

## ***Book Review***

**Max Weber. 2020. *Charisma and Disenchantment: The Vocation Lectures* (Damion Searls, Trans.). Paul Reitter & Chad Wellmon (Eds.). New York Review of Books, pp. 176.**

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*Charisma And Disenchantment* is a concise record of the lectures given by the economic historian and sociologist Max Weber during the early years of the 20th century. These lectures were delivered in Munich upon students' requests from the Bavarian chapter of the 'Free Student Alliance'. In their introduction about the aims of these lectures, Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon delineate the principles that underlined Weber's academic conviction, quite evidently influenced by his interpretations of the relationship between the state and modern society with a distinctive capitalist orientation. Weber's lectures draw heavily from Western Europe's past, and historical developments have been utilized at several junctures. The coexistence of disciplined practice – 'moral asceticism' – along with passion and social attitudes towards one's vocation has been espoused by him and is the driving force of his academic work. It surfaces in his lectures as well and is very difficult to overlook. In the social sciences, the scholar cannot do without moral judgments. The same condition applies to the politician's realm as well. It was seen as ideal for these values to be counterbalanced with an objective and political outlook.

In 'The Scholar's Work', Weber grapples with the changing state of affairs inside the avenues of scholarship while using explanatory aids from religious precepts. The scholar must be prepared to answer the needs of the scholarly 'calling' that he receives towards the direction of an academic profession. An unadulterated passion for scholarly life

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and all that it entails must be the norm of the willing. Weber concedes that a solid profession in the realm of academia is a matter of luck. The contingencies that determine the entry of a young scholar into this field are fraught with hurdles often put forward by the administrative structures of several universities. He observes that scholars are expected to be both - good teachers and good researchers. This is a rarity, according to Weber. He goes on to explain the different academic structures of universities found in the West and compares those found in the United States and Germany, respectively. He examines the impact of having a strict scientific orientation and how science tends to be 'meaningless' as it fails to ask pertinent questions about the alternative goals that it helps people achieve. It fails to inquire about the meaning of life beset in the clutches of a disenchanting (i.e., spurring of dogma and superstition) modern nation-state. While everything can be known in the new intellectually rationalizing structures of modernity, what one chooses to know and specialize in must also go beyond societal constraints and question the meaning and ramifications of the chosen goal.

Weber had no intention of giving a monologue about the nature of politics and issues contemporaneous to his time. Like a true sociologist, he expresses his desire to reflect upon the structure of political institutions from which politics emanate(s). The modern state encompasses all these elements, and its specialized apparatuses impact the organization and execution of political activity. He traces the history of state structures found in the West and how they give way to the modern, highly specialized bureaucratic states. It is an extremely complex mechanism that depends on the exercise of authority and power to attain a more coherent (and coercive) form. It legitimizes the use of violence and virtually monopolizes it. Out of the three forms of authority described by Weber – traditional, charismatic, and legal – it is the second form that is given more time and emphasis. Dependent on the personal gift of charisma bestowed upon the political leader, charismatic authority paves the way for the emergence of a vocation solely dedicated to politics. The modern bureaucratic state, along with the modern party structure, leads to an increased dependence on civil services to carry out everyday tasks and fulfill political needs. Education and specialized training are prerequisites for entry into the bureaucracy. Benefactors of the modern state structure have counterparts in political parties as well. The political party structure was also dependent on the workings

of political officials and the journalist emerged as a type of professional politician who straddled the spaces between the ruling powers of the state and dominant political parties. There is also raging insecurity when it comes to the control of power and its distribution among other political beings. Power not only strengthens those who wield it but can make them feel vulnerable due to the demands imposed by other, smaller political entities. All of these developments are compared and contrasted with a highly developed business model found under complex capitalistic conditions. These structures started to resemble a well-oiled machine and opened the doors to ‘plebiscitary democracy’, based on mass suffrage and a need for leadership. A complex division of labor found within political edifices demands the presence of political actors who are attuned to the importance of taking responsibility for their decisions while also maintaining a distance from people and political excesses. Politicians have a duty to tell the truth and uphold the sanctity of ethics in disenchanting modern states. The alienation and incoherence experienced in life under the presence of such entities are exactly what Weber wants his audience to be aware of – a new philosophical and psychological trend that seems to have been embedded in the capitalist world order of the West during the beginning of the 20th century. Dependent on this development is modernity and the way it rationalizes everything that it holds within itself, a significant issue dealt with by Max Weber throughout his life.

If there is one major lesson that can be taken away from Max Weber’s lectures, then it is how the intermingling of different academic disciplines becomes the need of the hour to understand how societies and economies take shape. Weber has utilized history and sociology, in tandem, to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the modern society, that he found himself in. Therefore, the issues that he addressed are something that all of us must take heed of, for we, too, are the denizens of a rapidly changing modern society.