Max Weber and the Two Universities

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Abstract
A set of events, long term trends, and internal conflicts has come to a head in the recent controversy over the Harvard President, the university's political role, and academic freedom. These raise questions about the traditional model of the vocation of scholarship and the role of the professor, and specifically about the continued relevance of the picture Weber himself famously presented. A recent book by Wendy Brown makes the case for a new model of 'responsibility' which reflects the idea that the role of the professor should be to kindle the 'desire' for a just and sustainable future through critique. The method of genealogy is presented as the means for both identifying harms resulting from usual practices and showing their historical contingency and thus the promise of their radical reform. This would represent the new 'responsibility' that notions of academic freedom conflict with and which the traditional scholar fails to fulfill. But the idea of radical contingency also conflicts with the Weberian idea that historical processes are intelligible and that the proper role of the professor is to clarify value-choices and identify their this-worldly implications without imposing them. Is this outdated? And is there a role for the traditional scholar in the purpose-oriented university?

Keywords: Max Weber, Wendy Brown, professorial responsibility, academic freedom, politicized universities, radical enlightenment.

No sooner than the ink had begun to dry (or should we say the pixels stopped changing) on the publications written to celebrate the centennial of Weber's 'Science as a Profession and Vocation' ([1919]2012) than Covid and a series of shocks to the university, especially in the United States, changed the conditions for discourse. The shocks included the 'enrollment cliff,' the early arrival of an expected decline in students for long-anticipated demographic reasons, an unexpectedly rapid decline in enrollments in the humanities, notably history, the recognition that young men especially were choosing not to go to college, a simultaneous and related turn against wokeness, a rapidly developing skepticism about the medical research establishment as a result of the admitted

failure of Covid vaccines to prevent the disease as promised and the revelation of the false narratives that were officially promoted about its origins together with the silence of the grant-dependent academy and the intimidation of those who spoke out, the great price inflation and the spectacle of prominent academic economists minimizing what was part of people's everyday experience, and ongoing crises of governance in universities as presidents resigned, and politicians and donors intervened.

If this were not enough, the events of October 7, 2023, produced an outburst of anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian demonstrations that quickly veered into anti-Semitic and anti-western directions. The Presidents of three elite universities, called to testify to congress about their response, repeated carefully crafted excuses that were immediately seen as hypocritical about free speech—defending students calling for genocide at the same time as they enforced elaborate regimes prohibiting misgendering and micro-aggressions, and promoting anti-racism. The scientist President of one major university, Stanford, had been caught up in a scandal involving what amounted to research fraud. The limited scholarship of the recently appointed President of Harvard, Claudine Gay, was scrutinized after her performance at the congressional hearing and numerous instances of what was arguably plagiarism were found. Much of the scrutiny was in politicized on-line forums which often either seized on them as evidence of fraudulence or attacked the scrutinizers as racists or as inferiors jealous of Harvard excellence; the main results appeared on Substack, and were selectively amplified in the subsequent public discussion. Soon older questions about the dataset some of this research was based on, which she had refused to share, were raised anew. But 700 Harvard faculty supported her in a petition, some probably motivated by the idea that outsiders should have no influence over the university. A smaller number called for her to resign.

The idea of academic freedom was caught up in this crisis. It was publicly challenged, along with the idea of freedom of speech in general, by the crisis produced by the Israeli-Palestinian war, which was seen as a source of harm, but also which produced problems over the key notions of harm, genocide, and hate speech, which now seemed to be selectively applied and in ways that reproduced the political and intellectual divisions that discourse was supposed to cure. This occurred against the background of an effort to delegitimate the west and 'whiteness' in the name of anti-racism, decolonization, and resistance to cognitive imperialism, incarceration, and environmental destruction, all of which were to be laid at the feet of racialized capitalism. The war was a convenient fit for the zero-sum theory of oppression to the effect that

every group's misery was the result of another group's 'privilege' and exploitation.[1] This kind of speech was promoted; responses to it were punished. The short-term result of these conflicts was a widespread acceptance of the need to reconsider these core freedoms as harmful and speech in need of more regulation, especially on-line. But there was also a reaction in favor of free speech and academic freedom, and a sense that it had already been deeply compromised. The fact that people had come to self-censor and act out of fear had become obvious, and documented (Clark *et al.* 2023; Stevens, Jussim, and Honeycutt 2020).

There was much more: the US Supreme Court had just decided, on June 23, 2023, that the scheme of racial preferences that Harvard and the University of North Carolina had relied on were cases of illegal discrimination[2], leading to a massive effort to circumvent the ruling and continue the practices under different terms. In science, retractions, conflict of interest issues, and financial misdeeds had become a world-wide epidemic, in part as a result of the metricization of research evaluation and rewards, in part because of the vast system of science funding itself, which produced an artificial competition oriented toward pay-offs rather than intellectual content, and, particularly in the US, great financial rewards for patents and business deals—the perfect example of the neo-liberal idea of artificial competition. At the same time, in the humanities and the social sciences, employment in academic life has become more precarious. Tenure, and the freedoms it implied, has become rarer and alternative forms of support were tied to other agendas. Robert Leroux, the late scholar of French liberalism, has written about the two universities: the parts devoted to traditional scholarship and scholarly values, and the part devoted to equity and social justice (Leroux 2022). It would perhaps be useful to think of a third: the part subordinated to the grant system, though no part, including this part, is free from issues of social justice.

Beyond this, are the transformations of digitalization, which have made scholarship available far more widely, but at the same time reinforced existing hierarchies of attention. The innovation of Chat-GPT and other large language models such as BARD have upended (to what extent is unclear) traditional models of student paper writing, and to an unknown extent professional writing, especially in the text-based scholarly world, much of which consists in interpreting and explicating existing works and in the kinds of compare and contrast exercises in

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1.   A particularly clear presentation of this theory and its importance in the educational curriculum is given in (Stein 2018), but the examples are everywhere.
2.   https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199_hgdj.pdf

which these programs excel. Because these programs are so useful, and already widely used, as crutch or convenience, the notions of authorship, plagiarism, and originality have been obscured and made obsolescent.

Max Weber and Wendy Brown

Some of these long-term trends are primarily found in American academia, some are international. Some national systems have been relatively immune. But, on the whole, the academic world, and the world itself, is very different from Weber's time, and this raises a question. What, if anything, does any of this have to do with Weber? And what possible relevance can there be of texts composed a century ago in reference to a cultural situation and the supposed obligations of professors in a university system that barely resembles either the situation of the present time or its universities? Oddly enough, this question has been addressed in a recent (2023) book by Wendy Brown, *Nihilistic Times: Thinking with Max Weber.* Brown is a long-term advocate of the need to invent a 'doctrine that [would] conceive and chart power in terms other than logic, develop historical political consciousness in terms other than progress, articulate our political investments without notions of teleology and naturalized desire, and affirm political judgment in terms that depart from moralism and conviction…. for a different inhabitation of the political world; they limn a different genre of political consciousness and political purpose (Brown 2001: 4-5).

Brown's new book, *Nihilistic Times: Thinking with Max Weber* (2023), based on her Tanner lectures, recognizes the present situation as one of 'nihilism,' or hopeless polarization, which the present educational regime is failing to address. She turns to Weber both as a source of inspiration and to correct him. Her appeal to Weber allows for the possibility to engage the differences more analytically in terms of specific comparisons rather than through a general, and necessarily reductive account of the conflicts which would merely reproduce the polarities. What inspires Brown is Weber's diagnosis of the value crisis of the time, which is her basic starting point. What repels her is his limitation of the role of the professor in relation to values: rather than just analyzing them, they should be actively engaged in a project of deepening them as worldviews, with a view to a revolution at the level of desire. This is language from Gayatri Spivak, who calls for the humanities to engage students in an 'un-coercive re-arrangement of desires' (Spivak 2004: 526).[3] For Brown, the idea of intellectualizing worldviews as 'values'

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3.   A discussion of Spivak and the pedagogical use of this theory is presented in

to be assessed rationally and exposed as choices for which one is responsible is an error, and indeed shows an inconsistency in Weber. Weber was right, she thinks, to see values as deriving from worldviews. And worldviews, for her, are the expression and codifications of desires, of the subrational, not value-choices.

What is at stake here? One can see the issue about desire and values quite simply in Weber's own example: peace. The desire for peace is one thing; the 'value-choice' another. But they have a relation. To clarify the 'desire' one can separate its factual and valuative elements, and through this identify the value-choice at stake, something which the mere expression of desire hides. A clarified value of 'peace' might be this: a stable military balance of power, through 'a sturdy militia to counter any violation of its borders,' which discourages each player from aggression (Weber [1916] 1994: 77) Or it might be this: a complete rejection in principle of any kind of defense against aggression ([1919] 1994: 364). Each comes from the same desire, but once the desire is analyzed into its valuative elements in this way, we get a value-choice which is not concerned with consequences in this world, and one which is. The same kind of analysis works for notions like agency, justice, and so forth. They need to be specified in order to be analyzed rationally and empirically. Does justice mean a coercive order of law and punishment of the transgressors of the law, with all the risks of error and abuse this implies? Or does it mean a state in which everyone feels treated fairly and acts freely according to their own idea of fairness and freedom? One is a this-world choice; the other is an ethic of conviction unrealizable in this world.

One can see why one would want to evade this kind of analysis and seek something else. And this is what Brown and her allies do. Their desire is for a 'more just and sustainable order' with academics in the role, not of Weberian critics and analysts who would ask hard questions about what these desires mean in terms of identifiable choices and their causal and valuative implicatons, but of those whose professorial role is to 'kindle and educate *desire* for such an order and to build that desire into a worldview and viable political project' (Brown 2023: 58; emphasis in original). This is precisely what Weber rejected: academics as the quasi-

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Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti 'Conflicting Epistemic Demands in Poststructuralist and Postcolonial Engagements with Questions of Complicity in Systemic Harm' (2014), which gives a clear idea of the ideological orientation in play. Her focus is more on the idea that complicity with oppressive structures has been concealed and disavowed, and that the needed education is the revelation of this complicity. She is also concerned that new forms will simply create new oppressions, a concern that Brown omits.

authoritative creators of politically potent but potentially disastrous worldviews which, like the desire for peace, are ambiguous between their apparent this-world promises and other-world conviction; that are viable as a political movement, but catastrophic in their consequences.

Brown is at least clear about this. She doesn't care where the new worldview comes from, but she takes it to require charisma, and to be other than the mere reinvestment in deracinated values. What she cares about is what the new worldview would do: overcome the binaries that divide us and relieve us of our nihilistic condition by providing us with a viable political project: a politics of hope and aspiration. Academics are kindlers, not the source of the fire itself. Their task, as she explains it, is to teach students to deconstruct binaries, values, and so forth, in preparation for the new revelation. If Brown is right, Weber's strictures on value freedom, the limited role of the professor according to the traditional obligations of academic apoliticality, are wrong, and therefore obstacles to the resolution of nihilism, and to the project that uses the desire for more just and sustainable order to produce a political movement. Weber's is merely a doctrine that must be deconstructed as an enemy of hope.

The Two Enlightenments

Is there a Weberian reply to this picture? I will leave aside the nuances of Weber's views on *Weltbilder* and the concept of values, his analysis of meaningful social action, and his insistence that categories of social analysis are abstractions. There is nevertheless a core difference between them that generalizes in a relevant way. We can think of it, analogically, in terms of an earlier difference, between what Jonathan Israel called the Enlightenment and the Radical Enlightenment (Israel 2006). There is another aspect to a response: the role of the professor. We traditionally thought it was the job of the scholar to master the tradition and pass it on improved, an understanding implicit in Weber's idea that the role of the scientist was to continuously surpass what had gone before. The difference between the Radical enlightenment, as defined by Israel, and the enlightenment we associate with the liberal tradition, is complex, and Israel's extensive treatment of it is full of nuance and is designed to be non-reductive. But to be reductive about it, the essence of the difference is that for the Radical enlightenment everything about human life can be changed in accordance with reason, while the liberal variant is that everything can be questioned, but not everything that is questioned can be changed, or even securely known. For the liberal variant, some apparently irrational practices and even superstitions

meet human and social needs or have unintended consequences that are worth preserving. They arose and persisted for reasons, though not the reasons given by their ideologists, and may not be known or obvious. For the radical variant, wholesale replacement is possible and just, and it is only because of the delusions, power, and interests of the oppressors that the unjust world is not replaced.

What does this have to do with Weber? In contrast with Critical Theory, Marxism, and also with Ernst Troeltsch, who hoped for a re-Christianization of the West, Weber thought that much of what existed in society was there to stay, because there were powerful reasons for these things being there that had not disappeared. One of the undercurrents of the distinction between the two forms of enlightenment that reappears in Brown (and Spivak and others) is a disagreement over the nature of history itself. For the radicals, history is radically contingent and non-teleological, so that a leap into freedom is possible: the constraints of the past are themselves the result of contingencies. Everything could have been otherwise. Therefore, the future can be radically otherwise. The way to think, and to teach, is the method of genealogy, which reveals that 'the randomness and discontinuity of history make the past *and* present more, rather than less, difficult to understand, as they weight the present more heavily with an infinitely complex history, a history that conforms neither to temporal nor spatial logics' (Brown 2001: 112; emphasis in original). Politics is similarly unconstrained: 'political aims need not be any less historically and contextually contingent than the conditions out of which the aims are born and in which they intervene; they need not precede or transcend the political domain' (Brown 2001: 94). The pedagogy that goes with this is to think not of what is and why it is that way, a hopeless enterprise in the face of the reality of contingency, but of what could be different from what is.[4]

Weber's account of the role of values and the proper limits to what a professor could honestly say limited it to clarification and the consideration of consequences. Our judgements of consequences are probabilistic, but the world is nevertheless ordered. He acknowledged that an ethic of conviction was beyond rational assessment. His concern was rather with a basic problem: that people confused what was an ethic of conviction with a this-world one. And this provided the professor with a task. Deciding on values was a personal matter, so the role of the teacher was limited. One could show what values were consistent, and what the this-world

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4. The term 'social construction' has been recruited to make the same point: facts and institutions are arbitrary. The origin of the term, and especially its place in science studies, made the opposite point: that social construction was a complex and constraining process beyond 'the world' itself.

consequences of value-choices might be. These were matters on the side of fact, or fact together with logic. For Brown, this was no longer a matter of values, which could be examined in a dispassionate Weberian way. Desire was not something based on rational justification; a pedagogy of desire escaped the Weberian limits. This pedagogy instead placed itself on a level with Weber, as both competitive and superior. Its premise is that all 'education' and all academic life is purposeful, including Weber's. Sometimes the purposes were bad, for example colonial and white supre-macist ones; sometimes they were good, liberatory, anti-racist, agency-producing, and justice-oriented ones. Weber's pedagogy needed to be judged in the same way. Brown, like Schmitt, regards his way of thinking about values and facts as 'neutralization.' It pretends not to be political, but it is. For thinkers of this kind, the distinction between fact and value itself is a false binary which could be revealed genealogically to derive from a program of domination or a relation of oppressor and victim, such as the relation between imperialist and colonized, precisely because it cauterized hope by absolutizing the present and the past and the causal order they exhibited.

Why is this not a value-choice, and a confused one at that? Lying behind the argument is a set of vague moral absolutes that don't require justification. 'Just and sustainable' is a fundamental desire that needs no rational support or additional justification, any more than any other desire. In practice the bad purposes came to be interpreted in terms of terms of 'harm.' The concept of harm became the de facto replacement for a value system. To ask where one got the authority to pronounce something good or bad was itself harmful: it asserted the authority of the harmer over the harmed. But this denial of authority was selective: only the oppressed, or those speaking for them, could say they were harmed.[5] The suppression of hope was, however, unambiguously a harm.

With this we get a new concept of professorial responsibility, which Brown, like her counterparts, affirms by insisting on the limitation of academic freedom and freedom of speech. The new idea of professorial responsibility follows from the Spivak-derived idea that these 'freedoms,'

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5.   Needless to say this understanding is never articulated as a coherent theory, which is why Brown uses the notion of desire. Harm is normally invoked by exam-ples. Freedom of speech and protest over harmful speech is a typical case where the issue arises, and typically the value of freedom of speech (and protest) is not directly attacked, but a notion like 'responsibility' is invoked and an affective harm is described. An example of this is the exchange between Eddie Glaude, Jr. of Prince-ton, and Berkeley Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky. Here the harm is entirely on the level of feelings. https://www.law.berkeley.edu/podcast-episode/free-speech-on-campus/

together with traditional teaching, allow for the disavowal of responsibility for the negative effects—the harms—of the dominant ideology, and therefore reproduce its harms. To be responsible is to be responsible first and foremost to considerations of further harm to the oppressed. This is what the code word 'responsibility' means. If we are to choose the good purposes, it follows that pedagogy, and the role of the professor, and of the curriculum, need a discipline other than Weber's and against Weber's: the one which guides the student in the task of kindling new desires unchained from its limitations. Thus the pedagogical centrality of genealogy and the philosophy of history on which it depends:

> The point of genealogy is to map the discourses and political rationalities constitutive of our time such that they are brought into relief as historical, contingent, partial, and thus malleable, such that 'that-which-is' can be thought as 'that-which-might-not-be.' Its point is to introduce the possibility of a different discursive understanding of ourselves and our possibilities (Brown 2001: 112).

Ordinary scholars, seeking to master the tradition using their freedom to pass it on improved, are thus cast as part of the apparatus of oppression. They fail to protect the oppressed by continuing to teach the oppressive tradition, by failing to teach it as 'that-which-might-not-be,' and the lesson of radical malleability. They practice the wrong kind of skepticism: by attempting to clarify values and show people the consequences of value-choices they appeal to an image of history or social knowledge that fails to allow for the radical contingency revealed by genealogy and therefore the radical possibilities of a new discursive understanding of ourselves.

   Nor is this view of history and society debatable: to analyze social life or history in terms of more or less predictable outcomes is to foreclose possibility, the possibility of radical contingency, and to thus harm and to fail in one's professorial responsibilities. To identify constraints is to portray the world as less open to radical change than it is, and to suffocate hope. Because contingency reigns, the entire project of testing value choices against probable outcomes is pointless and a kind of false mask on the future that can only conceal liberatory possibilities and a better world. To insist that the discussion of harms itself requires a conception of history that allows for this kind of analysis—to identify harms in a coherent way and to show causes— is itself a form of cruelty. It is an ungroundable insistence on a discursive understanding of ourselves that is contingent, oppressive, and that we are free to discard. Nor is there any mystery about harms: harms take the form of feelings of injustice, deprivation of dignity and agency, and oppression that are either evident or so generalized that 'analysis' of them is itself a form of violence. To respond to this in terms of the traditional understanding

of causality, history, and the ideal of an understandable universe is not possible. To do so is to fall into the role of oppressor.[6]

Weber was of course well-aware of contingency, and his own genealogies, for example, of western rationalism, were full of them. But this did not preclude thinking in terms of probabilities or using the stable causal patterns of the past to predict, fallibilistically, the future. Genealogy within the limits of the intelligible provides plenty of scope for imagining alternatives. But it does not provide validation for the vague aspirations that Brown wants kindled. The project of clarification, for Weber, was to bring these inchoate and tacit things into the realm of discourse and analysis. This was a specific kind of neutralization: it intentionally turned what was encountered as desire into objects of value-choice, rather than feelings. But that was the point. It was not a denial of desires. It reflected a recognition that worldviews, moral feelings, affect, and rationality itself were mixed up in the amalgam that made human action meaningful, and that unmixing them, separating the elements, was a matter of self-conscious abstraction that 'misrepresented' by design the entanglement of human action. Nor was it a contradiction, as Brown insisted: it was an open difference. To elevate desire over values is merely to elevate this unanalyzed and inchoate mass over clarity and the intellectual integrity of coherence. That is not to say that we cannot understand choosing between feeling and clarity abstractly itself as a value choice. Indeed, the real possibility of a choice for feeling was known in his Heidelberg milieu, for example in the Stefan George Circle, and in mysticism. But facing up to it as a value-choice, as Weber did, is to turn it back into an object of analysis, to disenchant it. Reducing desire to value-choice in this disenchanting way is precisely the thing Brown rejects.

The Liberal University and the Just University

Was Weber wrong about what is appropriate for scholars or the university? To think about this it is important to distinguish two separate questions: the problem of 'vocation' in the university as it presently exists or has existed, and the problem of the vocation of learning or *Wissenschaft* itself, which reaches back to Socrates or beyond. As to the university, and to any similar institution, the mantra that there has never been a university free of economics or politics is true. The non-political,

6. The appeal of Critical Race Theory is that it ignores the usual causal variables for income differences, which explain most of the variation, in favor of 'structural racism,' which cannot be measured as a cause, or a variable among others, but only as a supposed effect.

non-ideological university has never existed: even in Weber's time there were divisions, which his own speeches and denunciations make clear. The fact of administration, and the issues it generated when it was compelled to make decisions were present then as now. The question is how the relation between the need for money and the state is managed, how the university is administered, and how much (and what kind) of intellectual and communicative autonomy is achieved.

The 'liberal' university, the model which Weber appealed to and against which Brown writes, involved a self-denying ordinance on the part of science, which avoided making political statements as part of science, in exchange for the right to speak freely within science, and an administration that was formally neutral and a buffer from external pressures: a wall. That the wall between politics and scholarship depended on neutralization — on the ideal of pure science and the fact-value distinction — made it philosophically problematic. But it served its practical legal and administrative purpose when these distinctions were accepted on both sides, just as similar conventional distinctions between speech and conduct serve, in the law, to protect free speech.

The liberal university is rooted in history, but at the same time anomalous: the medieval university and the university tradition until the nineteenth century was wedded to orthodoxy and the task of enforcing the intellectual tradition as well as transmitting it, and often intolerant and dogmatic. Some aspects of this earlier intolerance linger. The critics of the liberal university, who demand responsibility and wish to impose, or kindle, the correct consciousness, based on the desire for justice, reflect this earlier ideal, but provide different content. There is nothing inevitable about the arrangement Weber describes, and when he talks about the inherent norms of the professor, he is talking about the properties of this historically situated role. This arrangement with the state provided for autonomy in theory, and to some extent in practice.[7] But it was only given to those who had proved themselves through some act which showed they deserved it — deserved an appointment under this arrangement. As Weber understood, this was a high hurdle, and often unfairly enforced. But the freedom, despite its limits, was real.

Is this a realistic picture of the present state of science? To ask this is to ask whether the 'vocation' is still possible, or what vocation is possible. For natural scientists the answer is simple: they are slaves to the grants system, metrics, and the market. Gloria Origgi calls this 'voluntary

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7. In the United States, and elsewhere, especially when state universities co-existed with Catholic ones, private universities did not need to honor this arrangement, and often did not. But in the US, for major universities, autonomy and academic freedom were nevertheless accepted as promises to be honored anyway.

epistemic servitude' (Origgi 2017: 216-40). For the scientists the choice is either to comply or be left out. This is the limit of autonomy: the freedom to supplicate for grants. But within this limit, they are free. Weber was already well aware that this was the case in the research institutes of his own time: 'The large institutes of medicine and the natural sciences are 'state capitalist' enterprises….The [scientific] worker—that is to say: the assistant—is dependent on the means of work put at his disposal by the state; consequently, he is just as dependent on the institute director as a worker in a factory [on the factory owner] (since the institute director, in completely good faith, regards that institute as 'his' institute and acts at his discretion in it), and his position is often as precarious as that of every "proletaroid" existence…' ([1917] 2012: 336). Nor are the scientists alone: to some extent, everyone in the present university shares in this position of dependence and precarity and relies on the arrangements that provide a degree of autonomy despite their dependence.

The question for the teacher reading Weber today is whether it is possible in the social sciences and humanities to be the kind of scholar he describes—to have anything approximating the vocation he describes in the present university—despite increasing intrusions and demands for accountability. In one sense there is a simple answer. If one keeps to one's scholarship, there are many niches in universities where one can be undisturbed by overt political intrusion, or the demand to engage in the kind of kindling of desire for a new world that Brown advocates, unrewarded and unnoticed, but safe. But these niches are disappearing. For academics in the university, the autonomy they enjoy, and its limits, are those of the disciplines they are appointed in, particularly sociology, political science, history, philosophy, and related fields. These are fields in trouble, especially for theoretical topics and the topics related to Weber. The limits, enforced by the market, are obvious, the new niches few, and the larger processes that produce metricization, the rise of the academic precariat, and the audit mentality, tighten the constraints.

The mechanisms of discipline in the modern university are at the moment mostly indirect, though often onerous and heavy-handed. Administrators and critics have neither the time nor the sophistication to screen directly. But no one can hide from metrics, which do not favor niche scholarship. Nor can the Weber scholar hide, ultimately, from politicization. Interest in Weber has waxed and waned in relation to the ideological contestation of the moment. Harvard, in the early nineteen-fifties and in the face of an active Communist student movement, used Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis and book to inoculate their freshmen from Marxism. Martin Luther King Jr, educated on the other bank of the Charles, was moved to say that 'We have deluded ourselves into

believing the myth that capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifice' (King 1967).[8] After 1989, Weber was briefly in fashion, quoted by politicians, and occasionally still is. But the kind of ideological contestation that made Weber relevant and honored in the liberal university makes him dangerously unfashionable in the present one.

That Brown would treat Weber as a target is indicative: he represents one of the two universities, and it is the one in retreat: she represents the one in ascendence. Despite the welcome and encouraging interest of young Weber scholars, the prospects for traditional scholarship on the topics related to Weber or his concerns are increasingly limited and marginalized. Most of the younger people who consider themselves Weber scholars are in the precariat. They do not have academic appointments or have marginal ones. In some countries, where the grant system is generous to the precariat, the same freedom that exists for natural science exists for people in the humanities and social sciences: the freedom of supplication. But it is freedom-dependent on the ability to invent projects that please the system.

Beyond these unfavorable institutional conditions, the emerging Weber scholar and the 'master the tradition and pass it on improved' scholar elsewhere in the theoretical social sciences and the humanities, faces daunting challenges. The model of text production that typifies the literature on Weber himself, such as the clarifying interpretation through summarization and comparison and contrast, already ridiculed in fields like sociology by the phrase 'what Weber meant' as a model of triviality, are the strength of AI, a strength which will only increase.[9] Training students in the production these kinds of texts has always been essential apprenticeship and this apprenticeship has been the means of transmitting means of thinking. But the idea of educating people by making them produce inferior AI-duplicative texts in the hope that they may someday produce work superior to AI-duplicative texts seems doomed. And even the traditional modes of academic communication

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8. 'The Three Evils of Society'; August 31, 1967, Keynote Address at the National Conference on New Politics in Chicago. https://www.nwesd.org/ed-talks/equity/the-three-evils-of-society-address-martin-luther-king-jr/ https://www.history.com/news/martin-luther-king-jr-speeches

9. The proprietary AI systems used in specific business applications are already far advanced beyond the publicly available large language models. We have not yet seen the development of the kind of academically specific systems that might be constructed, though they have been proposed, for example for reviewing papers. But the rapid development of machine translation, and its increasing application to scholarly publishing, is indicative of what can be done, and is another example of the replacement of traditional scholarly tasks by machines.

seem obsolescent. There is more life and more meaningful scholarly contention on Substack, blogs, and job boards than in the journals.

I would prefer not to conclude on a pessimistic note. We are not bereft. The situation is nearly as unsettled as it was for the students Weber addressed. Yet that generation, born within a few years of the turn of the twentieth century, was exceptional: out of the turmoil came such figures as Hans Morgenthau, Leo Strauss, Michael Oakeshott, J.-P. Mayer, Raymond Aron, Talcott Parsons, Carl Joachim Friedrich, Michael Polanyi, as well as the key players of the Frankfurt School, including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Franz Neumann, among many others with varying politics, such as Aurel Kolnai. Shock has its intellectual benefits, though they may not be immediately apparent.

The idea of scholarly quality still prowls around like the ghost of dead religious beliefs in most academic settings. Brown's book itself is an example of the tribute vice pays to virtue: she is unable to conceptualize the situation that drives her own proposal without reference to Weber and Weberian concepts, and she needs to step far outside the ordinary understanding of historical knowledge to make plausible her hope for using the university to kindle desire as a springboard to a 'viable political project' (Brown 2023: 57-58). It is not clear that the model of the university that she faithfully, along with Claudine Gay, represents, is itself viable. Its contradictions have been exposed by events. It is parasitic on the credibility of the academic life of the past, that *intra muros* it disdains but cannot yet openly disown. There is a constituency for the preservation of the older model and older virtues, however embattled and marginalized. Moreover, to abandon the virtues is to remove the justification for the walls and protections that went with them and invite the interference that the walls were there to protect against. It is to fail to see that the walls have two sides.

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