

Weber on Objectivity

"...politics is out of place in the lecture-room... To take a practical stand is one thing, and to analyze political structures and party positions is another. When speaking in a political meeting... one does not hide one's personal standpoint; indeed, to come out clearly and take a stand is one's damned duty. The words one uses in such a meeting are not means of scientific analysis but means of canvassing votes and winning over others. They are not plowshares to loosen the soil of contemplative thought; they are swords against the enemies... It would be an outrage, however, to use words in this fashion in a lecture... One can only demand of the teacher that he have the intellectual integrity to see that it is one thing to state facts... ...while it is another thing to answer questions of the *value* of culture... ...the prophet and the demagogue do not belong on the academic platform... ...whenever the man of science introduces his personal value judgment, a full understanding of the facts *ceases*... The primary task of a useful teacher is to teach his students to recognize "inconvenient" facts... "Scientific" pleading [for practical stands] is meaningless in principle because the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other... ...[Students] crave a leader and not a teacher. But we are placed on the platform solely as teachers... ...science contributes to the technology of controlling life... ...[to] methods of thinking... ...[and] to gain *clarity*... Thus, if we are competent in our pursuit... ...we can force the individual, or at least we can help him give himself an *account of the ultimate meaning of his own conduct*... ...a teacher who succeeds in this... ...fulfills the duty of bringing about self-clarification and a sense of responsibility... ...and I believe he will be the more able to accomplish this, the more conscientiously he avoids the desire personally to impose upon or suggest to his audience his own stand... ...[The] ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion... ...only a prophet or a savior can give the answers... If there is no such man, or if his message is no longer believed in, then you will certainly not compel him to appear on this earth by having thousands of professors, as privileged hirelings of the state, attempt as petty prophets in their lecture-rooms to take over this role. All they will accomplish is to show that they are unaware of the decisive state of affairs: the prophet for whom so many of our younger generation yearn simply does not exist... ...in the lecture-rooms of the university no other virtue holds but plain intellectual integrity..."¹

¹ Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York: Oxford Un. Press, 1958, pp. 145-156.