fraction" of the process of intellectual rationalization, which he refers to as "the disenchantment of the world." This process of disenchantment raises a question that Weber finds expressed in its purest form by Tolstoy, namely, whether death (and hence life) is a meaningful occurrence for modern people. Tolstoy's response is that it is not, precisely because the occurrence of death marks a moment not of final completion, in which one is satiated with life, but of depletion, in which one is tired of life. Be this as it may (and Weber will return to consideration of Tolstoy later), Weber's immediate concern is not with this general question but with the more specific issue of science as a vocation: "What is the *vocation of science* within the totality of human life and what is its value?"

At this stage, Weber briefly considers the ways in which the value of science has been grounded in the past. His survey takes us from science as a way to true being (Plato), as a way to true art (Leonardo), as a way to true nature (Francis Bacon), as a way to the true God (the Pietist Swammerdam), and as a way to true happiness (which he attributes with Nietzschean nastiness to "some overgrown children among the professoriat or in editorial offices"). However, he argues, all of these previous grounds for valuing science are illusions to which we can no longer cling—and so the pressing question returns: What is the meaning and value of science? Following Nietzsche's argument that there is no such thing as a science without presuppositions,[44] Weber acknowledges the central difficulty that this question

[43] *Hannah Arendt/Karl Jaspers Correspondence* 1926–1969. Edited by Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner. Translated by Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992). Jaspers to Arendt, pp. 660–1; see also 661–2.

[44] The best and most extensive study of Nietzsche's understanding of science is Babette E. Babich, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994). See also Robin Small, *Nietzsche in Context* (Aldershot, Eng.: Ashgate, 2001), for a study of Nietzsche's knowledge of and relation to nineteenth-century science, as well as Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology, and Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

poses: science presupposes that what is produced by scientific work is worth knowing, but it cannot itself ground this presupposition; it cannot tell us why scientific knowledge is worth knowing because it cannot address questions of value. Weber comments:

> The simplest reply was given by Tolstoy with his statement, "Science is meaningless because it has no answer to the only questions that matter to us: 'What should we do? How shall we live?'" The fact that science cannot give us this answer is absolutely indisputable. The question is only in what sense does it give "no" answer, and whether or not it might after all prove useful for somebody who is able to ask the right question. (S 17)

Before considering how, for Weber, there might be a valuable sense in which science gives us "no" answer, it is worth noting that the claim that science cannot address questions of value grounds Weber's argument that science cannot ground politics (as Marx had hoped) and, more particularly, that intellectual integrity demands that lecturers not expound their own political views in the lecture hall. To have a vocation for science thus involves this further commitment in just the sense that to espouse a political position from the lectern is a betrayal of the intellectual demands of one's subject; it is to make a claim that cannot be scientifically grounded and yet is presented under the auspices of one's authority as a scientist.

Is there, then, a sense in which science can give us "no" answer to the question of how one should live that grounds the meaning and value of *science?* If not, it would seem that to commit oneself to science as a vocation is simply irrational. However, Weber argues that there is just such a sense and that science does have an important ethical role to play within the totality of human life, namely, to provide *clarity* concerning "ultimate" problems:

> This brings us to the last contribution that science can make in the service of clarity, and at the same time we reach its limits. We can and should tell you that the *meaning* of this or that practical stance can be inferred consistently, and hence also honestly, from this or that ultimate fundamental ideological position. It may be deducible from one position, or from a number—but there are other quite specific philosophies from which it cannot be inferred. To put it metaphorically, if you choose this particular standpoint, you will be serving this particular god and will *give offense to every other god.* For you will necessarily arrive at such-and-such ultimate, internally meaningful *conclusions* if you remain true to yourselves. We may assert this at least in principle. The discipline of philosophy and the

> discussion of what are ultimately the philosophical bases of the individual disciplines all attempt to achieve this. If we understand the matter correctly (something that must be assumed here) we can compel a person, or at least help him, *to render an account of the ultimate meaning of his own actions.* (S 26)

In enforcing clarity, science enforces upon you the presuppositions that make possible the activity you have undertaken. Weber takes this very radically. Thus not only is a doctor *in the vocation of doctor* unquestioningly committed to health as a value, and a lawyer in the terms of his or her vocation to the constitutive value of the existence of law as that which permits him to do and be what he is, but this is also true in science. Thus "Kant's epistemology . . . proceeded from the assumption that 'scientific truth exists and it is *valid*' and then went on to inquire what intellectual assumptions are required for this to be (meaningfully) possible" (S 28–9). Note that for Weber the very concept of (scientific) truth is a constitutive assumption necessary for the practice of science and no more.

If it is to perform this role of clarification, science must operate against the background assumption that there is a plurality of incompatible orientations to life. While nowadays this Nietzschean claim might seem hardly controversial, at least in its milder versions, it is important to understand that Weber insists that it holds for science, including his own. Moreover, if we are concerned to seek an example of science playing this ethical role, we need look no further than the lecture "Science as a Vocation" itself—for here Weber has been concerned precisely with making explicit what is involved in an ultimate orientation to truth in one's professional life and clarifying the circumstances and commitments involved in acting on the basis of this ultimate orientation in a way that is designed precisely to create "a sense of duty, clarity, and a feeling of responsibility."

4. A Meaning for Life?

There is, however, a final issue concerning Weber's lecture that requires clarification, and here, in a sense, we return to Tolstoy's challenge concerning the meaning of life under conditions of disenchantment. This issue concerns Weber's invocation of the language of fate and his insistence on the virtue of intellectual integrity, that is, of being prepared to acknowledge the character of the modern world in which one is situated and the commitments that this imposes on us. Although Weber has invoked Nietzsche's thought

both explicitly (with respect to the critique of science as a way to happiness) and implicitly (with regard to the impossibility of science without presuppositions), it is in his confrontation with Tolstoy's challenge that Weber's commitment to Nietzsche's diagnosis of, and prescription for, our modern malaise is most prominent.[45]

The first point to note is that Weber's view that the turn to religion under modern conditions involves a "sacrifice of intellect" and his commitment to a "polytheism" of ultimate orientations to life simply expresses his acknowledgment of Nietzsche's account of the death of God. Against this background, Weber's stress on the importance of intellectual integrity should be seen as an endorsement of Nietzsche's claim that honesty expressed as intellectual probity is the preeminently necessary modern virtue[46]—and the pathos with which Weber invests this virtue, namely, that it is our very truthfulness that deprives us of the illusions (for example, illusions concerning the meaning and value of science) from which we might otherwise draw comfort, precisely echoes Nietzsche's own recognition that it is the commitment to truthfulness cultivated under the aegis of Christianity (or, more strictly, the ascetic ideal) that undermines Christianity. In this context Nietzsche's response was to argue that any post-Christian ethics must be structured around a commitment to *amor fati,* the love of fate. Our lives have ethical meaning, by this account, insofar as we acknowledge and affirm our fate, that is, the circumstances and commitments of our agency, as the condition of our agency and, more particularly, of the meaning and value of our agency. In other words, Tolstoy's challenge can

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[45] Weber's relationship to Nietzsche has been sketched well by Wilhelm Hennis' *Max Weber: Essays in Reconstruction* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1998) and examined extensively in Robert Eden, *Political Leadership and Nihilism: A Study of Weber and Nietzsche* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1983). It has been further explored in a number of recent articles; see David Owen, "'Autonomy' and 'Inner Distance': A Trace of Nietzsche in Weber," *History of the Human Sciences* 4, no. 1 (1991): 79–91, and "Of Overgrown Children and Last Men: Nietzsche's Critique and Max Weber's Cultural Science," *Nietzsche-Studien* 29 (2000): 252–66; Ralph Schroeder, "Nietzsche and Weber: Two Prophets of the Modern Age," in Scott Lash and Sam Whimster, eds., *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity* (London: Unwin, 1987); Tracy B. Strong, "What Have We to Do with Morals? Nietzsche and Weber on History and Ethics," *History of the Human Sciences* 5, no. 3 (1992): 9–18, and "Love, Passion, and Maturity: Nietzsche and Weber on Morality and Politics," in John McCormick, ed., *Democracy and Technology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

[46] See, for example, Nietzsche's *The Gay Science,* ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 335.

be met to the extent that we acknowledge and affirm the fateful character of our lives.

How, though, does this Nietzschean response to Tolstoy relate to Weber's reflection on science as a vocation? The relationship is this: in "Science as a Vocation" Weber is, carefully and precisely, specifying the fateful character of scientific activity and commitment to that activity. In other words, Weber is specifying the conditions of "love of scientific fate" in all its difficulty. From this Nietzschean perspective, Weber's concern with what it is to have a vocation for science is a concern with what it is to love one's fate as a scientist, that is, to embrace our condition of being thrown into the world as it is.

On "Politics as a Vocation"

If the "Science" lecture was delivered under conditions of war weariness, the "Politics" lecture was held, also in Munich, on January 28, 1919, in a context of high political drama. Like the "Science" lecture, it is a "philosophical" text in that it seeks to elaborate on the nature of politics and of human action in modern times, but it is also a lecture given under particular circumstances at a particular place. Most centrally, what had happened since the "Science" lecture was Germany's defeat. The war that came to be known as World War I had been originally thought a minor skirmish with a probable duration of less than a year. As it had dragged on into its fourth year and unprecedented casualties, opinion in Germany had polarized between those nationalists who wished to prosecute the fighting fully and various groups of a more or less thoroughly pacifist orientation who wished to bring it to an end. To general surprise, the end had come sooner rather than later, and Germany had surrendered on November 11, 1918, without any widespread sense that it had been in any way at fault. On November 23, 1918, the parliamentary Socialist intellectual Kurt Eisner had released a set of official documents that cast doubt on the purity of Germany's intentions in 1914.[47] Weber, whose sympathies were in support of German honor (and thus against any insistence on a confession of

[47] For a complete discussion of this and the release by the Spartacist League of a memorandum by Lichnowsky, see Allan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria, 1918–1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965).

German guilt for the origins of the war) and in defense of the German national interest, had raised the possibility of a mass mobilization of the German people in defense of the fatherland.[48] In addition, in a set of newspaper articles Weber had given and continued to give considerable time to the development and public expression of the institutions that he thought might best preserve the German nation.[49]

For both pacifists and nationalists, however, the defeat of Germany came as an unexpected shock. In Bavaria Eisner was elected prime minister in early November 1918. Many of those involved in his government were friends of Weber from many years back. With the development of Councils of Workers and Soldiers (modeled to some degree on Lenin's proposals and analyses in *State and Revolution*), the new government shuddered rapidly and somewhat chaotically to the left.

It is in the midst of these developments that Weber gave the "Politics" lecture. He had, as discussed above, given the lecture on *Wissenschaft* some fourteen months earlier. Weber had at first refused the request of Immanuel Birnbaum, rector of the University of Munich, to give a second lecture, but when, in the fall of 1918 Birnbaum indicated that he would ask Eisner instead, Weber relented. Weber continued to resist the invitation, however, suggesting as late as early January 1919 that his friend Friedrich Naumann—"a representative German politician"—replace him. Two other events intervened: Naumann fell sick and would have been unable to give the lecture, and on January 15 the Spartacists[50] Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who had played important roles in the Bavarian soviet and had initiated a left-wing uprising in early January in Berlin, were assassinated. Weber, despite his misgivings, agreed to give the lecture.[51]

[48] See the discussion in Sam Whimster, ed., *Max Weber and the Culture of Anarchy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), especially the articles by Carl Levy and Karl-Ludwig Ay, pp. 83–128. See also Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography.*

[49] See, for instance, "The President of the Reich" and "Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order," in PW. See his letter to Helene Weber, November 18, 1918, and the letter to Friederich Crusius, the same day. Letters are cited from the volumes published in the *Gesamtausgabe* (see Texts of Weber in German).

[50] The Spartacist League was the ancestor of the German Communist Party.

[51] He wrote to Else Jaffe on January 23, 1919, that "The lecture on the 28th will be poor, for I will have very much something else in my head than the 'vocation' of a 'politician.'"