

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

MAX WEBER, *Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*. Edited and with an introduction by John Dreijmanis, translation by Gordon C. Wells. New York: Algora Publishing, 221p., index.

Since there are already several translations of Weber's two classic essays, why another? The answer is quite simple: This excellent little volume provides a combination of helpful and interesting features unmatched by any of its predecessors.

In addition to Weber's well-known discussion of "science as a vocation," originally given as a lecture, we have translations of his other writings on science and academia. Some thirty-two items in all, these range from full-scale articles, speeches and letters to a single-page response to "A Challenge to a Duel at the University of Heidelberg." If the book's title is taken literally, however, the major piece on "politics as a vocation" was Weber's only treatment of that subject.

John Dreijmanis has meticulously – as he himself admits, almost compulsively – crafted some 500 plus footnotes to identify, explain, date, etc. practically every person, event, organization, etc. mentioned in the translated materials. In addition, he has provided a several page bibliography of Weberian literature and, for those not familiar with German academic terminology, a helpful glossary ranging from "beruf" to "wissenschaft." There is a thoughtful discussion, several pages long, of the major themes and subsequent influence of Weber's views on science and academia. Rather curiously, though, "politics as a vocation" receives only a two paragraph commentary.

Dreijmanis also succinctly sketches the major events of Weber's personal life and extraordinarily brief academic career, the latter perhaps the consequence of persistent physical and mental health problems. The physical ailments were apparently never clearly diagnosed and the mental illnesses seem to have been recurrent attacks of severe depression.

Probably the most unique feature of the book is the editor's explanation of Weber's personal and professional behavior and, to a significant degree, his intellectual views, in terms of "Carl Jung's ... theory of psychological types, as further developed by the Myers Briggs Type Indicator..." (1). If I understand correctly, this combination yields sixteen personality types of which, according to Dreijmanis, Weber was an ENTP, i.e., extroverted, intuitive and, in addition, "... creative, original, independent, individualistic and enthusiastic" (7).

Does this type of analysis materially enrich our understanding of Weber's ideas? For readers who are unfamiliar with such an approach, it may be an enlightening exposure to a mode of thinking once quite popular in American political science. For those familiar with it, and who accept its basic premises, the answer is obviously "yes." For those familiar with it but who reject those premises, the answer is probably "no." On balance, I think it fair to say, the possible positive outcomes justify Dreijmanis's labors in the psychological vineyard.

All of the translations in the book, I should mention, are to be credited to Gordon C. Wells. My inadequate mastery of German precludes me from commenting on the accuracy of his translation but I am happy to report that he has given us a clear, nicely readable text, not always an easy task when working from German to English.

So much for the book itself. Now for a few words about the substantive contents of the volume, a reviewer's obiter dicta, as it were. Re-reading Weber, I realized that I had forgotten the directness with which he voiced his opinions. To offer a few of many, many examples: On academic success – "Whether or not an adjunct professor, let alone an assistant, ever succeeds in achieving the position of a full professor, let alone of a head of an institute, is a matter of pure chance" (28). When young scholars come to ask for advice – "If the young man is a Jew, then, of course, we say to him *lasciate ogni speranza* [Abandon all hope, you who enter here]" (30). On the transient nature of scientific achievement – "...everyone who works in science knows that what he has achieved will be obsolete in ten, twenty, or fifty years" (34). On institutional reputation – "As far as the University of Berlin is concerned, it is, of course, true that appointment to a professorship there is generally regarded as good business in financial terms even today. But the time has passed when it was thought of as a high scholarly honor" (54). And on the temptations of political life – "Thus, the politician must daily and hourly overcome an all-too-human enemy within himself: common vanity, the mortal foe of all objective devotion and all ... distance from himself" (193).

As the reader may recall, Weber structured his two "vocational" lectures in terms of a comparison between the German and the American academic (1917) and political (1919) systems. Not surprisingly, he knew the former first-hand – and had a solid grasp of the latter. After describing the similarities and the differences between the two, he concluded that, everything considered, the German model of higher education was superior to the American but that the American political system was the more desirable of the two, not an unreasonable conclusion given the political situation in Germany at the time. He also predicted that higher education in Germany would become increasingly like its American counterpart. That did happen, to be sure, but only to a partial degree and with meaningful change not occurring for another several decades.

Though Weber wrote at length of the attributes and aspirations to be possessed by his "ideal" scientist and his "ideal" politician, respectively, he had no illusions about the reality of academic and political life in his home country, and especially in Prussia. In fact, as the translations in this book testify, much of his writings and his professional activities were devoted to issues arising from what he saw as blatant and gross violations of the ethical and professional standards he

prescribed. (See, for instance, the saga of his efforts to undo the decision at the University of Jena denying Robert Michels permission to pursue his Habilitation there because he was a member of the Social Democratic party (64-68).

How relevant are Weber's ideas today, almost a century later? My own sense is that "Science as a Vocation" is still the best treatment of that subject and that his views remain, whether we realize it or not, the starting point for any discussion or controversy over what constitutes proper scientific and academic behavior. By and large, we still expect academics and scientists, in their teaching and in their research, to abide by his guidelines as closely as realistically possible – and we are troubled, shocked and sometimes outraged, when that expectation is disappointed.

I don't think the same can be said of "Politics as a Vocation." Perhaps Weber set the bar far too high; perhaps we know too much political history and too much about the actual behavior of political leaders over the centuries; perhaps it reflected his hope, shared by many of his fellow countrymen in 1919, for a democratic politics in a newly republican Germany. Essentially a realist, I think that Weber would agree that prescriptions of Machiavelli and, say, Mosca have probably been much more influential than those he proposed. In any event, for those who are interested in these matters, I can think of no better place to start than with the volume under review. Dreijmanis and Wells are to be commended for a task well done.

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