

# NIHILISTIC TIMES

*THINKING WITH MAX WEBER*

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# I KNOWLEDGE

Positively affirming the value of science is the *precondition* of all teaching.

—MAX WEBER

Science is meaningless because it has no answer to the only questions that matter to us: “What should we do? How shall we live?”

—MAX WEBER, quoting Tolstoy

Weber’s ontological politics, populated with the furious struggles of gods and demons, and so incongruous in the thought of a founder of the scientific study of society and politics, issue from the frustration of a consciousness that knows that its deepest values are owed to religion but that its vocational commitments are to the enemy.

—SHELDON S. WOLIN

## NIHILISM IN THE ACADEMY

The previous chapter explored Weber’s effort to counter nihilistic effects in and on politics, especially through political action animated by responsible, selfless pursuit of a public cause. We turn now to Weber’s efforts, in “Science as a Vocation,” to resist nihilistic effects on knowledge and in the academy, a project that relies on arch depoliticization and secularization of scholarship, and a project that ultimately fails both because such

## KNOWLEDGE

purism is impossible and because even as it resists certain nihilistic effects, it intensifies others. Both the effort and the failure, however, are fecund for contemporary thinking about post-nihilist knowledge politics, which is how we shall approach Weber’s lecture.

“Science as a Vocation” is well known for drawing a dark line between facts and values and for reprimanding both those who mix them and those who openly advance values, especially but not only their embodiment in political positions or programs in academic settings. However, far from excising values from scholarly consideration, Weber argues for analyzing them as ethical and political constellations with entailments for action, power, and violence. So important is this matter that in the portion of the lecture concerning ethical pedagogy, Weber turns not to the question of how to teach facts (its own challenge given his hermeneutic commitments) but of how to handle values in the classroom. If what he calls “ultimate values” exceed mere personal beliefs contouring individual lives to shape political causes imbricated with that realm’s “diabolical powers,” then they must be withdrawn from the moral or theological castles in which they are often locked and submitted to rigorous analysis of their premises, “internal structure,” and entailments.<sup>1</sup>

Such an approach differs radically from contemporary bids for teachers to “balance” political views with opposing ones, or to let them “compete” with one another for attractiveness, or to crown some political value systems as moral or correct while denouncing others as evil or wrong. These approaches leave values unexamined, implicitly rendering them as beyond

the ken of the classroom, either because they are sacred and hence un-touchable, or because they are mere opinion and hence unimportant, or because they are subjective and hence unscientific. Each turns them into objects of deference or derision rather than of beady-eyed analysis.

Weber, by contrast, treats values as emerging from *Weltanschauungs* without rational origins or ultimate foundations, yet no less analyzable for that. Moreover, treating values in scholarly fashion is all important in a scientific age that both threatens value and confuses us about its status. The paradox of the “irrational” origin, content, and play of value, and a commitment to rationally analyzing it, is a vital dimension of what makes his perspective useful today. Weber implores scholars, especially but not only in their teaching capacity, to approach contemporary value concatenation “scientifically” even though the origins of values and the ultimate domain for their contestation lie in nonscientific domains—feeling or attachment for the former and politics for the latter. His wager is that academic commitment to cool and impartial deconstruction of values can be a scene of sober mediation between these two, that is, between the subjective and political realms, but only if subjectivity and politics are both barred from the academy. This paradox comprises the very scene of knowledge and the classroom that Weber aims to theorize, circumscribe, and protect.

Weber is adamant that philosophers, theologians, or social scientists cannot and should not solve value disputes. The scholar’s task, and the ethical requirement of a pedagogue, is to treat values as objects of analysis and critique—that is, to examine them through historical and comparative analysis or through consideration of their logics and entailments, but not

as matters of truth. We teachers can illuminate the stakes, implications, and possible trajectories of values in practice; we can help students clarify the meaning and entailments of the positions they hold. We cannot settle which values are right. This said, securing a dispassionate and thoughtful domain for analyzing value clashes may render their clashes—in an age of value proliferation and deracination, a secular and increasingly nihilistic age—both more substantive and less strident. Such scholarly and pedagogical work thus has potential for indirectly enriching the public sphere, and at the same time for burnishing the integrity and reputation of the academy. At a time when both domains are in peril and disrepute, this would be no minor accomplishment.

As we begin consideration of Weber’s account of the scholarly vocation, it is important to remember that *Wissenschaft*, routinely translated into English as “science,” refers to all systematic academic study, not only the natural or physical sciences.<sup>2</sup> At the core of the Humboldtian model of education, *Wissenschaft* in Weber’s time bore implications of knowledge pursuit that was internally unbiased and independent of external influence, especially by church and state. Knowledge is capable of being true, the assumption goes, only when this neutrality and autonomy prevail. This is the complex meaning-bundle at stake each time we encounter the term “science” in Weber’s lecture. I hasten to add, however, that while Weber drew on the (fading) Humboldtian commitment to intellectual freedom as unveiling the factual world, he rejected

the exalted moral and national purpose that Humboldt ascribed to scholarly endeavor and to universities.<sup>3</sup> Weber codifies the value of both as importantly divorced from such purpose and stipulates the value of *Wissenschaft* more narrowly.

RESISTING POLITICIZATION

As with the lecture on politics, Weber opens "Science as a Vocation" with a discussion of contemporary conditions for the vocation that he was invited to reflect upon. With a focus on contemporary German academic life, he paints these conditions in dismal hues. There is its feudal organization and reward structure that yield both low standards for teaching and the failure to reward excellent scholarship. There is the precariousness of much academic labor. There are the confines of steadily growing scholarly specialization and the inevitable eclipse of every achievement by scientific progress. Above all, there is science's own disenchantment of the world. With its promise that we can, in principle, understand the workings of everything, science bleeds spirit from its objects, depleting what it studies not only of mystery but of intrinsic value or meaning. In its way, it is as violent as politics, as desacralizing as capitalist commodification, as eviscerating of value as instrumental reason. In its way, *Wissenschaft* violates, desacralizes, or eviscerates not peoples, nations, vocations, and relations but meaning and value themselves. It rationalizes whatever it touches, toppling miracle, reverence, and faith and putting dissection, price, or function in their place. It divorces progress from its

millenarian promise of improvement, emancipation, or happiness and reduces it to accumulation of knowledge and technique. It leaves the world more suffused with power and depleted of meaning than it finds it.

Such is the condition Weber believes we face consequent to the dethronement of religious authority and mysteries of nature by science. As it topples religious and theological accounts of order and meaning, science cannot replace what it destroys. The inclination to do so, more than merely misguided, is itself a dangerous nihilistic effect: the voids opened in a radically desacralized world create a demand, Weber says, for prophets and demagogues everywhere, and for ideas that excite and incite. Performances in the realm of knowledge that belong in the church and political sphere become part of nihilism's destructive force in which, as Weber formulates the matter, "the ultimate and most sublime values have withdrawn from public life," and theology, with its inescapable "assumption that the world must have a meaning," is finished.<sup>4</sup> This nihilistic force, and the demands that emerge from it, are an important part of what Weber wrestles with in this lecture.

However, Weber's concern is not only with these world-historical forces, but with attitudes toward them and misapprehensions about them. In "Science as a Vocation" and his earlier essays on method from which much of the lecture's argument is built, Weber is at war. He is at war with Marx and Nietzsche for the soul of the social sciences, contesting what he regards as the norm-laden faux science of Marx and the anti-science of Nietzsche. He is at war with romantics who fetishize the irrational or make a new religion out of everyday life or "authenticity." He is at war with

academic colleagues who promote German nationalism from their scholarly podiums, with colleagues who are value positivists and colleagues who are syndicalists. (The nationalists make the university “into a theological seminary—except that it [lacks] the latter’s religious dignity.” The positivists make a category error, refusing the Kantian dictum to submit everything to critical scrutiny, eschewing the interpretive dimension of understanding action and values, and reifying the coordinates and norms of the present. The syndicalists both spurn objectivity and exploit the power of the academic podium in the manifestly inegalitarian classroom setting.<sup>5</sup>) Weber is at war with those who believe truth rests in balancing or achieving compromise between contesting views, a technique appropriate to politics, not science—when it infiltrates the latter, it relativizes facticity and trivializes ultimate worldviews, a relativization and trivialization expressive of nihilism.<sup>6</sup> He is at war with those who would submit diverse views to competition, a technique appropriate to markets, not science—when it infiltrates the latter, it indexes the invasion of the university by market values.<sup>7</sup> He is at war with those who pretend “the facts speak for themselves” when facts do not speak at all, when this likely means that both matters of interpretation and “inconvenient facts” are being strategically ignored, moves that also bring rhetorical sleights of hand appropriate to political debate into the classroom.<sup>8</sup> He is at war with those who believe they have achieved neutrality by structuring their historical or sociological accounts with *realpolitik*, with Darwinian adaptation, or with metanarratives of progress—each is an ungrounded theological remainder inappropriate to scholarly objectivity.<sup>9</sup> He is at war

with economists who believe their science establishes the normative supremacy of capitalism when it can never do more than describe its mechanisms and dynamics.<sup>10</sup> He is at war with philosophers and social theorists who believe they can assess, let alone certify, the validity of norms, rather than merely analyze their predicates, logics, and implications. And he is at war with those who believe in transcendental reason, who acknowledge neither the inescapability of hermeneutics nor differing modes of rationality within which there are always irrationalities.

Weber is at war, but his enemies are not timeless stalwarts. Rather, he understands most of what he is fighting as effects of political, epistemological, and existential conditions of his time. He takes his moral-political age to be one simultaneously drained of value, proliferating value, and cheapening value, one in which value judgments are frequently reduced to matters of taste, one that features false prophets in the absence of real ones, one that venerates personality in place of integrity and honesty, and one that promulgates freedom as license within unprecedented orders of domination. In an age he famously depicted as featuring “sensualists without heart” and “specialists without spirit,” neither feeling nor intellect are preserved from the rationalization that simultaneously renders us cogs in economic machineries and superficial individualists.<sup>11</sup> Truth has come apart from Meaning and Value to reside only in facts. Facts in turn are both infinite in number and always interpreted, a humbling as well as daunting reality that, when not accepted, produces reaction in the form of polemics, positivism, sectarianism, and millenarianism in the knowledge

domain. Progress no longer promises growing happiness, peace, or truth; it is limited to advancements of knowledge and techniques that paradoxically generate conditions for greater domination rather than greater freedom. As the organizational, technological, economic, and political machineries built from these advancements escape human control, they become world-blistering forces of power without right.

Boundary breakdown is also a key symptom of the age. Nothing stays in its place because, absent a moral lodestar and the organizing principles secured by tradition, place itself loses both its naturalized coordinates and its value. In the domain of knowledge, the incessant mixing of what Weber refers to repeatedly as “absolutely heterogeneous” practices—most notably analyses of facts and value judgments about them—degrades each, intensifying cynical disregard for facts, truth, accountability, responsibility, *and* values. Thus does nihilism ramify as it corrodes boundaries between preaching and teaching, entertainment and information, personality and politics. Depth, sobriety, historical consciousness, and care for souls and the world give way to superficiality, instrumentality, excitability, personal gratification, presentism.

Weber responds to this crisis and the spiraling miscegenation of elements it foments with his infamous stipulation of opposites and an epistemological and ontological hygiene aimed at isolating and insulating these opposites from each other. The familiar binaries he asserts are politics and knowledge, the classroom and the public square, fact and value, empirical and theoretical claims, positive descriptions and normative judgments.<sup>12</sup> Importantly, for Weber, not method alone but the world is at stake

in drawing and enforcing these separations. If the relative organicism of earlier epochs has given way to fragmentation and specialization in the age of capitalism, bureaucracy, and secularism, this means order once secured by hierarchy and authority has given way to life cleaved by value concatenation and dominated by “inanimate machineries.” With both organicism and authority receding, tightly enforced organization is all that remains to secure order. Notwithstanding Weber’s sensitivity to what he calls the “chaos of infinitely differentiated and contradictory complexes of ideas and feelings” in any epoch or ideational regime, and notwithstanding his admonition to scholars to avoid conflating concepts and typologies with reality, Weber’s way through nihilism in the intellectual sphere depends on fierce epistemological-ontological distinctions. More than establishing conceptual tidiness, these distinctions are sent into the field as police.<sup>13</sup>

Why? Why formulate these “absolutely heterogeneous” spheres of endeavor and practice—knowledge / politics, facts / values, truth / judgment—not as merely expressive of modal differences but as opposites that destroy each other when they touch or mix? Weber’s adamancy on this front aims at quarantining nihilistic effects in the academy, those ranging from the destruction of truth (reduced to empirical knowledge but at risk there too), to the final destruction of meaning (reduced to “ultimate values” but at risk there too), to the destruction of scholarly greatness (reduced to a cause for which the scholar is a vessel). Only by insulating the certainty of facticity from the undecidability of values can the nihilistic condition assaulting and degrading both be repelled. When students crave meaning and ultimate values in a world of moral chaos, only by

insulating teaching from charisma can the classroom “unlock the world by means of the intellect.”<sup>14</sup> And, paradoxically, only by imposing unbridgeable moats between church, politics, and the academy can the order they formerly secured by their entwinement be stabilized in the wake of their fragmentation.

Weber’s protocols, then, do not simply shed the fetters of a less scientific era but address nihilism’s world-destroying de-sublimations and boundary breakdowns with a program of hygiene. These protocols aim at challenging value warriors and politicians of every stripe who bend facticity to their cause to the point of breaking it. They challenge journalists and teachers who practice faux objectivity while being manifestly partisan as they frame, select, and arrange facts. They challenge the conceit that neutrality is obtained by balancing or synthesizing views—through competition, or through finding middle ground.<sup>15</sup> They seek to preserve truth by confining it to facts and preserve value by assigning it to politics where its undecidability and contested character is on permanent and vivid display. And they challenge teachers, and not only scholars, to lock away their personal passions and personalities while doing their work.

Since Weber is conventionally understood as codifying protocols of value-neutral social science for a secular age, it is worth examining more closely the specific crisis for knowledge that he aims to redress with his category purifications. What has vanished in recent decades, Weber writes in his 1917 essay, “The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality,” is “the widespread conviction among social science scholars that of the various possible points of view in the domain of practical-political preferences, ultimately

only one was the correct one.”<sup>16</sup> In its stead, he continues, “a patchwork of cultural values *and personalities*” to advance them have replaced the “relatively impersonal” because supra-personal character of the old ethical imperative.<sup>17</sup> In addition to value proliferation, Truth’s dethronement in morals and politics elevates the individual and personality as carriers of values. This is part of what generates the widespread demand for demagoguery everywhere—church, state, classroom.<sup>18</sup> For Weber, fusing value promulgation with personality is especially dangerous in the domain of knowledge: as facticity wobbles along with ethical monoculture, the political partisan and the preacher invade the classroom dressed in professorial garb. The same historical conditions necessitating pristine scholarly integrity—respect for facts and an approach to values only as analytic objects—undermine it by feeding the rise of personality. That cult of personality, Weber suggests, is one that students crave and unethical teachers gratify.<sup>19</sup> It is intensified in our time by the loop between a ubiquitous culture of celebrity that reaches into academic life itself, reliance on students to evaluate pedagogy, and the growing dependence of marketized universities on student satisfaction. The quiet purveyors of methodologically certified knowledge for which Weber argues cannot easily buck, or survive, these trends and practices.

The classroom, Weber insists, is for training, not molding students; developing intellectual capacities, not inculcating worldviews.<sup>20</sup> This means teaching the importance of “inconvenient facts” (including those that unsettle worldviews or narratives to which we hew), distinguishing facts from evaluations and judgments of them, and disciplining students to



“repress the impulse to exhibit [their own] personal tastes or sentiments” in their studies. They must be taught that intellectual greatness rests in training, discipline, industry, specialization, devotion, and restraint of ego investment—all the familiar Protestant virtues bundled into the scholarly vocation.<sup>21</sup> These virtues, Weber hoped, would not simply harness but choke the will to power that has no place in intellectual life, although, as Nietzsche and Freud understood, that life force must go somewhere, and we will see its emergence later on.<sup>22</sup> Weber also knows that these demands aggrandize precisely the ascetic forces—objectivism, neutrality, dispassion, denial of the subject of knowing—that Nietzsche grasped as turning us against our senses, bodies, historicity, faculties of interpretation, and will to truth. Weber’s project for the scholar, then, chases nihilism from one door while letting it in through another.

Weber tries but fails to twist away from Nietzschean conclusions. The pointlessness of dedication to accumulating knowledge, which risks going unrecognized and is certain to be superseded, is a leitmotif of his lecture. The frustration and ennui of the modern scholar is repeatedly acknowledged and never resolved. To the contrary Weber insists that knowledge confined to what can be empirically established and neutrally analyzed requires that “the human element” in the drive to know be objectivized rather than unleashed. He calls for knowledge practices that not only starve the knower of gratification and starve the world of meaning but turn the will to know (or the will to power in knowing) against its own source, lashing it with unparalleled ferocity due to its close containment. This turning of the self against the self, Nietzsche in-

sisted, would reach a crescendo in Western civilization where we would come to will nothingness even as we broke into decadence—two loud symptoms of nihilism in political culture today. What is refusal to stem climate change and affirmation of being governed by markets rather than humans other than the will to nothingness? What is the festive spurning of facts and truth by power without right other than decadence? What is open destruction of democratic norms and institutions in order to salvage power for an eroding demographic base other than pure power politics, itself an outgrowth of nihilism?

#### VALUES

As I have already suggested, notwithstanding Weber’s insistence that science dwells exclusively in facts, his fiercest and finest moments in “Science as a Vocation” pertain to how scholars and teachers ought to analyze values. Why? In the previous essay I argued that Weber identifies values with politics, and politics with partisanship, power, force, and, at the extreme, violence. This chain of identifications is shorthand for a historical process Weber charts that bears significantly on the problem of handling values academically in a nihilistic age. In one of his earlier methodological essays, Weber identifies values not with politics but culture.<sup>23</sup> To be cultural creatures, Weber says, is to be “endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it *significance*.”<sup>24</sup> The very concept of culture, he adds, is a “value concept . . . empirical reality becomes ‘culture’ to us because and insofar as we relate

it to value ideas.”<sup>25</sup> (We don’t merely eat, procreate, and learn, but enjoy cuisines, build institutions like families, and develop curriculums reflecting who “we” take ourselves to be.) How, then, do values shift from the cultural to the political plane in late modernity? Values become political in Weber’s terms when they are deracinated, detached from an authoritative worldview that is both grounded and shared. At this point, they become matters of struggle, undecidable except (provisionally) by rhetorical, legal, or physical force. As we have seen, this is also when they become vulnerable to nihilistic hyper-politicization. The politicization of culture, arising from value uprooted from foundations and detached from authority, is part of what makes liberalism itself crack: multiculturalism in the broadest sense only works when culture remains depoliticized, a depoliticization possible only when value is both anchored and common. What we call the age of identity politics did not change all this but is, rather, the measure of its loss.<sup>26</sup>

The chain of distinctly contemporary identifications Weber establishes between values, politics, partisanship, and force does three consequential things. First, it converts all values into practical positions available to cool analysis and situates their worldly enactment in a realm where the disjunction between motives and effects demands responsibility to that disjunction rather than to principles alone. No religious or other moral raiment can shield actors from this responsibility. Second, it makes the political domain a gladiatorial theater for contests of value or what Weber calls “warring gods.” Third, it renders that theater a potential, though not inevitable, space for a post-nihilist recuperation and pursuit of value,

even in the context of historical forces, both raging and quiet, that are destructive of value.

This chain of identifications also has implications for scholarship, curriculum, and pedagogy. It animates Weber’s argument that developing and teaching knowledge must not be infected or inflected with values. If values are *now* inherently political because inherently contingent and partisan, then the slightest normative impulse is poison in scholarly waters. Representing more than bias or interest, this impulse brings undecidability, yes, but also force and potentially charismatic power into a place wrecked by the presence of both. Crucially, though, these stern demands for objectivity in research and analysis, and for value neutrality in the classroom, are themselves the result of Weber’s post-foundational framing of values. No universal norms or transcendental moral commitments for him, no tissues of justifications to establish valid norms! Rather, values are fundamentally political *because* they are ungrounded today, because they cannot be secured by or as truth. Put the other way around, value deracination and contestability underlie the contemporary nature of politics itself, even as Weber never quite puts it this way. Warring values constitute the essence of political struggle for which power and violence are the dominant means. Far from seeking to solve the consequent irrationality of that domain, as we have seen, Weber dreams only of tethering it to responsibility, limiting its violence and keeping it away from laboratories of knowledge.

Values are political, politics is a field of power and violence, and scientific knowledge materializes only where all of this—power, passion,

partisanship, violence—is in abeyance. Weber famously inscribes this opposition in language itself. In the political sphere, he says:

the words you use are not the tools of academic analysis, but a way of winning others over to your political point of view. They are not plowshares to loosen the solid soil of contemplative thought, but swords . . . used against your opponents: weapons, in short. In a lecture room, it would be an outrage to make use of language in this way.<sup>27</sup>

The language of seduction versus the language of analysis, words as weapons versus words as plowshares, war and peace—the differences are polar, not matters of degree. “Whenever an academic introduces his own value judgment,” Weber thunders, “a complete understanding of the facts comes to an end.”<sup>28</sup> Impartiality, neutrality, adherence to facts and method, are absolute opposites to the investments, demeanor, and effect of “the prophet and the demagogue.” One traffics in cool reason, the other in hot passion; one seeks truth, the other power; one seeks to stir curiosity and reflection in its audience, the other to attract followers.<sup>29</sup> Weber’s fierceness here would seem to be an eruption of that will to power we knew would surface somewhere in the tightly disciplined scholar. It appears in Weber’s own ferocity about the methods for obtaining knowledge.

Yet again, Weber does not eject values from the knowledge field. This would leave their power intact, a power that must be devitalized to insulate knowledge from it completely. Instead, he shifts values from the subject to the analytic object of knowing, even as doing so strips them of

their visceral and lived qualities, their emergence from the ineffable subjective sphere and their passionate deployment in the political one. Transposing the register of values from the knower to the knowable, and from belief or conviction to objects of study, brings them into a scientific domain that can reveal their inner logics and external implications *and* underscore their lack of foundation. Their magical powers are neutralized if not neutered by toppling them as “gods” and instead analyzing them as norms with assumptions and entailments. Weber goes further: the “meaning” of values is reduced to their relation to other values. As Weber puts it, the obligation of the scholar or teacher is to show that “if you choose this particular standpoint, you will be serving this particular god and will *give offense to every other god.*” This is how “we can compel a person, or at least help him, to render an account of the ultimate meaning of his own actions. . . . And if a teacher succeeds in this respect I would be tempted to say that he is acting in the service of ‘ethical’ forces, that is to say, of the duty to foster clarity and a sense of responsibility.”<sup>30</sup>

The mere possibility of such value-neutrality or objectivity in depicting or analyzing anything is widely and rightly challenged today. But this is not our main concern with Weber’s wrestle to deploy objectivity to protect knowledge *and* value in a nihilistic age. Rather, what is striking is how values are transformed—even violated—by casting them as normative positions with analyzable precepts and logical entailments, by bracketing their psychic, religious, or affective dimensions, and also by lifting them from the very cultural and historical contexts that give them specific weight and meaning. Weber knows better. He is the master theorist

of values as historical, protean, and ineffable, and of our attachments to them resting in sources that may be personal or transpersonal, experiential or theological. He knows well that values themselves emanate from cultural and political traditions, but also from desires, ambitions, hopes, delusions, resentments, rancor, revenge—all that Nietzsche depicts as the price of erecting ideals on earth. This attempt to make science useful to ethical, moral, and political clarity, and hence responsibility, thus transforms as it formalizes the object it studies. More, it aims to rationalize value itself . . . disenchantment's final frontier.

Weber is aware that the demand that the scholar and especially the teacher approach the study of values as contingent standpoints with inevitable entailments, omissions, and exclusions both distorts and devitalizes the practice that he identifies with our deepest humanity, the practice of imbuing life with meaning and *deciding* what matters. Accelerating disenchantment, this demand converts worldviews into dry and disembodied normative positions drained of their captivating and motivating forces and their capacity to alter the meaning of history and the present. Weber requires that the academy be this drying shed and that the professoriat be Taylorized laborers within it, laborers who both stay in their own specialized fields and deny their own judgments or cares. Together, these strictures compose a more profound assault on values than even Nietzsche's demand for their genealogical revaluation—the latter leaves intact their seductive powers and weaponry while Weber's mandate aims to disarm them of both. And in direct contrast with Nietzsche's re-embedding of post-nihilist value in Eros and power, Weber treats

values as if they could be evaluated according to rational consideration of their abstract entailments, even as he knows this is not how values, and the domain of politics where they are struggled over, works.<sup>31</sup> Thus do Weber's knowledge protocols simultaneously abet the emptying of the world of value, constrain the reach of human knowing, and transmogrify objects he promises only to study. These protocols employ the objectifying force of science to diminish what they cast as the subjectifying force of value—not only disavow value in knowledge, but deny value the status of knowledge.

Treating values in this way requires Weber to eschew Nietzsche's critique of accounts from nowhere, his eulogy for "the dangerous old conceptual fiction" of a "pure will-less, timeless knowing subject," with its "eye turned in no particular direction," and its attempt at expunging "the active and interpreting forces."<sup>32</sup> More than merely rejecting Nietzsche's radical interpretivism and exposé of the will to power at work in all knowing, Weber *demand*s the very asceticism that Nietzsche diagnoses as the illness culminating in nihilism. If care for the world or agony about its predicaments may shape what we study, those investments along with all ambition for personal gratification must be abandoned *as* we study. Scholarship requires leaving one's beliefs and cares for the world at the threshold of research and analysis; eliminating personal expression from the work; adopting rational orderliness and method divested of one's person or personality; and of course accepting that one's endeavors may come to naught and one's "discoveries" will be eclipsed in time. In Wolin's words, "the exacting, even obsessive demands that Weber imposed on the

social scientist form a counterpart of the Calvinist's adherence to the letter of Scripture and rules of piety prescribed by Puritan divines."<sup>33</sup>

In short, Weber *affirms* the "castration of the intellect," the "no to life," but also the "protective instinct of a degenerating life" that Nietzsche identifies with the ascetic ideal, its "program of starving the body and the desires" as the will to power turns against the life instincts themselves.<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche writes:

An ascetic life is a self-contradiction. Here rules a *ressentiment* without equal, that of an insatiable power-will that wants to become master not over something in life but over life itself, over its most profound, powerful and basic conditions; here an attempt is made to employ force to block up the wells of force.<sup>35</sup>

Weber affirms this masochistic turn of the will to power against the self in intellectual life, and salts the wound by underscoring the fleeting quality of scientific achievement. The scholar as spiritless vessel of a meaningless cause requiring both self-negation and draining meaning from the world one analyzes—this is the ascetic practice Nietzsche predicted would culminate in "willed nothingness," a nihilistic spirit in the scholar aiming at stilling spirit in everything it touches.<sup>36</sup> Weber's own disenchantment thesis is too mild to capture what Nietzsche understands this practice to accomplish. Mystery and miracle, meaning and majesty are not simply subtracted from *the world* when it is subjected to the objective, ethically neutral scholar's scalpel. Rather, intellectual grandeur itself—in literature, art, and theory of every kind—is assaulted and reduced

by the demands Weber makes on the scholar, demands to repel nihilistic effects in the academy. Yet this *drive* to diminish and reduce life, including the life of the mind, according to Nietzsche, is itself the drive of nihilism born from asceticism.<sup>37</sup>

More than merely proscribing a regime of spiritual-intellectual starvation, Weber builds a torture chamber for the man with the vocation for knowledge. This creature is condemned to the frenzied accumulation of facts combined with destruction of value at the heart of Weber's own diagnosis of modernity's slide into darkness. As Wolin writes, "Like the Calvinist [of the *Protestant Ethic*], scientific man accumulates" even as "what he amasses has no more lasting value than other things of the world."<sup>38</sup> Thus does Weber repeat in a scholarly register both the morphology of capitalism once its spirit settles into what he calls "mechanical foundations" and the morphology of depression induced by nihilism: driven but aimless, agitated and obsessive without outlets, desire raging yet choked, repose unavailable. With eyes wide open about the modern machineries killing human freedom, value, and satisfaction, Weber builds his cage of knowledge and scholarship from their blueprint: means separated from ends, the scholar reduced to a means, the ends receding altogether, a wheel of value depreciation whose turns we never get off. The de-spiriting of knowledge and the knower and conversion of the intellectual into a worker at the conveyor belt of scientific progress aim at draining not only meaning but emotional gratification from the work. The vocation demands both a spirit of kenosis and reconciliation to being eclipsed in the face of the inevitable obsolescence of one's production of knowledge.<sup>39</sup> In his

demands for depersonalization, objectivity, hewing to method, and elimination of ultimate truth from scientific pursuit, Weber thus denies the scholar even the sublimated pleasures of creativity or imposing form on matter, and denies the pedagogue the hand in transformation that many associate with teaching.

Weber is fully alert to—and likely embodied with his own paralyzing depression—the tragic dimension of these demands on the academician, the machinery he feeds, the gratifications and redemption he denies. In many ways, the lecture on science is one long, depressive sigh about what scholarship is and requires, even apart from its miserable contemporary conditions. In this respect, it differs sharply from his depiction of the politician's life. While both vocations require that one “endure the fate of the age like a man” or else retreat “to the welcoming and merciful embrace of the old churches,” science offers none of the compensatory pleasures of enjoying “the naked exercise of the power [one] possesses,” giving one's own life meaning by serving a cause, or “holding in one's hands a strand of some important historical process.”<sup>40</sup> There is no brave and exhilarating Lutheran moment of resistance, no “here I stand, I can do no other.” And there is nothing grand to which the scientific activity is wedded, as the politician brings sobriety and restraint to passionate pursuit of a great cause. There is no world-changing purpose, hence no compensatory pleasures, to which the scholar weds the ascetic commitments of scientific method. The cause is science, full stop, a cause that is both unending and without ultimate meaning. Consequently, in contrast with the ethic of the politician, who must titrate principle, ambition, and responsibility, “the *only*

morality” of the scholar “is that of plain intellectual integrity,” and facing the ultimate meaninglessness of science requires simply “manly fortitude.”<sup>41</sup>

Weber's distinctions and knowledge protocols would also seem to proscribe social and political theory that discards objectivism and empiricism for imaginative or speculative practices of knowing and thinking. We rightly draw on such faculties to conceive political and social constellations and powers, Sheldon Wolin writes, to produce a “corrected fullness” in accounts of political life that is required because we cannot “see” all political things firsthand.<sup>42</sup> “The impossibility of direct observation compels the theorist to *epitomize a society* by abstracting certain phenomena and providing interconnections where none can be seen. Imagination is the theorist's means for understanding a world he can never ‘know’ in an intimate way.”<sup>43</sup> Such imaginative luminescence, with its dependence on unempirical architectonics and proximity to creative world-making in thought, is precisely what Weber aims to purge from social science, even as he admires it in literature, art, religion, and tradition. Imaginatively theorizing the world, despite Weber's exceptional talent for this work—exhibited in his accounts of rationalization, charisma, disenchantment, and more—without submission to method, is epistemologically unsound, unteachable, dangerous. We are limited to empirical studies, ideal types and typologies, and cool analytic dissections of culture and values. In his own version of purging the poets from the Republic, Weber further tightens the screw of asceticism and meaning-destruction.

In contrast with his crafting of *Beruf* for politics, then, which is positioned against the prevailing forces of his time, Weber draws the scholar's

vocation into tight accord with rationalization and disenchantment, with value-slaying and machineries of domination built from calculative rationality. Far from contesting these, scholarly endeavor amplifies them with its commitments to specialization, objectivity, method, and dispassion. Thus does Weber decisively sever the Enlightenment link of knowledge to emancipation and bid adieu as well to the Humboldtian ideal of universities as builders of culture. He also barred the academy from practices of diagnosing social ills or crises, work we identify with critical theory and critical knowledge production. Thus, scholars in a Weberian mode are permitted to describe but not criticize an “information age” producing unrivaled capacities for surveillance and manipulation of subjects; an epoch of capital subjecting everything to the vicissitudes of finance; and knowledge so compartmentalized by discipline and so withdrawn from the world that it has little relevance to the crises of planetary habitability, humanity, and democracy now upon us. Weber saw the dark ahead, but his path to containing nihilistic destructions of knowledge and truth took us directly into it.

#### KNOWLEDGE AND RELIGION

Release from the rationalism and intellectualism of science is  
the fundamental premise of life in communion with the divine.

—MAX WEBER

To this point, we have considered Weber’s formulation of knowledge and requirements for producing it in terms of the opposition he posits between

value-animated struggle in the political sphere and value-free knowledge accumulation in the scholarly one. This opposition is central to his polemic against politicized research and teaching. However, toward the end of the lecture, he moves from the problematic of political power to the problematic of the sacred, thereby transposing knowledge’s opposite from politics to faith. The secular pluralization of values, he argues, sets up “battles of the gods” that science, and professors, cannot and must not settle.<sup>44</sup>

In the Introduction, I suggested that, for Weber, one entailment of rationalization and the nihilism it generates is the coming apart of knowledge, politics, and religion in modernity. These three domains are split off from one another only after science dethrones religious epistemological authority. Only at this point can knowledge be identified with objective, provable accounts (no matter what we think of this conceit). Faith rejects this binding of knowledge to objectivity and empiricism, which is why Weber, without malice, terms modern religious belief an explicit “sacrifice” of the intellect. Politics becomes a domain for struggle among value systems rooted in convictions that lack ultimate foundations. Religion and politics are both concerned with values, of course, but religion also claims truth, which means it risks encroaching on the territory of knowledge in a specific way that politics does not. John Locke’s entire brief for tolerance of religious pluralism rests on the separation of these three spheres: knowledge is empirical and corrupted by power; faith depends on inner truth, conscience; and politics uses coercive power, which cannot produce faith or truth, only submission.<sup>45</sup>

For Weber, however, the existential threat of a religious attitude in the academy rests not only in substituting faith for reason or proof, but in a scholar's willingness to satisfy the great appetite for meaning among students in a disenchanted age. Weber knows that the absence of objective meaning is nearly impossible to bear, and identifies several strategies for refusing it. One is direct retreat into "the welcoming arms of the old church," where religious truth is absolute. He finds no fault with this but simply declares its inappropriateness in both the knowledge and political domains. Another is to adopt the bleakest iteration of nihilism, where nothing matters and life is pointless. Weber decries this move for its failure to appreciate that, in a secular age, each of us must *decide* what matters and what our lives mean. Still another possibility is making a religion of "everyday life" or "authentic experience," a tendency Weber sees as prevalent among the youth of his time and which he identifies with the "weakness . . . [of being] unable to look the fate of the age full in the face."<sup>46</sup> But the most dangerous infectious agent in the classroom is Tolstoy's question re-written: "*who if not science* will answer the question: what shall we do and how shall we organize our lives?"<sup>47</sup> This question bears all the desperation of the age, and in it Weber detects the longing for a prophet that many of his colleagues lack the fortitude and ego-discipline to resist. Students who want more than instruction in method, analysis, and facts, he fumes, are "looking for a *leader* and not a *teacher*."<sup>48</sup> A deflationary reaction to this longing, including explaining how it came to be, is all that we can provide. To Tolstoy's re-written question, then, Weber answers:

. . . only a prophet or a savior. And if there is none . . . you will certainly not force him to appear on earth by having thousands of professors appear in the guise of privileged or state employed petty prophets and try to claim its role for themselves in their lecture rooms. If you attempt it, the only thing you will achieve will be that knowledge of a certain crucial fact will never be brought home to the younger generation in its full significance. This fact is that the prophet for whom so many of them yearn simply does *not* exist.<sup>49</sup>

Few things are more existentially difficult than confronting the absent givenness of what to value or care for in this world. Hence the many strategies for avoiding this hard truth—religion, nihilism, or the search for authenticity or a secular prophet. The task of the professoriat, Weber says, is to expose these for what they are and confront students with the innate meaninglessness of the world. Instead of filling that vacuum, we must teach that "life . . . is the incompatibility of ultimate *possible* attitudes and hence the inability to resolve the conflicts between them. Hence the necessity of *deciding* between them."<sup>50</sup> Counterintuitively, only by affirming meaninglessness can corrosive nihilistic effects—spiritualization or politicization of knowledge—be averted.

Along with addressing desperation for meaning, there may be another reason for Weber's shift, in the final part of his lecture, from political demagoguery to false prophecy as a frame for criticizing value promulgation in the classroom. Even if politics is ruled out at the lectern, might ethical and moral teachings remain relevant? Against Kant and not only Nietzsche, Weber argues that ethics also lacks authoritative ground and cannot



be arrived at through reasoning. Indeed, Weber sometimes appears to regard proponents of ethical or moral systems as even more irresponsible—perhaps because they are less ostentatiously partisan—than teachers who espouse political positions at the academic podium. The only ethical purpose for which the teacher or scholar can be of use, Weber says, is helping a student achieve *clarity* about the “ultimate meaning of [their] own actions.”<sup>51</sup> Still, since value undecidability requires that each *decide* what is right and wrong, this service is no minor one. This “duty to foster clarity and a sense of responsibility” comprises both a pedagogical ethic and an action in “the service of [larger] ‘ethical’ forces” insofar as it furnishes students with the knowledge and understanding necessary to develop their own ethical standpoint. The decision itself is *not* scientific, but scientific analyses of different possible positions can enrich it. Here again, Weber struggles for a position in which values not founded in intellectualism may be developed and supported by it nonetheless.

As we take the measure of all that Weber prohibits in scholarship and teaching—diagnosis, critique, and advocacy on the political side, and shaping character and developing codes of conduct on the ethical one—it is important to remember what animates these prohibitions. Instead of deploying the academy to address the crises of meaning unleashing so many troubling forces in his time, he aims to protect academia from those forces. Although his position is recognizable as a “conservative” one, above all it is the academy he aims to conserve by protecting it from encroachments and deformation by capitalism, state interests, politicization from below, and religious impulses in any guise. But we must not mistake

his position for that of Wilhelm von Humboldt a century earlier or that of secular liberals today. The prize Weber seeks to secure is not the Humboldtian university as a fount of national moral culture, nor is it faculty privilege or rights in the form of unregulated academic freedom. Rather, he aims to protect the academy’s singular promise and purpose, its unqualified commitment to knowledge uncorrupted by power or interest of any kind, which paradoxically requires limiting the promise of what knowledge is or can offer. For neither faculty nor students does it provide meaning, moral truth, critique, or prescriptions for social, political, or existential problems. Yet in charting the world we inhabit, it is more than a pile of dusty facts. Without this charting, there is no hope of understanding, hence directing or re-containing powers otherwise dominating or threatening our existence. Moreover, knowledge production, including its challenges and limits, are at the heart of human intellectual development. Essential for individual self-crafting, this development is also indispensable for any possibility of crafting our lives together.

transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it." *Genealogy of Morals*, II.12, p. 77. Machiavelli's attunement to the transmogrification of political acts into chains of unintended effects and even inversions of actor intentions may be seen as structuring the entirety of *The Prince*.

50. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 92.
51. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 92.
52. Following his denunciation of the "sterile excitement, aimless and unfocused romanticism" of revolutionaries, Weber writes: "Mere passion . . . cannot make a politician of anyone, unless service to a 'cause' also means that a sense of responsibility toward that cause is made the decisive guiding light of action. And for that (and this is the crucial psychological characteristic of the politician), a sense of proportion is required, the ability to allow realities to impinge on you while maintaining an inner calm and composure. What is needed, in short, is a distance from people and things. The 'absence of distance' . . . is one of the deadly sins of every politician. . . . For the heart of the problem is how to forge a unity between hot passion and a cool sense of proportion in one and the same person. . . . This can only be achieved by acquiring the habit of distance in every sense of the word." Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 77.
53. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 94.
54. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 77.
55. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 92.
56. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 92.
57. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, III.12, p. 119.
58. See Satkunanandan, "Max Weber and the Ethos of Politics," 174.
59. "An inanimate machine is mind objectified. Only this provides it with the power to force men into its service and to dominate their everyday working life as completely as is actually the case in the factory. Objectified intelligence is also that animated machine, the bureaucratic organization, with its specialization of trained skills, its division of jurisdiction, its rules and its hierarchical relations of authority. Together with the inanimate machine, it is busy fabricating the shell of bondage which men will perhaps be forced to inhabit some day, as powerless as the fellahs of ancient Egypt." Max Weber, "Bureau-

cracy and the Naiveté of the Literati," in Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 2, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1402.

60. Eden, *Political Leadership*, 186.
61. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 93-94.
62. Yet some who identify charismatic leadership with authoritarianism would tolerate technocracy in place of democracy, which today means being ruled not merely by economists, behaviorists, and bureaucrats, but algorithms.
63. *This kindling of desire can happen in quotidian settings and institutions, and it is significant that the Right has organized for decades in schools, churches, civic associations, leisure pursuits, and, of course, media. The Left, notwithstanding Gramsci, Stuart Hall, and the program of the early Frankfurt School, has largely neglected the cultural production and dissemination of its values in this way.*
64. This was the "polar night of icy darkness and harshness" that Weber forecasted for the near future, and which would soon materialize as fascism, national socialism, and war. Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 93.
65. Weber explicitly affirmed the identification of the German university tradition with an "aristocratic spirit," not a democratic one. See Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 6.

## TWO | KNOWLEDGE

1. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. D. Owen and T. Strong, trans. R. Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 20.
2. For this reason, in a recent English edition of Weber's lectures, translator Damion Searls renders "Science as a Vocation" as "The Scholar's Work." See Max Weber, *Charisma and Disenchantment: The Vocation Lectures*, ed. Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, trans. Damion Searls (New York: New York Review of Books Press, 2020).
3. Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, "Editor's Introduction," in Weber, *Charisma and Disenchantment*, x-xi.

4. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 28, 30.
5. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 20. Weber's lingering democratic principles shine through here: one should only speak politically, he implies, where others are equally entitled and able to speak back.
6. From the essay explaining the outlook and intentions of the journal of social science he co-founded, Weber writes: "The *Archive* will struggle relentlessly against the severe self-deception which asserts that through the synthesis of several party points of view, or by following a line between them, practical norms of *scientific validity* can be arrived at. It is necessary to do this because, since this piece of self-deception tries to mask its own standards of value in relativistic terms, it is more dangerous to the freedom of research than the former naïve faith of parties in the scientific 'demonstrability' of their dogmas. The capacity to distinguish between empirical knowledge and value-judgments, and the fulfillment of the scientific duty to see the factual truth as well as the practical duty to stand up for our own ideals constitute the program to which we wish to adhere with ever increasing firmness." Max Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. and trans. E. Shils and H. Finch (New York: Free Press, 1949; New York: Routledge, 2011), 58.
7. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 10, 13.
8. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 20.
9. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 25-33.
10. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 37. "It can never be," Weber thunders, "the task of an empirical science to provide binding norms and ideals from which directives for immediate practical activity can be derived." Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science," 52.
11. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Revised 1920 Edition*, trans. S. Kalberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
12. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 11, 12, 19, 20.
13. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science," 96. Even different value systems cannot copulate or miscegenate but must be appreciated as bound in an "irreconcilable death struggle, like that between God and the Devil" (Weber,

- "Science as a Vocation," 17). Values cannot be submitted to compromise, blending, or modification by one another, Weber implies, without being corrupted or destroyed.
14. Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 352. Weber writes, "[Religion] claims to unlock the meaning of the world not by means of the intellect but by virtue of a charisma of illumination."
  15. That said, after the linguistic turn and the rise of behaviorism, maintaining Weber's corridors of separation requires jettisoning Weber's own frank acknowledgment of the ineradicable hermeneutic dimensions of facticity, of the infinite complexity of all human things, and even of the values necessarily driving every inquiry in the social sciences. The positivist social science ironically built in his name after these turns eschews Weber's own insistence on a great chasm between the natural and social sciences and especially the inappropriateness of imputing "laws" of behavior to the latter, and attempts to close it with a killing mathematization, and positivist methods so resolutely unhistorical, and so indifferent to the complexities of human language, culture, psyche, and power, that it will draw the scholarship designed to fathom human things ever farther away from prospects for redeeming the species, compounding the nihilism Weber struggled against with the mountains of meaningless data and analysis it generates. This is the nightmare, fully upon us now, that Weber sought to forestall with his category purification and border barriers, with a singular place for everything and everything in its place, with his arch oppositions between modes of understanding that he also sometimes acknowledged were separated by a "hairline."
  16. Max Weber, "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics," in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. and trans. E. Shils and H. Finch (New York: Free Press, 1949; New York: Routledge, 2011), 3-4.
  17. Weber, "Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality,'" 4.
  18. This is part of what underwrites Weber's own effort to craft charisma in political leadership as "responsible to its element," discussed in Chapter 1.

19. Weber, "Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality,'" 9.
20. Weber, "Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality,'" 3.
21. Weber, "Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality,'" 5.
22. Again, Weber has given us a condition of crisis, born of historically inevitable conditions, which he proposes to address through stipulations and oppositions that he posits as factual (hence true), rather than moral or political (hence contestable), even as he acknowledges their historically specific standing and often places terms like "objectivity," "neutrality," and "living without illusions" in quotation marks, underscoring their permanently aspirational status.
23. He stipulates culture as a "finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process . . . on which *human beings* confer meaning and significance." Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science," 81.
24. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science," 81.
25. Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science," 76.
26. This is why Weber refers to the twentieth century as a (shallow) return to ancient polytheism. Discussing the impossibility of deciding objectively what to value, of expecting value to line up with the good or the beautiful, or of ranking the value of different cultures, he writes, "conflict rages between different gods and it will go on for *all* time. It is as it was in antiquity before the world had been divested of the magic of its gods and demons, only in a different sense. Just as the Greek would bring a sacrifice at one time to Aphrodite and at another to Apollo, and *above all, to the gods of his own city*, people do likewise today. Only now, the gods have been deprived of the magical and mythical, but inwardly true qualities that gave them such vivid immediacy" (Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 23, italics added). Their lack of an inward truth is the sign that what was cultural has now become politicized.
27. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 20.
28. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 21.
29. More than merely irresponsible or exploitative of power differences (part of Weber's concern in "Science as a Vocation"), at stake is knowing itself.
30. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 26-27.

31. Weber calls this a service to students, in which a student is helped to "render an account of the ultimate meaning of his own actions," and a service to ethics insofar as it fosters "clarity and a sense of responsibility." Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 26-27.
32. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. and trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 119.
33. Sheldon S. Wolin, "Max Weber: Legitimation, Method and the Politics of Theory," *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (August 1981): 401-424, 413.
34. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 117-121.
35. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 117-118.
36. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 163.
37. It would not surprise Nietzsche that historicism, formal analysis, and even deconstruction have been wielded to neuter that grandeur in the humanities, even if this is not the avowed ambition of these approaches to humanistic knowing.
38. Wolin, "Max Weber," 413.
39. One is not even a vessel in the Platonic sense because there is no communion with the Forms, no sensuous connection with ultimate truths.
40. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. D. Owen and T. Strong, trans. R. Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 40, 76.
41. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 31. Or as another translator, Damion Searls, renders this sentence, "in the lecture hall, simple intellectual integrity is the *only* virtue that counts." Weber, *Charisma and Disenchantment*, 41.
42. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, New Princeton Classics edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 19.
43. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 19.
44. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 23.
45. John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, in Locke, *Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (London: Penguin, 1993).
46. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 24.
47. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 27. Italics added.

48. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 24.
49. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 28.
50. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 27.
51. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 26.

## AFTERWORD

1. The relentlessly pejorative characterizations of populism emerging from mainstream politicians, pundits, and scholars are an index of neo-Weberian hegemony in this regard.
2. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).
3. Libby Nelson, "The Strangest Line from Donald Trump's Victory Speech: 'I Love the Poorly Educated,'" *Vox*, February 24, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/2/24/11107788/donald-trump-poorly-educated>.
4. It is crucial to avoid what Weber identified as the error of conflating intellectual concepts with what he termed the "density and chaos of reality."
5. Combined with growing reliance on Google for "research" of every kind, and the spurning of intellectual for technical knowledge, it is unsurprising that student expectations for learning in classrooms are at historic lows and that the question "is college worth it?" is routinely answered exclusively with data about the "college premium," that is, expected increased lifetime earnings.
6. Sarah Kaplan and Emily Guskin, "Most American Teens Are Frightened by Climate Change, Poll Finds, and About 1 in 4 Are Taking Action," *Washington Post*, September 16, 2019.
7. Responsible scholarship in the social sciences today surely means inquiring into how we came to our current state of emergency and being able to envision intelligent, viable, realizable alternatives. Without this, we especially frustrate students who look to the social sciences with the reasonable expectation that its disciplines will help them understand dire contemporary problems. The most serious and passionate of these students are often driven to the humanities, where their concerns and questions may be affirmed, yet detached from empirical study and analyses of history, social systems, and power.

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