

Activity and Renunciation

Max Weber on Science and Politics as Vocations

Allem Leben, allem Tun, aller Kunst muß das Handwerk vorausgehen, welches nur in der Beschränkung erworben wird. Eines recht wissen und ausüben gibt höhere Bildung als Halbeit im Hundertfältigen.

—Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*
(*Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*)

Wie an dem Tag, der dich der Welt verliehen,
Die Sonne stand zum Grûße der Planeten,
Bist alsobald und fort und fort gediehen
Nach dem Gesetz, wonach du angetreten.
So mußt Du sein, dir kannst du nicht entfliehen,
So sagten schon Sibyllen, so Propheten;
Und keine Zeit und keine Macht zerstückelt
Geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt.

—Goethe, "Urworte—Orphisch"
(*"Primal Words—Orphic"*)

The Character of Weber's Two Lectures "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation"

The two speeches "Science as a Vocation" ("Wissenschaft als Beruf") and "Politics as a Vocation" ("Politik als Beruf") are key

texts in understanding the position Weber took on central questions of modern culture. Some scholars consider them to be foundational efforts at a rational declaration of faith that even today remain pathbreaking. In fact, Weber responds more directly here than elsewhere in a fundamental way to the intellectual and political situation of his time and to its questions of meaning. This directness is the intrinsic connection between the two speeches. There was, however, an extrinsic one as well. Both were given in a similar framework and addressed a similar audience. This similarity is the reason why they should be read together.¹ Contrary to the editions of these addresses prepared by Marianne Weber and Johannes Winckelmann, "Science as a Vocation" should not be incorporated into Weber's writings on the methodology of science (*Wissenschaftslehre*), nor should "Politics as a Vocation" be included in his writings on politics.

Both addresses differ in character from Weber's scholarly treatises or his academic lectures, and from his political articles or election speeches. They pursue a different goal. They are "philosophical" texts, intended to lead the listeners (and later, the readers) to recognize facts and to encourage self-reflection, to win them over for responsible efforts on behalf of a realistic cause. In Weber's view, the future both of the German nation and of modern Western culture depended on the readiness of individuals to engage in such labors of self-renunciation as part of the dialectic of dedication and detachment. These two futures were interrelated: apprehension about the state of the nation was the starting point for apprehension about the state of modern culture.²

Max Weber was, as Karl Jaspers put it, a "national German."³ Nevertheless, Weber fought against those representatives of the German spirit who contrasted it as something "of its own, self-grown and superior" to the progressive, democratic individualism of Western Europe and America.⁴ As a national German, he was cosmopolitan in outlook. Nonetheless, he waged battle against those representatives of a moralistic, international pacifism who denied the necessity of a German power state (*nationaler Machtstaat*) and the "responsibility in the face of history" it involves.⁵ Even at the end of the First World War, as imperial Germany collapsed—due to the politics of emotion and vanity practiced by its feudal-conservative and bourgeois forces⁶—he hoped, in a phrase of an expression of Heinrich von Treitschke's, for Germany's third age of youth.⁷ If one was going to take advantage of this opportunity, political action had to take up again a line of de-

velopment that had begun with the events of 1806–7 and 1848–49. This action presupposed that politically, the bourgeoisie finally stood on its own two feet and combined its powers with those of the labor movement on behalf of a politics pursuing realistic causes.⁸ It further presupposed that academic youth actively participated in this historical alliance. To do this, youth would need to cast off its illusions that one can replace rational, scientifically determined knowledge with "direct experience" (*Erlebnis*) and that a politics of conviction that calmly ignores the realities not only of Germany but also of life in general is more authentic than a rational, power-oriented politics of responsibility. Both speeches were addressed to the German academic and democratic youth,⁹ they were and are speeches about political and human self-determination under the conditions of modern Western culture.

To make the audience (and later, the reader) aware of intellectual and political conditions, of "the state of the world in general,"¹⁰ it was thus not sufficient to diagnose the fate that only Germany faced.¹¹ A world-historical perspective was demanded. Weber had obtained it by means of a cultural science that employed a comparative and developmental orientation. It encompassed the value-related but "nonevaluative" (*werturteilsfrei*) investigation of the distinct nature of each of the world's major civilizations (*Kulturkreise*). Only against this backdrop were the distinct character of modern Western civilization and its accompanying problems of life, as well as the problems of Germany's life, put in proper perspective. Therefore, the lectures represented a summation of Weber's most important scientific findings and of his most important political convictions.

What led to these two addresses? Even though they go together, they do not form a single entity. Not only do they treat different topics, they also were conceived at different times. The addresses were given over a year apart: "Science as a Vocation" was delivered on November 7, 1917, and "Politics as a Vocation" on January 28, 1919.¹² In the time between them, imperial Germany had suffered its final military defeat, and the November Revolution had occurred. Moreover, a host of developments in Weber's life and work took place between these two dates: his return to those manuscripts abandoned at the beginning of the war, on the economy and other societal orders and forces;¹³ his revision and expansion of the comparative studies of the economic ethics of the world religions, the publication of which had meanwhile progressed up to ancient

Judaism, his continued interventions into foreign, and increasingly, domestic policy, and finally, his participation in the election campaign for the national assembly¹⁴ and in the choice of candidates for it, in which he failed to get himself nominated. Let us therefore take a closer look at the genesis of the two speeches. The broader context of the addresses primarily encompasses the development of Weber's work from the time he left military service on September 30, 1915.¹⁵ The narrower context involves above all his ties to the Bavarian Free Students Association (Bayerischen Landesverband der freien Studentenschaft) in Munich, which planned and carried out the lecture series "Intellectual Labor as a Vocation."¹⁶

The Broader Context of the Lectures:

Weber's Emergence as a Political Orator and His Return to University Teaching

Before the outbreak of the First World War, Weber worked very intensively on his articles for the *Outline (Grundriß der Sozialökonomik)*.¹⁷ Even though he participated not only in the scholarly but also in the organizational side of periodicals such as the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, and of organizations such as the Association for Social Policy and the German Sociological Association, after his breakdowns in 1898–99, his real field of activity was his writing desk. Even after regaining his admittedly precarious ability to work, Weber continued to try to keep his distance from public speaking and teaching activities.¹⁸ He had developed strong psychological inhibitions regarding public obligations of this kind.¹⁹

With the onset of the First World War he left his desk, and with it, a series of well-advanced, but as yet incomplete, manuscripts. During the following year, he performed the time-consuming and monotonous activities of a military member of the Heidelberg Auxiliary Hospital Commission (Reservelazarettkommission Heidelberg).²⁰ After departing from this "service for the fatherland" he began to publish his essays on the economic ethics of world religions, the revision and expansion of which occupied him from the winter of 1915–16 onward. At the same time, he intervened in the foreign-policy debate, especially on the war goals, with his first political articles.²¹ After leaving the military hospital administration, he initially hoped to be active politically. This

hope was one of his reasons for going to Berlin in the middle of November 1915. However, although he kept his chances alive by staying there (with some interruptions) until the middle of 1916, little came of it. He participated in organizations of a more "private" nature, such as Friedrich Naumann's working committee on Central Europe and a committee of the Association for Social Policy; but aside from sporadic and informal contacts with high-level government officials, he never had the chance to influence the political decision-making process in a way satisfactory to him.²² As a result, Weber made use of his time to work in the library on "Chinese and Indian matters."²³ One result of this intensive scholarly activity was soon forthcoming. In 1916–17, he published the study on Hinduism in three parts in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* as the continuation of his study of Confucianism and on the basis of the abandoned manuscripts from 1914.²⁴

After reinvestigating the "Chinese and Indian matters," he immersed himself for a second time in "matters Jewish" in the autumn of 1916. He dealt with the Old Testament, primarily analyzing "the Prophets, Psalms, and the Book of Job."²⁵ In particular, the pre-exilic prophets of doom—independent of both political authorities and the people, and oriented toward foreign affairs—made a great impression on him now. Were there not certain similarities between the international situation of ancient Israel and that of imperial Germany? And in view of this situation, did Weber not feel himself increasingly pushed into the role of the pre-exilic prophets of doom? In the impressive series on ancient Judaism, the first sequel of which appeared in 1917, he described these prophets, the first political demagogues in world history, in a historical treatment with contemporary relevance.²⁶ Thus, he appeared to move between the present and the most distant pasts. But those Chinese, Indian, and Jewish "matters" were not just the past; they were, in a manner of speaking, also alternative to the present.²⁷

The year 1916 not only brought the revision and expansion of important scholarly texts and the first results of policy-oriented political journalism, it also witnessed the conquest of the public platform. Admittedly, Weber still avoided the lecture hall, for which, as he later once wrote, he was not born.²⁸ In his first political address since his illness, the Nuremberg speech of August 1, 1916, to the German National Committee for an Honorable Peace (Deutscher National-Ausschuß für einen ehrenvollen Frieden), he

still moderated himself, "following official regulations."²⁹ But he took off his gloves in the great speech "Germany's Situation in World Politics" ("Deutschlands weltpolitische Lage") on October 27, 1916, in Munich.³⁰ Whereas in Nuremberg he had been restrained in his treatment of the advocates of "peace through victory," he now stopped being "diplomatic," especially in regard to the pan-Germans.

"The lion had gotten a taste of blood,"³¹ and now he slipped into that role of political demagogue molded by the pre-exilic prophets of doom. Weber mercilessly took to task the rightists' politics of prestige; he indicated that the causes of the war were primarily political and not economic, the most important being the threat of Russia to a powerful German nation-state. For this reason alone, Germany's entry into war had been justified. However, Germany's successful self-assertion and the maintenance of its honor and military security required political reorganization, especially of Central Europe, but not annexation.³² Germany's national power had to remain tied to the national cultural community. Only on this basis could there be a peace of mutual understanding that included Russia. The latter, however, would have to restrain its expansionist urges, which were intimately connected to czarism as a system. Later, after the February and October Revolutions, Weber repeatedly emphasized that Germany's achievement in this war had been the definitive discrediting of the czarist system. Its elimination removed an important hindrance to rational international relations in Europe. Nevertheless, a peace agreement was based on the willingness of the opponents to recognize Germany as a powerful nation-state with its own cultural tasks. Germany was not a small state (*Kleinstaat*), but a big state (*Großstaat*), not just a *Kulturstaat* but also a *Machtstaat*, and thus subject to the "vicissitudes of power." The Germans must accept this without conceit as their "responsibility in the face of history." Who fails to recognize this, from inside just as much as from outside Germany, is a "political idiot." Furthermore,

Posterity will not hold the Swiss, Danes, Dutch, or Norwegians responsible for shaping culture on earth. They would not be blamed if there was on the Western half of the planet nothing but Anglo-Saxon convention and Russian bureaucracy. That is only fair. The Swiss or the Dutch or the Danes could not have prevented that. But we could have. A nation of 70 million between such world powers had the *duty* to be a *Machtstaat*.³³

Weber thus anticipated, still in the period of German military successes, that the war would result in a reorganization of Europe.

On the one hand, there would be those large and powerful nation-states that were capable of an alliance: England, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Germany; on the other hand, there would be a multiplicity of small states. Even if some of these states were closely economically connected to a greater or lesser extent to large and powerful states, all would remain politically sovereign entities. Nevertheless, continuous German national self-assertiveness in the international arena had to be accompanied, as in the case of Russia, by domestic reforms. The longer the war lasted, the more intensively Weber analyzed the necessary reorganization of Germany in a reconstructed Europe. And the more he did this, the tougher his polemics became, first against the Right, and then against the Left as well. In this context he revived some of his prewar reflections, further developing them in terms of the constantly changing political constellations.

He still considered the strictly parliamentary monarchy the best form of government.³⁴ It was clear to him, however, that this form of government, given the well-entrenched hegemonic position of Prussia, could not be fully realized in the foreseeable future. His various recommendations for constitutional reform after 1917, in part based on a comparative theory of the modern state, can be understood as steps toward coming closer to this parliamentary ideal. Only when the Hohenzollern dynasty completely compromised itself through the flight of Wilhelm II, and only after a decent interval,³⁵ did Weber declare his support for a parliamentary republic as the only form of government now appropriate for Germany. In the interest of the selection of leaders, he checked pure parliamentarism with certain plebiscitary elements, and in the interests of unity, he checked pure federalism with certain unifying elements. In substance, however, this new German state was to be bourgeois and working class in character. By opting for this political orientation, Weber took a stance against the National Liberals (Nationalliberale) and all parties further to the right, and against the Independent Social Democrats (USPD) and all parties further to the left.

Weber's political orientation, which recognizably guided his foreign and domestic policy positions, has, however, another and deeper side to it. He held politics—like the economy, science, art, erotics, and religion—to be a sphere in its own right that must be exclusively defined neither in terms of class or status group interests nor in terms of brotherly ideals. The conceptual distinction in connection with politics is not useful versus harmful, nor is it true versus false or beautiful versus ugly, nor is it even good versus evil,

it is honorable versus disgraceful. Failure to satisfy a political duty does not provoke feelings of discontent or guilt as much as it does those of shame. Of course, only he who roots his action in ultimate values can fulfill his "responsibility in the face of history."

Any purely power politics is ultimately damned to oblivion, inasmuch as it offers no other support. The politics of realism that Weber advocates, termed the *politics of responsibility* in "Politics as a Vocation," must not be confused with so-called *Realpolitik*.

However, political values are not primarily universalistic human values if one disregards those incorporated in human rights; they are particularistic cultural values. Thus, their reduction not only to economic values but also to ethical values destroys the possibility of politics in its own right. Certainly, if politics hopes to avoid degenerating into pure power politics, it must relate itself not only to cultural but also to ethical values. For that reason Weber focuses on the ever problematic relationship between politics and ethics in the second half of the speech "Politics as a Vocation." Nevertheless, just as those who engage in the politics of responsibility must relate it to ethics, they must also use power. However, those who accept power as a means, says Weber, make a pact with diabolic forces. Although personal communication might be pervaded by the spirit of love,³⁶ political communication is always pervaded by the spirit of war. This is not to say that Weber wanted to leave Germany's fate to the mightier of the battalions. As he had already put it in 1916 in connection with German war goals, "Let us not forget, *honor*, not changes in the map or in economic profits, is what the German war is about."³⁷

Of course, he also did not want to leave Germany's fate to politicians of conviction, with their love of humanity. For Weber the war effort was about the national self-assertion of Germany, not the realization of good in the world. National honor and human good are certainly values equally bound up with ideal interests. This connection, however, does not make them identical. Whoever exclusively follows the imperatives of ethic fulfill the imperatives of politics only in those few cases where the self-preservation and expansion of the collectivity run strictly counter to the self-determination of the individual. In all the other cases, however, where a certain degree of outer freedom is granted to the individual by the collectivity, the conditions of inner and outer freedom do not coincide. This conviction also guided Weber in the hotly debated question of Germany's war guilt after its defeat. Anyone speaking of war guilt, and especially of sole German war

guilt, Weber contended, moralized politics in a way that permanently damaged Germany's material as well as ideal interests, a major political mistake that would have to be paid for in the long run, both domestically and internationally.³⁸

Weber's political orientation also possesses a foundation in value theory. This orientation penetrates both addresses. Although it is always part of his political statements, it is most clearly developed in other parts of his work, especially in the sociology of religion and in the famous "Intermediate Reflections" ("Zwischenbetrachtung") of 1915 (see the discussion in Chap. 2). In 1916-17, another important element is added to this value theory. It is found in the essay on value freedom, which Weber had originally written as a response to the so-called controversy on value-judgment, but which he then published in revised form at the beginning of 1917. There he added "very brief remarks . . . regarding the theory of value." They clearly conceptualize thoughts already guiding the "Intermediate Reflections": we find ourselves in value relations that are without a common denominator and cannot be mutually harmonized; this forces us to choose our own fate. As an "advocate of [the theory of] value collision," Weber sought to remind youth above all of this "disturbing but inescapable" insight.³⁹ He also wanted to remind them that their understandable desire for a harmonious life, insofar as it was not counterbalanced by a "disciplined dispassionateness" with which to view "the realities of life," had to collide with the tragic, strife-torn character of life and ultimately lead to adjustment to or to flight from the world.⁴⁰

Thus, by 1916 Weber had recaptured the public platform. He intensified his activities in the public realm in 1917 and also spoke again on scholarly themes. On January 24, 1917, he lectured to the Social Science Association (Sozialwissenschaftlicher Verein) in Munich on "The Sociological Foundations of the Development of Judaism" ("Die soziologischen Grundlagen der Entwicklung des Judentums"),⁴¹ reporting on his work in progress on ancient Israel.⁴² On October 25, 1917, he addressed the Sociological Association (Soziologische Gesellschaft) in Vienna on "Problems of the Sociology of the State" ("Probleme der Staatssoziologie"); the focus here was on the sociology of domination, with its three pure types of legitimate domination and a fourth type based on the development of the city in the Occident.⁴³ Between the occasions of these two addresses, the two Lauenstein conferences on culture took place, the first from May 29 to May 31 and the second from

September 29 to October 3, 1917, both behind closed doors, and both with selected participants. In addition, Weber gave a political speech before the Progressive People's Association (Fortschrittlicher Volksverein) in Munich on June 8, speaking about the "democratization of the life in our state."⁴⁴ Moreover, he may have spoken in Heppenheim in mid-September in an adult education course on "State and Constitution" ("Staat und Verfassung").⁴⁵ The high point of these activities, however, came in November, when the Munich public was given the opportunity within the space of three days to listen to the man of politics and to the man of scholarship,⁴⁶ to hear both the fighter for the political self-determination of a Germany threatened internally and externally by war⁴⁷ and the fighter for the self-determination of the individual human being threatened internally and externally by the disenchantment of the world: On November 5 came his speech for a negotiated peace and against the pan-Germanic danger ("Gegen die alldeutsche Gefahr"),⁴⁸ and on November 7 came his lecture "Science as a Vocation."⁴⁹

The return to the academic lecture hall, to a professorship, also came within reach in 1917. In Vienna, Weber was asked to succeed the late Eugen von Philippovich; Göttingen had also made efforts to get him, and in Munich and Heidelberg appointments were being discussed. The offer from Vienna came in the summer, and Weber finally decided, in spite of serious reservations, not to reject it out of hand. At the end of October, he negotiated in Vienna and agreed, for the first time since his illness, to a "trial lecture course" in the summer semester of 1918.⁵⁰

"Science as a Vocation" thus comes in a phase of Weber's life in which he immersed himself with ever-increasing determination in fields of activity partly postponed due to illness and partly new to him. It was a time during which he sought to make something of his regained energies not only as a researcher, but also as a politician and as a teacher. In spite of his sobriety and detachment, something like optimism seems to have captured his mind.⁵¹ As a researcher, he had made decisive headway with his large-scale and continually expanding project on the economic ethics of the world religions. With the lecture course in Vienna, which he announced as "Economy and Society (Positive Critique of the Materialist View of History)" ("Wirtschaft u. Gesellschaft. Positive Kritik der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung"), the stage was set for more than just occasional work on the manuscripts he had abandoned at the outset of the war.

With his articles and speeches, Weber the politician had taken an incisive stand on the domestic and foreign policy situation of imperial Germany; he called for a negotiated peace settlement and the parliamentary reform of the imperial constitution, as well as for the democratization of German political life. In view of the peace resolution of the majority parties in the German Reichstag on July 19, 1917, and the developments in Russia, a peace settlement appeared to be in reach; the quick changes in the imperial chancellorship from Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg to Georg Michaelis and to Georg Graf von Hertling had increased the actual say of the parties in the choice of leaders, and decisive legal steps toward parliamentarization appeared to be only a matter of time.

As a teacher, however, Weber had reopened the dialogue with parts of academic youth. As Marianne Weber had so desired, he gave at least occasional lectures.⁵² He no longer talked just at the famous Sunday afternoon gatherings at the house at Ziegelhäuser Landstraße 17,⁵³ but also at the exclusive meetings at Burg Lauenstein. Admittedly there he appeared to the youth present not so much as a scholar or teacher, but—perhaps because of his very detachment from matters and people, because of his passionate objectivity—as a possible leader in politics and of men.⁵⁴

On November 7, 1917, during the presentation of "Science as a Vocation," he made this impression once again. Karl Löwith provides a vivid account of the effects of this address on a group of students deeply sensitized by their experiences of war. In his memoirs, written in exile,⁵⁵ he observes:

In [Weber's] statements the knowledge and experience of an entire life were concentrated; everything was taken directly from within and thought through with critical understanding, the authority of his personality providing them with a powerful urgency. His acuteness in formulating the question was matched by his renunciation of all easy solutions. Although he tore away the veils of all wishful thinking, anyone listening had to feel that at the heart of this clear reason lay a deeply earnest humanness.⁵⁶

A year later, "Politics as a Vocation," presented in the same series and in front of a similar audience, did not have the same effect. Löwith made short shrift of it: "A second lecture on 'Politics as a Vocation' did not have the same captivating verve."⁵⁷ Weber himself indirectly confirmed this impression. A few days before the address he wrote to Else Jaffé: "The lecture is going to be bad; something other than this 'calling' occupies my heart and soul."⁵⁸

He had long hesitated to deliver the lecture, and it appears that something like political blackmail was necessary to get him to finally do it.⁵⁹ What had changed?

Weber's cautious optimism from 1917 had by now disappeared. He saw the Germans—largely due to their own failings—as having been made by the war into the "pariah people of the world."⁶⁰ The extreme right-wing "politics of vanity" in conjunction with the inability of the political leadership, first under Bethmann-Hollweg and then under Hertling, to make the military accept the primacy of politics had led to Germany's destruction as a powerful nation-state. Those foundations still capable of being built upon were now being razed by that "bloody carnival," the "revolution."⁶¹ The price paid for the ruinous submarine policy, demanded by the military in conjunction with the Right and opposed by Weber from the very beginning,⁶¹ was ultimately the entrance of the United States into the war. The price paid for the military-dictated policy toward Russia was the failure to reach a reasonable separate peace with Russia at Brest-Litovsk that could have laid the foundation for a lasting general peace.

The revolution added yet new calamities to these two serious foreign policy mistakes of the old regime. For example, Kurt Eisner, who had succeeded in coming to power as the Bavarian governor, hoped, with the support of a "small crowd of leftist literati," to arouse sympathy from the Allies by publishing the "records of guilt." Weber was deeply embittered by these completely undignified politics of conviction.⁶² Moreover, the constitutional developments these and similar groups wanted appeared to him to be inappropriate for strengthening Germany internally and especially for finally guiding Germans—in terms of their values—toward realistic politics, toward a politics of responsibility. At the time of "Politics as a Vocation" Weber considered Germany's complete loss of power, and—as in the time of Napoleon, even foreign rule—a distinct possibility. The political prospects had been dismal. Germany was faced by that "polar night of icy darkness and harshness" that, as he wrote at the end of "Politics as a Vocation," certainly "will only slowly fade."⁶³

Moreover, Weber now had to come to terms with yet another setback: the return to teaching, which he had ever more seriously considered since 1917, would be connected with even greater personal sacrifices than he had feared. Admittedly, the lecture course in Vienna had been a truly sensational success. Many reports attest to this. Theodor Heuss, who attended some of these lectures,

summarized his impressions: "He had become the sensation of the university, one had to have seen and heard him at least once. In this way, he landed in the largest auditorium, where an irreverent curiosity kept the doors in continual motion. I was filled with righteous indignation, especially since I noticed how this pained him, and I told him so. I have never forgotten his reply: 'You are right, it certainly is not possible to roar the word 'asceticism' into such a room.'⁶⁴ Nonetheless, it was not so much these adverse external conditions as the self-imposed obligation to keep the lecture and the public platform separate that caused him such difficulty. After his first lecture hours, he wrote, "My God, is that a strain! Ten speeches are nothing compared to two hours of lecturing. Simply being bound to the plan, to the ability of the people to take notes, and so on."⁶⁵ And then: "Nothing, but absolutely nothing has changed from twenty years ago."⁶⁶

From the point of view of husbanding one's energies, the Vienna experience showed that the lecture hall was a much harder lot than the public platform or the writing desk. The course completely exhausted Weber, "dulling his senses" and prompting a "leadened tiredness." In this state of body and mind, he returned to Heidelberg at the end of July. In 1918, shortly after he turned down the Viennese offer in the midst of the semester, he wrote to Mina Tobler: "Naturally, it is very painful—more than I had expected—to become so distressingly aware of the limits of one's own capabilities. But—that is nothing new, and 'the view from the other bank,' with its isolation from all of those of good health, even those closest to one, is something I am indeed very familiar with."⁶⁷

Of course, Weber did not turn down the appointment in Vienna because the burdensome nature of this experience had convinced him to permanently refrain from teaching. He wanted to stay in Germany for political reasons, and in the meantime more favorable professional opportunities had arisen there. One possibility was to succeed Lujo Brentano in Munich, the city with which, outside of Heidelberg, he was probably most closely connected, especially after the developments from 1916 to 1918.⁶⁸ By the time Weber delivered "Politics as a Vocation" it was clear that he would return to teaching in some form in the foreseeable future, if not in Munich, then in Bonn. If only for economic reasons, it was practically unavoidable. The war had not only destroyed Germany's position as a great power, it had also severely undermined Weber's life as a rentier. Weber could no longer afford to live purely for his

work; he had to live from it, too. As much as he desired to earn a steady income solely with the pen or as a freelance lecturer, he had no illusions that this method would work. Only his return as a professor could guarantee in the long term his material existence. A return of this kind, however, as the trial lecture course had demonstrated, would in any case be bound up with sacrifices. Shortly before giving "Politics as a Vocation" Weber wrote to Else Jaffé that he was aware that "in terms of health, I will naturally have to pay for taking on a teaching position by *taking leave* of all 'politics,' since I am not able to do both."⁶⁹ Thus, for some time, the stage had been set for the inner and outer calling of scholarship, not of politics.

In March 1919, Weber accepted the appointment to the University of Munich, in spite of more attractive offers elsewhere. After the brief interlude of Versailles, where he prepared, together with others, a document on Germany's war guilt, he actually did pay for the acceptance by departing from all politics, which, as he once put it, was his secret love. This departure has been seen as a direct or indirect confession of political failure, the increased concentration on scholarly work as an escape, and the form in which it was carried out as the continuation of the political struggle with other means.⁷⁰ As plausible as such interpretations appear at first glance, one should not overlook one decisive point. Since the end of the war it had become ever more unavoidable for Weber, regardless of the momentary political constellation, to choose between his commitments to scholarship and to politics. Admittedly, the political development after the November Revolution, and his manner of involvement in it may have made it easier for him to leave the political arena. There is little evidence that his choice would have been different had he had greater success in everyday politics, however, for although Weber was eminently political, given his public evaluation of political events, he was basically not a politician, at least not a party politician who could ever have made a living from politics. He simply made too many tactical mistakes,⁷¹ and his desire to maintain his independence from political authorities and from the voters was too great.⁷² His decisive contribution to German politics in no way consisted of his rather sporadic political actions.⁷³ It lay instead in his political thought, with which he sought first to make possible political action deserving of the name. In this context also belongs "Politics as a Vocation."⁷⁴ In that lecture he deliberately abstained from taking any direct positions on political questions of the day.⁷⁴ Instead, he provided a

contribution toward a theory of politics, or in his terminology, toward a *sociology of the state*.⁷⁵ As such, the lecture (which he subsequently revised into a treatise for publication) has become "a document of the state of democratic thought in that critical moment of German history," as Immanuel Birnbaum fittingly put it in retrospect.⁷⁶

Weber's decision to return to the university and forgo all politics was motivated not only from without but also by serious concerns from within. Despite his numerous political speeches, extensive political journalism, and increasing activities in the politics of the day, even from 1916 until the beginning of 1919 he remained primarily a man of scholarship. The essays on the economic ethics of the world religions continued to be published throughout this period. It is highly likely, indeed practically certain, that the versions of these essays as we know them today, with the exception of the "Introduction" ("Einleitung"), the essay on Confucianism ("Konfuzianismus"), and the essay titled "Intermediate Reflections" first came into being in the winter of 1915-16, and thereafter as revisions of older manuscripts.⁷⁷ These essays, however, represent only the visible results of an enormous theoretical and historical project. Although its broad outlines were already visible before the war, from the time of Weber's departure from the military hospital administration onward its focus became ever sharper. Emphases were changed, sections were shortened, others were expanded. As early as 1915, Weber anticipated that in addition to *Economy and Society*, already far advanced when the war began, an economic ethics of the major religions (*Kulturreligionen*) with a revised *Protestant Ethic* would exist in book form in the not-too-distant future. By the time Weber decided to return to the university and abstain from politics, the work on this double project was already well advanced. There had long been opposition and even conflict in Weber's life between the *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life) required for the completion of this scholarly work and the *vita activa* (active life) of current political activities.⁷⁸ Even though lecturing was agonizing, in contrast to the public platform it was directly useful for his program. Thus, the retreat from politics made Weber's life easier in this sense.⁷⁹ Indeed, he had only accepted the appointment to Munich under the condition that he would be allowed to lecture on sociology and the theory of the state instead of on economics.⁸⁰ The written and spoken word were supposed to coincide as closely as possible. In Vienna, he had already lectured from his handbook

article, his contribution to the *Outline*, on his sociology of religion and domination, in the summer semester of 1919, his first semester in Munich, his lectures provided the basic conceptual introduction for it, "The Most General Categories of the Science of Society" (*Gesellschaftswissenschaft*).⁸¹

Thus, in the spring of 1919, Weber left the public platform that he had won back in 1916 in order to concentrate all his energies on writing and to find a way to cope once again with lecturing. In spite of the immense scholarly labors he had already performed, an enormous amount of work still lay before him, the core of which was found in the two large-scale projects "The Economy and the Societal Orders and Powers" ("Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte") and the "Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion" ("Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie"). The former was presumably supposed to consist of several parts, and the latter of four volumes.⁸² In addition, Weber had apparently wanted to continue to work on the sociological studies on music, art, architecture, and literature that he had begun in 1910 and had always come back to, but ultimately was never to finish. From 1912 until 1918, Georg Lukács was perhaps his most important partner in scholarly dialogues in this field of interest.⁸³ As Weber prepared the speeches from November 1917 and January 1919 for print, speeches marked by different moods but by the same life experience, he aimed at grounding an interpretive sociology that, as a theory of action, order, and culture, was located between psychology and legal doctrine. In counterpoint to the "dilettante achievements of ingenious philosophers," his perspective was developed in a "strictly objective and scholarly" manner, in the service of historical understanding, and thus, at the same time, for the sake of understanding the present and its developmental tendencies.⁸⁴ The theoretical and historical dimensions of such a science of reality (*Erfahrungswissenschaft*) have the task of promoting knowledge of the facts and self-knowledge; in general, that science should impart clarity and intellectual honesty, a sense of perspective and responsibility, detachment, and dignity to a passionate and resolute academic youth. It should also serve the fatherland insofar as its happier future remains dependent on the practice of these virtues, and on a "steadfastness of heart" that "can brave even the crumbling of all hopes."⁸⁵

In fact, Weber increasingly placed his hopes for Germany in the reform of government, and above all in the attitude of academic youth. In the speech on Germany's restoration on January 2, 1919,

he pointed out that "the fatherland is not the land of the fathers, but the land of the children."⁸⁶ Above all, one could add, youth had to learn what it means to conduct or lead one's own life, to shape one's own personality. If one follows Weber's sociology, these lessons presuppose not only forms or institutional arrangements but also a "spirit" (*Geist*). In an instructive letter to Otto Crusius, professor of classical philology in Munich and participant at the Lauenstein conferences, Weber wrote as early as November 24, 1918, before throwing himself into the election campaign, that the resolution of present cultural problems involved above all the regaining of moral "decency." In order to cope with this formidable didactic task, the only form possible was "the American: the 'club'—and exclusive associations, i.e., associations of every kind based upon the *selection* of persons, starting in childhood and youth, *regardless* of their purpose; first signs of it [are seen] in the Free German Youth" (*Freideutsche Jugend*). As "spirit" however, there remained only objectivity and the "rejection of all spiritual narcotics of every kind, from mysticism all the way to 'expressionism.'" Only in this way could a true sense of shame arise, the sole source of a political and human "posture" "against the disgusting exhibitionism of those inwardly broken."⁸⁷ This statement shows how much Weber linked this hope for Germany to the Free German Youth, part of which he apparently considered to be the Free Students Association (*Freie Studentenschaft*). It also shows the great extent to which his two speeches before the Munich Free Students Association are to be seen in this context. This context leads us to ask how Weber's relationship to the Free German Youth, and especially to the Free Students Association, developed, and thus to the question of the narrower context of the genesis of "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation."

The Narrower Context of the Lectures: Weber's Relationship to the Youth and Student Movements

During his three semesters as a student of law and political economy at the University of Heidelberg, starting in the summer semester of 1882, Max Weber joined the student fraternity Allermannia, of Heidelberg. He approved of their code of honor that revolved around proof of honor through dueling (*Satisfaktion, Mensur*). As a young scholar, though, he had already raised doubts

about the educational value of the reserve officers' patent and student dueling societies in his analyses of the authoritarian deformation of the German bourgeoisie. Moreover, as years went by, he distanced himself ever more clearly from these institutions of military and student "morality" and "honor."⁸⁸ Nevertheless, he remained a member of the fraternity until after the November Revolution, probably giving up his alumni membership on November 17, 1918, in the context of a public dispute about the symbolic value of wearing fraternity colors.⁸⁹ First, in a public meeting, Weber had termed the tradition of wearing colors feudal nonsense no longer suitable to the times and useful to no one. Then, in his letter of resignation, he denied both the right to existence of this form of student life in a reorganized Germany and its ability to reform itself. In the address "Students and Politics" ("Student und Politik"), delivered to a student audience on March 13, 1919, shortly before he accepted the appointment to the University of Munich,⁹⁰ Weber made it clear that the politically disturbing character of the system of fraternity colors resulted from its "exclusivity on the basis of the qualification for dueling."⁹¹ This type of exclusivity made democratization impossible. It supported a false understanding of the special position of the student and graduate. Clearly, in Weber's opinion, this position should no longer be founded on the pretensions of an academic status group. Instead, it had to be individually earned by conducting one's life in the manner of an aristocracy of the *spirit*, by means of self-determined conduct that spurns all reminders of "feudalism" and does not close itself off from those not attending the university.

Thus, Weber radically and publicly rejected the color-bearing student fraternities after the November Revolution. He considered them incompatible with the future form of government he sought for Germany: a modern democratic parliamentary republic. His rejection, however, also extended to parts of the student body not organized in these fraternities. The account of the address makes this clear as well. Weber criticized "phenomena known from the free youth movement that basically amount to an emancipation from authority and have bred those literati against whom, in the interest of spiritual health, effective war must be waged." Even though no names were named, there can be hardly any doubt that Weber meant, among others, Gustav Wyneken and his followers,⁹² whom he had rejected at Burg Lauenstein. His sympathy clearly belonged only to those student groups that, like the Free Students, were oriented around the idea of the university

as an institution for scholarly education and self-development. Such students would believe in an education toward self-directed activity and autonomy through specialized scholarship and abstain in their university politics from all artificial forms of separate student politics.⁹³

In fact, the Free Students Association deserves a special place in the history of German student life from the end of the nineteenth century until the reorganization of Germany after the First World War. It was of great importance in historical development. Its opponents alternately defamed and fought against it as Jewish, socialist, rationalistic, pacifist, collectivist, or even subjectivist, but it was in modern times "the first decisive bearer of ambitious social efforts aimed at the welfare of all financially weak students." Moreover, "through its emphasis on the student university community and on the necessity of general student committees, it paved the way for the large-scale student unity movement that [reached] its goal in 1919 by establishing the German Student Association."⁹⁴ Its struggle was directed above all at the privileged position of student societies and fraternities, which were most intimately connected with the very structure of imperial Germany. The free student movement, originally begun under the name *Fin-kenschaftsbewegung*,⁹⁵ can be understood as an umbrella movement for those student efforts directed against student fraternities and societies at the beginning of the century. The goal is given concise expression in a resolution adopted at the Weimar Free Student Conference in 1906. Here is one passage from it:

The ultimate and highest goal of the Free Student movement is the reestablishment of the old *civitas academica*, the unification of all students into one self-contained, autonomous body, which is officially recognized as one unit at every university, and alongside of the teaching staff as the totality of lecturers, and equal to the latter. The organization should build an essential component of the university body with its own constitution. The student body cannot receive its representation through a partial committee that includes members of only certain parties; it can do this solely by means of a committee for all students, resting on a parliamentary basis, in which every group of academic youth finds appropriate representation. Students must share equally in the burdens and advantages, and no part of the student body can withdraw from it, even if it waives its right to its representation.⁹⁶

Thus, the Free Student movement was, as a collective movement of the "nonincorporated" (as it was expressed in the language of the time), pluralistic from the very beginning. It advo-