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Clarity, Value Conflict, and Academic Politics: Weber’s “Science as a Vocation” a Hundred Years Later

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Abstract

After reviewing three conceptions of Weberian clarity, as found in *Social Epistemology's* special issue on Weber's "Science as a Vocation," we articulate an additional conception of clarity that better enables us to understand the unique vocation of the scientist, as described by Weber. We argue that a scientist is a disenchanted Odyssean *polytropos* (πολυτροπον), insofar as she can traverse political *Weltanschauungen*—a polytheism of values—without endorsing them. While this conception of clarity enables us to distinguish the scientist from the political demagogue within the context of a polytheism of values, we also argue that all conceptions of Weberian clarity, including our own, fail for a different reason: it rests on an unargued ontological commitment that life will forever be a conflict of exclusive values. Still, this failure is instructive as it enables us to better appreciate the "external conditions" of the university a hundred years after Weber's lecture.

Weber's is an investigation into the nature of the scientist's calling or vocation, given the disenchantment of the world. Weber notes what most of the students in his audience already appreciate—that this disenchantment necessarily precludes historically influential characterizations of the calling in terms of the scientist being a seeker of, e.g., first principles and/or ultimate meanings. Rather, Weber addresses himself to a different confusion, which is pervasive not just among students but also their scientific teachers, about the nature of the scientific calling: if, as per the disenchantment thesis, there is no firm ground upon which to stand—if the "numerous gods of yore" have arisen from the graves to "strive for power over our lives" (Weber 2004, 24)—then one might infer that the scientist is, like the demagogue, just another vector of political power. Accordingly, many professors and students cynically recast appeals to objectivity as just another political act. Not only are there lecturers who freely promulgate their own political views in the lecture halls, but students, in the grip of the same confusion, seek those very "lectures ... to experience something more than just analyses and statements of fact" (Weber 2004, 24).

Weber's question, then, is this: how does a polytheism of values not imply that all scientists are politicians in disguise? How, in other words, can we make sense of a version of the fact-value distinction, where scientists are oriented to facts and politicians are oriented to values, in a world devoid of unassailable first principles?

In section I, we summarize three attempts to make sense of what scientific objectivity or clarity could look like against the backdrop of radical value pluralism, as found in *Social Epistemology's* Special Issue on Weber's "Science as a Vocation."

In section II, we articulate our own answer to this question. In particular, we suggest that the scientist is helpfully cast as a disenchanted *polytropos* (πολυτροπον). This is the description that Homer gives Odysseus, who bears a special relation to Athena. If it is the case that disenchantment has resurrected the gods of yore, then it is not implausible that those same gods might cast light on what Weberian objectivity must look like.

In section III, we articulate a critique of Weberian clarity. All such interpretations, including our own, fail to grapple with the fact that Weber's polythesism of value *is* the kind of first principle to which Weber does not think the scientist is entitled.

In section IV, we argue failure is instructive as it enables us better appreciate the "external conditions" of the university a hundred years after Weber's lecture.

I. Three Takes on Weberian Clarity

Weber seeks to carve out a mode of being in our overall form of life which is uniquely characteristic of the scientist and irreducible to that of the politician. It is an identity that treasures objectivity while remaining courageously observant of the impossibility of final truths. In *Social Epistemology's* Special Issue, three papers attempt to explicate Weber's remarks about what a uniquely scientific vocation looks like in a disenchanted age. In this section, we briefly survey those remarks.

All authors agree that the Weberian scientist achieves objectivity by striving for "clarity". Accordingly, Alexander Yu Antonovskiy and Raisa Ed Barash evocatively describe the Weberian scientist as a kind of *judge*: "The scientist is not a 'leader' (which demarcates scientific communication from politics), however, he appears as a 'judge,' even though without the right to provide a decisive judgment. Although he is unable to disclose the Plan of God, he occupies something like the hypothetical position of God" (Antonovskiy and Barash 2020, 122).

Sung Ho Kim reviews Weber's remarks on the ideal type in order to deploy a very different picture of scientific objectivity. Clarity, for Kim, involves honesty. Objectivity, here, is achieved by being "*self-consciously* subjective," wherein operative value-orientations are flagged via "a public *revelation* of one's own subjective value" (Kim 2020, 146). Kim's notion of clarity and, so, objectivity seems comparable to that of the feminist philosopher of science, Helen Longino, who argues that "good science" is a matter of self-consciously and publicly "choosing or using a framework of interpretation—male or femalecentered—and assigning evidential relevance to the data on the basis of the assumptions of the framework" (Longino 1990, 111). Kim's view is opposed to Antonovskiy and Barash's judicial view of the Weberian scientist—"an omnipresent observer" who "observes the world from all value-specific and objective positions" (Antonovskiy and Barash 2020, 125).

Finally, Lada Shipovalova draws from work by the philosopher of science Heather Douglas to claim that while the Weberian scientist strives for a kind of "value-neutral objectivity," this kind of objectivity should be distinguished from what she calls "value-free objectivity." If clarity is value-neutral objectivity, the Weberian scientist attempts to occupy a "balanced or neutral position with respect to a spectrum of values" (Douglas 2004, 460)—"Such a position is possible," Shipovalova writes, "if a human knower, striving for objectivity, takes into account different views and values" (Shipovalova 2020, 135). Shipovalova's conception of Weberian objectivity seems incompatible with Kim's: a scientist who self-consciously takes up a value could hardly be said to be "neutral" with respect to that value. Also, Kim's notion of clarity does not involve any active "balancing" between seemly incompatible positions. The relation between Shipovalova's conception of Weberian objectivity and that of Antonovskiy and Barash's is less clear. However, the purported capacity to "occupy

something like the hypothetical position of God” arguably tends toward value-free objectivity, which Douglas explicitly contrasts with her preferred notion of value-neutral objectivity.

II. The Scientist as Disenchanted *Polytropos*

Having presented and compared these three interpretations of Weber’s notion of scientific “clarity” and, so, objectivity, in what follows we develop our own interpretation of the Weberian vocation of a scientist. We claim that the scientist is best construed as a kind of Odyssean *polytropos* and compare this conception of scientific clarity with those proffered by Antonovskiy and Barash, Kim, and Shipovalova.

As we have seen, disenchantment gives rise to a secularized polytheism of values. Since there is no rational way to adjudicate this multiplicity of values, and given that these values are in eternal conflict, polytheism would ultimately seem to imply only two possible orientations to that world: one must take either the stance of value-affirming disciples (“Which of the warring gods should we serve?” (Weber 2004, 27)), or one takes the stance of value-creating gods (or prophets or saviors). In a world of irreconcilable values, there are, following Nietzsche, only slaves and masters. Since the vocation of the scientist would appear to track neither of these categories, it is unsurprising that some scientists would use their classrooms to “create a surrogate” of “mystical sanctity” to which students would be attracted as eager disciples (Weber 2004, 29–30).

In this section, we read Weber as reminding us that polytheism is more capacious than the Nietzschean master-slave dichotomy would imply. Polytheism, in other words, would seem to support possible identities which resist reduction into either masters or slaves. To see this, we might start by considering the enchanted polytheism of the ancient Greeks. Yes, the gods fight and, as Nietzsche fully appreciated, the Greeks valorized beautiful heroes. But they do far more than battle: they, for example, party, fall in love with each other, have children, and construct beautiful artifacts. Insofar as the various gods, for the ancients, mark or make possible various identities available within a Hellenic form of life, the reduction of these many forms of life to modalities of battle is no less absurd than to suggest that Aphrodite or Hephaestus are nothing but expressions of Aries, as the one true Greek god. While warfare is a central activity of the Greeks, it would be profoundly mistaken to conclude that all their activities, from that of the lover to that of the craftsman, were ultimately only expressions of war.

Where does science fit into this?

Following Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly, where most of the Greek gods are associated with a particular skill, craft or mood, as Aries is associated with excellence in battle, there is a special class of what they call “trans-world gods,” including Zeus—protector of guests or travelers (*xenos*)—himself:

It is surely no coincidence that Zeus’s main role as a father associates him with no skill or craft or mood at all, but rather he is the god of strangers who

go from world to world. And his two favorite children are Athena and Hermes, neither of whom is associated with any mood either. Rather, Athena enables Odysseus to get fully in tune with every situation he is in, and Hermes, as the god of wayfarers, has the job of leading people from world to world, including even to the underworld (Dreyfus and Kelly 2007, 10).

Focusing on Athena, Dreyfus and Kelly associate her with the crossing of thresholds and transitions. When Odysseus explores island after island, it is Athena who enables him to get in tune with each of those island's inhabitants, so long as they accept *xenia* or hospitality. When Telemachus crosses the threshold from boy to man at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, he only does so with Athena's help. This is why Odysseus can be a warrior, a general and strategist, a king, a lover, an athlete, a husband, a son, a father, and, ultimately, an adventurer; in working under the light of Athena, he doesn't just exemplify a particular skill or mood, but is a traverser of the many ways it is possible to be a Greek. Or better: one intelligible way to be a Homeric is to be able to serially tune in to the inhabitants of Greece's many islands or worlds. Thus, with the help of the trans-world god Athena, Odysseus is, as described in the opening sentence of the *Odyssey*, a *polytropos*—much-traveled, complicated (Homer 2017, 105), or, more literally, “many-turning.”

Odysseus wasn't a scientist (although Horkheimer and Adorno argue that Odysseus prefigured the cognitive engines of disenchantment (2007)), but it is not implausible that the scientist is an intellectualized version of someone working under the light of a disenchanted and de-personified Athena. Where the politician is the warrior, who works under the light of a disenchanted Ares to impose a *Weltanschauung* on a polity, the scientist is, on this reading, a *polytropos*—an explorer of the implications of such practical standpoints.

Addressing the politician in the second-person, Weber writes that:

[T]he scientist can and should tell you that the *meaning* of this or that practical stance can be inferred consistently, and hence also honestly, from this or that ultimate fundamental ideological position [*Weltanschauung*]. It may be deducible from one position, or from a number—but there are other quite specific philosophies from which it cannot be inferred. To put it metaphorically, if you choose this particular standpoint, you will be serving this particular god and will *give offense to every other god*. For you will necessarily arrive at such-and-such ultimate, internally meaningful *conclusions* if you remain true to yourselves (Weber 2004, 26).

The conceptual topography of a *Weltanschauung* consists in a network of conditionals. Where the politician's domain is that of action (again, addressed in the second-person), the scientist's is that of possibility:

If you take up this or that attitude, the lessons of science are that you must apply such and such *means* in order to convert your beliefs into a reality. These means may well turn out to be of a kind that you feel compelled to reject. You will then be forced to choose between the end and the inevitable means. Does the end “justify” these means or not? The teacher can demonstrate to you the necessity of this choice (Weber 2004, 26).

Additionally, the scientist can exploit these conditionals to recommend *means*, given a politician's *ends*. From the empirical fact of value conflict, one ought to draw the conclusion that this is an irreconcilable conflict and, therefore, that one ought to merely choose any value. For Weber, the political value dimension of human life is unknowable by reason—so it is merely a product of a *decision*. What human beings ought to do, or how they should live, are not the questions of science, because science is knowledge of the *means* and not the *ends* of human life. The most important questions of human life—the oughts, values, ends—are unknowable to science, but, once an individual has chosen an ought, value, or end, then science can be helpful.

What Weber calls “clarity,” then, is nothing other than a sterilized, rationalized version of the multi-world-attunement characteristic of Odysseus and made possible by Athena. Where Odysseus *skillfully plays* the soldier or king without *being* either, the scientist charts the deductive consequences of a politician's world-view without committing to that world-view. This is why so-called teachers who would use their classrooms as pulpits to advocate rather than explore a *Weltanschauung* are not, in fact, teachers: “As long as he wishes to remain a teacher, and not turn into a demagogue, he can do no more” (Weber 2004, 26). Teachers who use their classrooms as political pulpits have elided two importantly distinct identities—that of the scientist and politician—available to us. Scientific objectivity is nothing other than Weberian clarity, where clarity involves the capacity to intellectually explore the practical standpoints advocated by different politicians within a given form of life. While this requires of degree of distancing, it does not presuppose a God's-eye view. Indeed, clarity or objectivity presupposes a degree of cultural proximity—a German academic can plausibly understand the dynamics of American academic culture, for example. But Weber's account implies, there are *Weltanschauung* that are simply unintelligible to a given scientist; even Odysseus is unable to get in tune with the Cyclops, Polythemus.

In summary, Athena is, on the one hand, just one among many gods. She represents and makes possible a mode of being. However, she's also unlike the other gods in that she is not associated with any particular skill, craft or mood. Rather she is a trans-world god capable of traversing the identities made possible by the other gods. In “Science as a Vocation,” Weber can be construed as making an analogous point about the scientist. On this interpretation of Weberian objectivity, the scientist is cast as a disenchanted *polytropos*. It is one of many identities available to those who share Weber's form of life. But unlike the politician, it is an identity which self-referentially concerns itself with the many identities available in that self-same form of life. The mistake scientists who would use their classroom as a pulpit would make is it reduces a plurality of identities to one: they cloak themselves in the colors of Athena while in fact worshipping at the altar of Aries. Since the politician is a framer of values, and the scientist is an explorer of those values, we can distinguish the scientist from the politician even against the backdrop of an assumed polytheism of values.

What remains in this section is to gesture to considerations that recommend this interpretation of Weberian clarity over those articulated by Antonovskiy and Barash, Kim, and Shipovalova. First, contra Antonovskiy and Barash, it can't be that the scientific *polytropos* “occupies something like the hypothetical position of God” (Antonovskiy and

Barash 2020, 125). Not only is the monotheistic imagery of an “omnipresent observer” in overt tension with Weber’s polytheism of values, but, as discussed, cultural proximity is a condition for the scientific understanding of a given *Weltanschauung*. Where God sees all, the polytropos would not be capable of Davidsonian radical interpretation (Davidson 1984). Second, Kim’s claim that the scientist can be distinguished from the politician insofar as the former makes “a public *revelation* of one’s own subjective value” seems to lack textual support (Kim 2020, 146). Not only do such declarations seem incompatible with a commitment to Weberian objectivity, but Weber’s classroom pundit would not seem to be absolved if she flags the fact that she’s engaging in punditry. Longino’s model of scientific inquiry, in other words, is not Weber’s. Third, the proposed model of scientific clarity would appear to be compatible with some of Shipovalova’s characterizations of objectivity, wherein “a human knower, striving for objectivity” would take “into account different views and values” (Shipovalova 2020, 134). However, the further claim that such value-neutrality (which, importantly, is not “value-free”) also involves a “balanced or neutral position with respect to a spectrum of values” would not appear to track Weber’s characterizations of clarity. All the Weberian scientist can do is track the conditionals which make up the conceptual structure of a given *Weltanschauung*: if you are committed to X, then you are thereby committed to Y. This would not seem to involve any “balancing” or adjudication between competing value systems.

III. Weber as *Polotropos*

As argued in section II, we think that the idea of scientist as disenchanted *polytropos* faithfully distinguishes the politician from the scientist and helpfully illuminates the notion of scientific clarity. Our proposal, however, is not without its difficulties. We explore a key problem in this section.

The polytropic notion of clarity-as-world-travel originally takes place within a polytheism which itself was *not and could not* be an object of clarity. Odysseus could travel between the worlds, moods, or practices made possible by a pantheism of gods, but, for him, *polytheism itself* wasn’t a possible destination; it was, rather, a *tacit presupposition* of Odyssean world-travel. However, if, and against monotheism, the “numerous gods of yore ... arise from their graves” to “strive for power over our lives, and resume their eternal struggle among themselves” (Weber 2004, 24), then *polytheism itself becomes thematized* and so an explicit object of scientific concern. But as such, we need to inquire into the modern day polytropos’ relationship not just to the worlds made possible by the gods/politicians but to polytheism itself. Is polytheism just another contingent world through which travel is possible? Or is the polytropos’ knowledge of polytheism itself of a different and more fundamental order? In other words, is Weber’s view of a science distinct from the realm of “values” itself possible?

These questions give rise to a contradiction that we believe Weber is unable to resolve. The entire project rests on an unargued premise: “life is about the incompatibility of ultimate *possible* attitudes and hence the inability ever to resolve the conflicts between them” (Weber 2004, 27). Given the truth of this premise, Weber presents to his impressionable students the view that life begins with a decision about which science and reason cannot help guide them, since this irreconcilable value conflict is among radically equal values (Weber 2004, 27). But, here we must explicitly press Weber: how does he *know* both that these values are forever in irreconcilable conflict *and* that these values are equal to one another? A plurality of values,

like that of polytheistic gods, does not entail all gods are equal in stature or import—there may even be what Dreyfus and Kelly call “trans-world gods.” But, Weber’s project falls apart without this kind of knowledge or fundamental clarity. On Weber’s own terms, science is not valuable except Here and Now (Weber 2004, 26–27). Perhaps science’s value could change, a possibility Weber must on principle accept as possible, though one he cannot accept in practice (Weber 2004, 7). Or perhaps more distressingly, what if the value of clarity is better served by another means than science?

Throughout the lecture, Weber is turning in two incompatible ways: from the *is* to the *ought*, and then from the *ought* to the *is*. At times, Weber argues from a matter of first principles of fundamental ontology—the eternal conflict of values. If we assume that Weber means to say he has that knowledge of first principles, he can have his view of science but, then, that science *is necessarily one that has knowledge of values*. In other words, here is the “positivist” resolution to Weber’s confusions.

At other times, Weber seems to begin his argument and understanding of science from the simple fact of value conflict—a simple empirical fact, proven routinely all around him and in history (Weber 2004, 27). But, if this is Weber’s foundation, he cannot have the *certainty* of eternal value conflict—which requires clarity about what is accidental in his Here and Now, a clarity Weber cannot strictly have. So, he can have his scientific clarity, though it is one that must always remain open to not only the possibility of progress, but potential transcendence: scientific clarity is but one value among many, and therefore cannot have a privileged position relative to the other values. Accordingly, Weber must admit that the distinction between facts and values is itself derived, like all other knowledges, from pre-scientific value decisions based in his Here and Now (“historicism”) (Strauss 2018). With the collapse of facts into values, or values into facts, so too does politics and science collapse into one another.

Summarizing, our critique of Weber takes the form of a constructive dilemma: Weber’s foundational assumption that “conflict rages between different gods and it will go on for all time” (Weber 2004, 23) is either the kind of claim that could be supported *a priori* or it is just another provisional, contingent truth. If it is an *a priori* truth, then it can’t be just another contingent world through which the scientific *polytropos* might travel. But this entails a philosophical, non-polytropic notion of absolute and unequivocal clarity and/or objectivity to which the scientist must ultimately be oriented. Such super-scientists or metaphysicians are not polytropic. If, however, polytheism itself is a contingent, historical truth, then Weber must concede it is at least possible that polytheism itself could be incorrect. But what would it be for polytheism itself to be at least in principle incorrect? It would mean Weber must at least remain open to the possibility that the monotheistic, “awe-inspiring rationalism of a systematic ethical conduct of life” which, historically, “dethroned” Greek polytheism and was, in turn, dethroned by a disenchanting polytheism, might itself come to arise from its grave (Weber 2004, 23–24). But again, if there is at least the possibility of *a priori* knowledge, then this implies at least the possibility of a non-polytropic notion of absolute clarity.

In short, once polytheism *itself* becomes thematized as a possible object of clarity, then the absolutist claims to which Weber helps himself are beyond the threshold of what the

genuine scientific *polytropos* could claim to know. The *polytropos* is a traveler of contingent worlds; she traverses political perspectives, but could never, by definition, purport, in the words of Antonovskiy and Barash, to “occup[y] something like the hypothetical position of God” (Antonovskiy and Barash 2020, 125). And yet it is precisely this hypothetical position Weber occupies when he relies on first principles, such as “the conflict between these gods is never-ending” (Weber 2004, 27). Weber performatively contradicts himself in his defense of a deflated, historically contingent notion of polytropic clarity or objectivity.

We have so far inflected the concept of a polytropos in a certain way: scientific clarity requires world-travel, complication, or “many-turning.” The scientist, on this view, traverses the various worlds created and sustained by politicians; a scientist who uses their classroom as a political pulpit thereby ceases to be a scientist. But Weber’s performative contradiction highlights a different sense in which one can be a *polytropos*—derived from Socrates and Plato to Nietzsche, Horkheimer, and Adorno—as one who is cunning or, simply, lying (Lampert 2002).

Odysseus was not just a traveler of worlds, but a liar. One wonders if Weber is lying or unintentionally saying both “A and not-A,” or even merely if Weber presented half the argument on purpose. Weber presents his account of science to a particular audience: the current graduate students and future professors of Germany’s universities. He makes it clear from the beginning that his audience is perhaps unable or unwilling to accept what he is about to tell them about the nature and value of science (Weber 2004, 7). Weber struggles with his audience but presents himself as the resolute truth-teller, unable to and unwilling to compromise his moral convictions about the value of science, even if his audience will leave unhappy and unfulfilled at the end. And yet, in asserting polytheism as a kind of bedrock truth or first principle, Weber hubristically assumes a kind of *a priori, non-polytropic* clarity that he himself is not entitled to on his own terms. Is Weber, thus, lying to his audience? Is he, in short, taking the stance of the politician, who trades in moral certainty, even as he champions the distinctive value of science?

Perhaps our understanding of the end of the lecture was hidden from us. Weber’s goal is not simply to separate politics and science, but also to push the Marxists out of the classroom (Weber 2004, xix). Perhaps Weber was keenly aware of the precariousness of the value of science in his Here and Now of 1917 Germany. Perhaps his goal was to save science—somehow. He knows that science cannot be saved by an appeal to the virtues of the Enlightenment, for Marx and Nietzsche have showed how science and even reason are but value decisions—the scientist is a value-maker, just as the politician, the parent, and the preacher are, too (Weber 2004, 22). And, even if Weber did not believe those arguments, he is nevertheless aware that the material conditions of science are actively eroding around him: the university is becoming more and more politicized, professors more openly partisan, and the students more and more longing for “something else” (Weber 2004, 7).

Weber’s project is to save science from becoming too political by making politics more scientific. His solution is not to politicize science but to “scientize” politics—he presents the political defense of science by neutralizing and disenchanting all *other* values *including science* to be but—though not merely—individual *decisions*. Then, and only then, under this thoroughly disenchanted world will science survive *as that which is most needful* because all values need science—we need clarity. And, in precisely this world, the values that cause conflict—the

religious creeds and now political utopian doctrines—are excluded as illegitimately covering over disenchanting reality. Weber must be, though publicly disavow that he is, a value-maker. Here, in the *Science as Vocation* lecture Weber is showing his “ethic of responsibility”: he is a *polytropic* liar, like Odysseus, because he says what he must to achieve his end—as all good politicians should do.

IV. The “External Conditions” of the University a Hundred Years Later

Of all the things that Weber wrote in his “Science as a Vocation” lecture that remains true a hundred years later, it is perhaps not his understanding of academic science—the inner life of the academic—but the “external conditions” of the university and academia itself. This accomplishment should not be overshadowed by the other theoretical issues of the essay. In fact, Weber’s analysis of the university in the 1920s is perhaps even *more* true in 2020. In this section, we will briefly outline Weber’s relevance for understanding “academic politics” --i.e., the “external conditions” of the university. Then, we will discuss Weber’s proposed factors that contribute to the erosion of academic life—democracy, capitalism, and bureaucratization. Finally, we suggest one possible path that Weber leaves open for understanding the “external conditions” of the university a hundred years after Weber’s lecture.

For Weber, he is anxious that the university—an institution innately independent and in search for the truth—has been completely eroded. On the one hand, the institutions are no longer able to resist the need for funds, which makes them less independent, and, perhaps, directly dependent on public governmental research funds, or even funds from private non-governmental bodies: universities are now like other “state capitalist” institutions that need massive amounts of money to operate (3). With this need for massive operating monies comes dependency of the institution on the government (and thereby, indirectly, the public) and/or on corporations, all of which may have conflict of interest with the mission of the university. To make matters worse, Weber notes that this “American” trend also changes the relationships between individuals within the university: senior faculty become directors, who are more and more like managers, whereas the junior faculty become paid lecturers, who are more and more like employees (Weber 2004, 3-4). Unlike in other disciplines within the university, Weber is convinced that this “Americanization” will spread to even his own, where he is traditionally more like an “artisan” than an employee—the difference being that the artisan is more independent in his work life than the other.

On the other hand, not only is the (junior) faculty member dependent on the whims of senior faculty and administrators, mirroring the employee-employer relationship in capitalist modes, but a junior faculty member can only hope to achieve a promotion through *teaching*—a job now premised on being *popular* so students will pay tuition to the large university employer. The commodification of education is complete in the “American” model where what is produced in the classroom is more akin to what the students want to consume, than knowledge or science. This is Weber’s greatest fear for the future of universities and colleges—the mixing of mass democracy consumption, capitalism’s organizational principles, and the oppressive mediocrity of a highly bureaucratic system.

One hundred years later and our reality is worse than even Weber imagined. The employer-employee model—the “corporatization” of higher education—is the championed norm. Where at least there was the promise of tenure for the “lucky” junior faculty member, for many Ph.Ds. there is only adjunct work (which is completely at the whim of the employer). Even those with large endowments, universities are increasingly interested in “enrollments” and student admissions. The executive power of president and provosts—who are themselves increasingly beholden to a Board of Trustees singularly focused on the financial bottom-line—within the university system has consumed even the nominal powers of faculty governance.

A hundred years ago, Weber longed for the “old constitution” of the university where it was an independent place of learning, outside the grasp of partisan politics, and classes were taught by scholars who searched for truth and not by contingent employees who are most concerned with headcounts and student fees. For Weber, and for us certainly a hundred years later: “both in essence and appearance, the old constitution of the university has become a fiction” (Weber 2004, 4). The outside factors of capitalist consumer culture and its mass democracy, on the one hand, and the rationalizing bureaucracies of the massive research universities on the other—the “external conditions”—have placed academia in even more a precarious place in 2020.

But the truth is that the erosion of the university is not merely from the outside or *external* factors, but also from within the university itself, too. In other words, Weber’s own defense of science proved historically incapable of resisting the partisan and political pull of values. As we have tried to show above, part of Weber’s failure was simply that his view of science—the value of clarity—is itself misunderstood by Weber if he believes somehow that this value is value-free. In other words, in so far as academia adopts Weber’s view of facts and values, and that we cannot have knowledge of values, the university cannot—which Weber admits to his students in 1920—defend itself from other value systems that will easily dispense with the value and importance of clarity, among others.

But, perhaps Weber’s failure in this regard shows us a way forward to potentially reviving the “old constitution” of faculty independence and truth-seeking, but it will have to come at a cost Weber was unwilling to make in 1920: the university and the scientist are necessarily *value-creators*. In other words, the distinction between science and politics, between facts and values, must be abandoned in Weber’s strict sense. But what is gained is plenty. If we admit from the beginning that the University and, consequently, faculty members and their academic disciplines, carry a normative commitment—and, maximally, are creating normatively-committed students—then we can actually have ground to combat the eroding forces that are crippling the university’s enterprise.

One potential value is simply, as we have discussed above, the Weberian value of *clarity*. But, the value of clarity can defend itself as a value against others—which is often why we can rephrase Weberian clarity into the all-too-familiar common parlance of “critical thinking.” But, unlike the other political and partisan values out in the world, the university’s value of “critical thinking” is not *inherently* political or partisan *except defensively*—i.e., when challenged by other value systems. Additionally, in a way that Weber could not see or accept, the particular and peculiar value of clarity is always itself *contingent*: it accepts as a fact that science or academia may not, in turn, be the methods or instruments that produce clarity *and* that

clarity may extend to the realm of values, such that even the value of clarity is found wanting and replaceable. Unlike political and partisan value systems, Weber's concept of clarity—properly understood—may be able to both defend the university from the corrosive factors that have only become worse these last hundred years, *and* be a normative value that leaves open exactly the kind of contingency and progression that Weber valued so highly in early 20th century science.

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