

MAX WEBER 1919

#### WORTHY QUOTES FROM *POLITICS AS A VOCATION*

*The modern state is ultimately defined sociologically by a specific means that is inherent to it: [physical force or violence].*

*Those who engage in politics strive for power: either as a means in the service of other goals (idealistic or selfish), or power "for its own sake": to enjoy the feeling of prestige it provides.*

*Devotion to the charisma of the prophet or the leader in war, or of the great demagogue in the church or parliament, means that he is personally considered the inwardly "called" leader of the people who submit to him not by virtue of custom or statute, but because they believe in him.*

*All political party struggles are not just for substantive goals but, above all, for the power of patronage.*

*In order to be useful to the leader, followers must blindly obey, be a machine in the American sense ...*

*One enemy the politician must overcome in himself every day and hour - an utterly trivial, all-too-human enemy - ordinary vanity ...*

*Whoever seeks the salvation of their own soul and the salvation of other souls does not seek it through politics, which has entirely different tasks: tasks that can only be solved by violence.*

#### WHO WAS MAX WEBER AND SOME OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION?

First, what Weber says does not apply only to "them." It applies to "us," too, and to people who are neither them nor us. This is how the world works. Politics is a necessary business that brings out the worst, and hopefully the best in people. Some people really enjoy it and the rest put up with it or try to ignore it.

Max Weber was born in old world Germany of 1864, and died of natural causes in a new world of a transformed Germany of 1920. He was a scholar and one of the founders of sociology. He was also a lawyer, a philosopher, a not very successful candidate for political office, and an insightful and frank critic of politics. Weber wrote a great deal but in this essay I will address only *Politics as a Vocation* [*Politik als Beruf*], a speech he gave in January 1919 to university students.[1,2,3,4,5] Everything that follows is from *Politics as a Vocation*. What I have interjected is in square brackets. Be aware, though, that Weber is difficult to translate and whatever appears here or in my sources (at the end of this essay) may be, one could say, creative or inspired.

In what follows you will not find a rain of double-quotes, just a few when useful. The text is entirely a translation of Weber's lecture; to add double-quotes would make it unreadable. I have freely used the not-copyrighted work of Tony Waters, reference [4], and offer him my gratitude and encourage you to read *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, reference [5]. I have also relied on Reitter and Welmons' *Charisma and Disenchantment*, reference [2], another good read, and used Google Translate along with my own judgment. No AI has been used.

Weber uses the word *Gewalt* throughout *Politics as a Vocation*. Straight-up, it means power. However it is always "dressed" explicitly or implicitly. It can denote actual or threatened violence, coercive power, such as through legal proceedings or financial controls, and so on. I will try to present this in as fair a way as I can while not hiding its ambiguity and complexity.[6]

#### AND NOW, A VERY SHORT VERSION OF THE TEXT OF *POLITICS AS A VOCATION*

What is politics? In this lecture, it is the management or influencing the management of the modern state. The modern state is ultimately defined sociologically by a specific means that is inherent to it: physical [force or violence] [*der physischen Gewaltsamkeit*]. This is not the state's normal or only means, but it is a necessary one.

When we say of a question that it is a "political" question, of a minister or civil servant that they are a "political" civil servant, of a decision that it is "politically" motivated, what is always meant is that interests in the distribution, maintenance, or shifting of power are decisive for the answer to that question, or determine that decision, or define the sphere of activity of the civil servant in question. Those who engage in politics strive for power [*Macht*]: either as a means in the service of other goals (idealistic or selfish), or power "for its own sake": to enjoy the feeling of prestige it provides.

The state is a human community comprising a specific territory wherein it successfully claims the monopoly of legitimate physical violence [*legitimer physischer Gewaltsamkeit*]. All other groups or individuals within this territory are granted the right to physical violence only to the extent the state permits it. The modern state, just like the forms that preceded it [kingdoms, tribes, and so on], is a relationship of people over people, based on the means of violence that is at least perceived to be legitimate.

Why do people agree to the claimed authority of a ruling power? There are three grounds for legitimacy of rule. First, custom, valid from memory and habit. Next, the authority of an exceptional gift; this is charisma and depends on the entirely personal devotion and trust in this leader [whether a prophet, warlord, demagogue or selected ruler]. Finally, rule by virtue of the law; belief in the validity of legal statutes [such as a constitution] and conformance to rational rules. There are, of course, highly compelling motives of fear and hope — fear of the revenge of magical powers or the ruler, hope for reward in this or an after life.

This lecture is primarily interested in rule based on devotion to the purely personal "charisma" of the "leader" [*Führer* — a general term, only later specific to one person]. Devotion to the charisma of the prophet or the leader in war, or of the great demagogue in the church or parliament, means that he is personally considered the inwardly "called" leader of the people who submit to him not by virtue of custom or statute, but because they believe in him. What is peculiar to the West is political leadership in the form of the "demagogue", who has grown on the soil of the city-state, which is unique to the West, especially to the culture of the Mediterranean, and then of the parliamentary "party leader," who has grown on the soil of the constitutional state, which is also unique to the West.

People have to be predisposed to obey the men who claim to exert legitimate power [through agreement, admiration, or fear]; and, given this obedience, the rulers must have at their disposal the personnel and equipment needed to exert physical force when necessary. More specifically, then, politics is the striving for a share of power or for influencing the distribution of power between states, or within a state between the groups of people it encompasses.

The people who administer this rule - the individuals who concretely represent political authority (just as such people constitute the outward appearance of every other kind of authority) - are not, of course, bound to obey those who hold power solely because of the legitimating idea discussed above. They are also bound by two factors that appeal to their personal interests: material gain and social status. In the case of demagogic charismatic leaders, rewards are the spoils of exploiting the ruled by means of a monopoly of public offices, profits determined by political loyalty, and bonuses to flatter their vanity.

In the past, fiefs, land grants, benefices of all kinds, and, with the development of a monetary economy, especially gratuities, were the typical remuneration of princes, victorious conquerors, or successful party leaders for their followers; today, it is offices of all kinds in parties, newspapers, cooperatives, health insurance funds, municipalities, and states that are awarded by party leaders for loyal service. All political party struggles are not just for substantive goals but, above all, for the power of patronage. In contrast, the modern civil service has evolved into a highly qualified, intellectually skilled workforce, trained through years of specialized education and possessing a highly developed sense of professional honor in the interest of integrity. Without this, the danger of terrible corruption and common philistinism would hang over us as our fate, threatening even the purely technical performance of the state apparatus, whose importance to the economy, especially with increasing socialization, has steadily risen and will continue to rise. The amateurish administration by opportunistic politicians, which in the United States [such as under Andrew Jackson] saw hundreds of thousands of officials, down to the postman, replaced depending on the outcome of the presidential election and did not recognize the concept of a career civil servant, has long since been riddled with holes by the Civil Service Reform.

We need to realize ... that when popularly elected leaders are put in charge of parties, their followers' souls are hollowed out; the followers undergo a spiritual proletarianization [*die seelische Proletarisierung*] one might say. In order to be useful to the leader, followers must blindly obey, be a machine in the American sense - with no pretensions to their own views or vanity connected to status in the "local elite." Only this kind of organization made Lincoln's election possible. That is the price to pay for having a leader.

[Why be involved in politics?] The first thing it offers is a sense of power. even in relatively modest positions, the full-time professional politician will feel his influence over other people, his share of power over them; most of all, he will feel his own importance as one who holds at least some of the guiding threads of a historically important process in his hands.

One enemy the politician must overcome in himself every day and hour - an utterly trivial, all-too-human enemy - ordinary vanity, the definite enemy of any commitment to one's goals and of every kind of detachment, in this case a sense of perspective about oneself.

But for the politician to do his job, he needs a desire for power; this lust for power, as it is often called, is precisely how he acts as a politician, and is one of the politician's normal attributes. The sin against the holy spirit of his calling begins when the politician's lust for power is no longer grounded in objective reality and instead simply intoxicates him personally.

In fact, there are ultimately only two kinds of deadly sin in the political realm, often the same but not always: lack of objectivity and lack of responsibility. Vanity - the need to put oneself at center stage as much as possible - is what most tempts the politician into either or both of these sins, all the more so as the demagogue has to try to be effective, make an impression, and is thus always at risk of turning into a mere actor and minimizing his own responsibility for the consequences of his actions. Losing objectivity makes him long for the brilliant appearance of power irrespective of his actual power, while his irresponsibility consists of enjoying power for its own sake, not for the sake of any substantive purpose.

No ethics in the world can avoid the fact that achieving "good" ends is, in numerous cases, tied to accepting morally questionable or at least dangerous means and the possibility or even the probability of [collateral damage]; and no ethics in the world can determine when and to what extent the ethically good end "justifies" the ethically dangerous means and side effects. ... In politics, the decisive means is the use of [violence or coercive power].

Luther shifted moral responsibility for the war from the individual to the authorities: obeying the authorities in nonreligious matters could never be morally wrong. Calvinism recognized the principle of violence as a way to defend the faith - religious war - which had been fundamental to Islam from the start.

Whoever wants to establish absolute justice [*die absolute Gerechtigkeit*] on earth by force needs followers: the human "apparatus." He must offer this apparatus the necessary internal and external rewards—heavenly or earthly—otherwise it won't function. Internal rewards: under the conditions of modern class struggle, the satisfaction of hatred and vindictiveness, above all, resentment and the need for pseudo-ethical self-righteousness, that is, the need to blaspheme and denounce opponents. External rewards: adventure, victory, plunder, power, and sinecures.

Anyone who wants to engage in politics at all, and especially anyone who wants to pursue politics as a profession, must be aware of these ethical paradoxes and their responsibility for what they themselves might become under its pressure. They become, I repeat, entangled with the diabolical powers that lurk in every act of violence. ... Whoever seeks the salvation of their own soul and the salvation of other souls does not seek it through politics, which has entirely different tasks: tasks that can only be solved by violence.

*No AI here, none at all.*

## REFERENCES

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- [3] Politics as a Vocation, January 28, 1919. In Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics\\_as\\_a\\_Vocation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_as_a_Vocation)
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