

From Politics as a Vocation [Politik als Beruf] (1919)

Max Weber¹

[...]

What do we understand by politics? The concept is extremely broad and comprises any kind of *independent* leadership in action. One speaks of the currency policy of the banks, of the discounting policy of the Reichsbank, of the strike policy of a trade union; one may speak of the educational policy of a municipality or a township, of the policy of the president of a voluntary association, and, finally, even of the policy of a prudent wife who seeks to guide her husband. [In this lecture] tonight, our reflections are, of course, not based upon such a broad concept. We wish to understand by politics only the leadership, or the influencing of the leadership, of a *political* association, hence today, of a *state*.

But what is a “political” association from the sociological point of view? What is a “state”? Sociologically, the state cannot be defined in terms of its ends. There is scarcely any task that some political association has not taken in hand, and there is no task that one could say has always been exclusive and peculiar to those associations which are designated as political ones: today the state, or historically,

¹ Weber was a German professor (1864-1920) who is often called the most important sociologist of all time. This piece was presented as a lecture to the Free Students Union of Bavaria. Though certainly liberal and left-leaning in politics, Weber was somewhat critical of the claims made by advocates of communism.

those associations which have been the predecessors of the modern state. Ultimately, one can define the modern state sociologically only in terms of the specific *means* peculiar to it, as to every political association, namely, the use of physical force.

“Every state is founded on force,” said Trotsky at Brest-Litovsk. That is indeed right. If no social institutions existed which knew the use of violence, then the concept of “state” would be eliminated, and a condition would emerge that could be designated as “anarchy,” in the specific sense of this word. Of course, force is certainly not the normal or the only means of the state—nobody says that—but force is a means specific to the state. Today the relation between the state and violence is an especially intimate one. In the past, the most varied institutions—beginning with the sib²—have known the use of physical force as quite normal. Today, however, we have to say that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory. Note that “territory” is one of the characteristics of the state. Specifically, at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the “right” to use violence. Hence, “politics” for us means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state.

This corresponds essentially to ordinary usage. When a question is said to be a “political” question, when a cabinet

² Merriam-Webster: “a group of persons unilaterally descended from a real or supposed ancestor,” i.e. a kinship group or *ethnos*.

minister or an official is said to be a “political” official, or when a decision is said to be “politically” determined, what is always meant is that interests in the distribution, maintenance, or transfer of power are decisive for answering the questions and determining the decision or the official’s sphere of activity. He who is active in politics strives for power either as a means in serving other aims, ideal or egoistic, or as “power for power’s sake,” that is, in order to enjoy the prestige-feeling that power gives.

Like the political institutions historically preceding it, the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence. If the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be. When and why do men obey? Upon what inner justifications and upon what external means does this domination rest?

To begin with, in principle, there are three inner justifications, hence basic *legitimations* of domination.

First, the authority of the “eternal yesterday,” i.e. of the mores sanctified through the unimaginably ancient recognition and habitual orientation to conform. This is “traditional” domination exercised by the patriarch and the patrimonial prince of yore.

There is the authority of the extraordinary and personal *gift of grace* (charisma), the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership. This is “charismatic” domination, as exercised by the prophet or—in the field of politics—by the elected war lord, the plebiscitarian ruler, the

great demagogue, or the political party leader.

Finally, there is domination by virtue of “legality,” by virtue of the belief in the validity of legal statute and functional “competence” based on rationally created *rules*. In this case, obedience is expected in discharging statutory obligations. This is domination as exercised by the modern “servant of the state” and by all those bearers of power who in this respect resemble him.

It is understood that, in reality, obedience is determined by highly robust motives of fear and hope—fear of the vengeance of magical powers or of the power-holder, hope for reward in this world or in the beyond—and besides all this, by interests of the most varied sort. Of this we shall speak presently. However, in asking for the “legitimations” of this obedience, one meets with these three “pure” types: “traditional,” “charismatic,” and “legal.”

These conceptions of legitimacy and their inner justifications are of very great significance for the structure of domination. To be sure, the pure types are rarely found in reality. But today we cannot deal with the highly complex variant, transitions, and combinations of these pure types, which problems belong to “political science.” Here we are interested above all in the second of these types: domination by virtue of the devotion of those who obey the purely personal “charisma” of the “leader.” For this is the root of the idea of a *calling* [*Beruf*] in its highest expression.

Devotion to the charisma of the prophet, or the leader in war, or to the great demagogue in the *ecclesia* or in parliament, means that the leader is personally recognized as the innerly “called” leader of men. Men do not obey him by virtue of tradition or statute, but because they believe in

him. If he is more than a narrow and vain upstart of the moment, the leader lives for his cause and “strives for his work.” The devotion of his disciples, his followers, his personal party friends is oriented to his person and to its qualities.

Charismatic leadership has emerged in all places and in all historical epochs. Most importantly in the past, it has emerged in the two figures of the magician and the prophet on the one hand, and in the elected war lord, the gang leader and *condotierre* on the other hand. *Political* leadership in the form of the free “demagogue” who grew from the soil of the city state is of greater concern to us; like the city state, the demagogue is peculiar to the Occident and especially to Mediterranean culture. Furthermore, political leadership in the form of the parliamentary “party leader” has grown on the soil of the constitutional state, which is also indigenous only to the Occident.

These politicians by virtue of a “calling,” in the most genuine sense of the word, are of course nowhere the only decisive figures in the cross-currents of the political struggle for power. The sort of auxiliary means that are at their disposal is also highly decisive. How do the politically dominant powers manage to maintain their domination? The question pertains to any kind of domination, hence also to political domination in all its forms, traditional as well as legal and charismatic.

Organized domination, which calls for continuous administration, requires that human conduct be conditioned to obedience towards those masters who claim to be the bearers of legitimate power. On the other hand, by virtue of this obedience, organized domination requires

the control of those material goods which in a given case are necessary for the use of physical violence. Thus, organized domination requires control of the personal executive staff and the material implements of administration.

The administrative staff, which externally represents the organization of political domination, is, of course, like any other organization, bound by obedience to the power-holder and not alone by the concept of legitimacy, of which we have just spoken. There are two other means, both of which appeal to personal interests: material reward and social honor. The fiefs of vassals, the prebends³ of patrimonial officials, the salaries of modern civil servants, the honor of knights, the privileges of estates, and the honor of the civil servant comprise their respective wages. The fear of losing them is the final and decisive basis for solidarity between the executive staff and the power-holder. There is honor and booty for the followers in war; for the demagogue’s following, there are “spoils”—that is, exploitation of the dominated through the monopolization of office—and there are politically determined profits and premiums of vanity. All of these rewards are also derived from the domination exercised by a charismatic leader.

To maintain a dominion by force, certain material goods are required, just as with an economic organization. All states may be classified according to whether they rest on the principle that the staff of men themselves *own* the administrative means, or whether the staff is “separated”

³ Prebend(ary): clergy supported by the revenues from an estate or parish.

from these means of administration. This distinction holds in the same sense in which today we say that the salaried employee and the proletarian in the capitalistic enterprise are “separated” from the material means of production. The power-holder must be able to count on the obedience of the staff members, officials, or whoever else they may be. The administrative means may consist of money, building, war material, vehicles, horses, or whatnot. The question is whether or not the power-holder himself directs and organizes the administration while delegating executive power to personal servants, hired officials, or personal favorites and confidants, who are non-owners, i.e. who do not use the material means of administration in their own right but are directed by the lord. The distinction runs through all administrative organizations of the past.

These political associations in which the material means of administration are autonomously controlled, wholly or partly, by the dependent administrative staff may be called associations organized in “*estates*.” The vassal in the feudal association, for instance, paid out of his own pocket for the administration and judicature of the district enfeoffed to him. He supplied his own equipment and provisions for war, and his subvassals did likewise. Of course, this had consequences for the lord’s position of power, which only rested upon a relation of personal faith and upon the fact that the legitimacy of his possession of the fief and the social honor of the vassal were derived from the overlord.

However, everywhere, reaching back to the earliest political formations, we also find the lord himself directing the administration. He seeks to take the administration into his own hands by having men personally dependent upon him: slaves, household officials, attendants, personal “favorites,”

and prebendaries enfeoffed in kind or in money from his magazines. He seeks to defray the expenses from his own pocket, from the revenues of his patrimonium; and he seeks to create an army which is dependent upon him personally because it is equipped and provisioned out of his granaries, magazines, and armories. In the association of “*estates*,” the lord rules with the aid of an autonomous “*aristocracy*” and hence shares his domination with it; the lord who personally administers is supported either by members of his household or by plebeians. These are propertyless strata having no social honor of their own; materially, they are completely chained to him and are not backed up by any competing power of their own. All forms of patriarchal and patrimonial domination, Sultanist despotism, and bureaucratic states belong to this latter type. The bureaucratic state order is especially important; in its most rational development, it is precisely characteristic of the modern state.

Everywhere the development of the modern state is initiated through the action of the prince. He paves the way for the expropriation of the autonomous and “*private*” bearers of executive power who stand beside him, of those who in their own right possess the means of administration, warfare, and financial organization, as well as politically usable goods of all sorts. The whole process is a complete parallel to the development of the capitalist enterprise through gradual expropriation of the independent producers. In the end, the modern state controls the total means of political organization, which actually come together under a single head. No single official personally owns the money he pays out, or the buildings, stores, tools, and war machines he controls. In the contemporary “*state*”—and this is essential for the concept of state—the “*separation*” of the

administrative staff, of the administrative officials, and of the workers from the material means of administrative organization is completed. Here the most modern development begins, and we see with our own eyes the attempt to inaugurate the expropriation of this expropriator of the political means, and therewith of political power.

The revolution⁴ has accomplished, at least in so far as leaders have taken the place of the statutory authorities, this much: the leaders, through usurpation or election, have attained control over the political staff and the apparatus of material goods; and they deduce their legitimacy—no matter with what right—from the will of the governed. Whether the leaders, on the basis of this at least apparent success, can rightfully entertain the hope of also carrying through the expropriation within the capitalist enterprises is a different question. The direction of capitalist enterprises, despite far-reaching analogies, follows quite different laws than those of political administration.

Today we do not take a stand on this question. I state only the purely *conceptual* aspect for our consideration: the modern state is a compulsory association which organizes domination. It has been successful in seeking to monopolize the legitimate use of physical force as a means of domination within a territory. To this end the state has combined the material means of organization in the hands of its leaders, and it has expropriated all autonomous functionaries of estates who formerly controlled these

⁴ Weber refers to the revolution in Germany in 1918 that ended the Kaiser's imperial rule and produced the Weimar Republic, which was a representative democracy that lasted from 1919 to 1933, when it was abolished by the Nazi dictatorship.

means in their own right. The state has taken their positions and now stands in the top place.

During this process of political expropriation, which has occurred with varying success in all countries on earth, “professional politicians” in another sense have emerged. They arose first in the service of a prince. They have been men who, unlike the charismatic leader, have not wished to be lords themselves, but who have entered the *service* of political lords. In the struggle of expropriation, they placed themselves at the princes; disposal and by managing the princes’ politics they earned, on the one hand, a living and, on the other hand, an ideal content of life. Again it is *only* in the Occident that we find this kind of professional politician in the service of powers other than the princes. In the past, they have been the most important power instrument of the prince and his instrument of political expropriation.

Before discussing “professional politicians” in detail, let us clarify in all its aspects the state of affairs their existence presents. Politics, just as economic pursuits, may be a man’s avocation [*Nebenberuf*] or his vocation [*Hauptberuf*]. One may engage in politics, and hence seek to influence the distribution of power within and between political structures, as an “occasional” politician. We are all “occasional” politicians when we cast our ballot or consummate a similar expression of intention, such as applauding or protesting in a “political” meeting, or delivering a “political” speech, etc. The whole relation of many people to politics is restricted to this. Politics as an avocation is today practiced by all those party agents and heads of voluntary political associations who, as a rule, are politically active only in case of need and for whom politics

is, neither materially nor ideally, “their life” in the first place. The same holds for those members of state counsels and similar deliberative bodies that function only when summoned. It also holds for rather broad strata of our members of parliament who are politically active only during sessions. [...]

There are two ways of making politics one’s vocation: Either one lives “for” politics or one lives “off” politics. By no means is this contrast an exclusive one. The rule is, rather, that man does both, at least in thought, and certainly he also does both in practice. He who lives “for” politics makes politics his life, in an internal sense. Either he enjoys the naked possession of the power he exerts, or he nourishes his inner balance and self-feeling by the consciousness that his life has *meaning* in the service of a “cause.” In this internal sense, every sincere man who lives for a cause also lives off this cause. The distinction hence refers to a much more substantial aspect of the matter, namely, to the economic. He who strives to make politics a permanent *source of income* lives “off” politics as a vocation, whereas he who does not do this lives “for” politics. Under the dominance of the private property order, some—if you wish—very trivial preconditions must exist in order for a person to be able to live “for” politics in this economic sense. Under normal conditions, the politician must be economically independent of the income politics can bring him. This means, quite simply, that the politician must be wealthy or must have a personal position in life which yields a sufficient income.

This is the case, at least in normal circumstances. The warlord’s following is just as little concerned about the conditions of a normal economy as is the street crowd following of the revolutionary hero. Both live off booty,

plunder, confiscations, contributions, and the imposition of worthless and compulsory means of tender, which in essence amounts to the same thing. But necessarily, these are extraordinary phenomena. In everyday economic life, only some wealth serves the purpose of making a man economically independent. Yet this alone does not suffice. The professional politician must also be economically “dispensable,” that is, his income must not depend upon the fact that he constantly and personally places his ability and thinking entirely, or at least by far predominantly, in the service of economic acquisition. In the most unconditional way, the rentier is dispensable in this sense. Hence, he is a man who receives completely unearned income. He may be the territorial lord of the past or the large landowner and aristocrat of the present who receives ground rent. In Antiquity and the Middle Ages they who received slave or serf rents or in modern times rents from shares or bonds or similar sources—these are rentiers.

Neither the worker nor—and this has to be noted well—the entrepreneur, especially the modern, large-scale entrepreneur, is economically dispensable in this sense. For it is precisely the entrepreneur who is tied to his enterprise and is therefore *not* dispensable. This holds for the entrepreneur in industry far more than for the entrepreneur in agriculture, considering the seasonal character of agriculture. In the main, it is very difficult for the entrepreneur to be represented in his enterprise by someone else, even temporarily. He is as little dispensable as is the medical doctor, and the more eminent and busy he is the less dispensable he is. For purely organizational reasons, it is easier for the lawyer to be dispensable; and therefore the lawyer has played an incomparably greater, and often even a dominant, role as a professional politician. We shall not

continue in this classification; rather let us clarify some of its ramifications.

The leadership of a state or of a party by men who (in the economic sense of the word) live exclusively for politics and not off politics means necessarily a “plutocratic” recruitment of the leading political strata. To be sure, this does not mean that such plutocratic leadership signifies at the same time that the politically dominant strata will not also seek to live “off” politics, and hence that the dominant stratum will not usually exploit their political domination in their own economic interest. All that is unquestionable, of course. There has never been such a stratum that has not somehow lived “off” politics. Only this is meant: that the professional politician need not seek remuneration directly for his political work, whereas every politician without means must absolutely claim this. On the other hand, we do not mean to say that the propertyless politician will pursue private economic advantages through politics, exclusively, or even predominantly. Nor do we mean that he will not think, in the first place, of “the subject matter.” Nothing would be more incorrect. According to all experience, a care for the economic “security” of his existence is consciously or unconsciously a cardinal point in the whole life orientation of the wealthy man. A quite reckless and unreserved political idealism is found if not exclusively at least predominantly among those strata who by virtue of their propertylessness stand entirely outside of the strata who are interested in maintaining the economic order of a given society. This holds especially for extraordinary and hence revolutionary epochs. A non-plutocratic recruitment of interested politicians, of leadership and following, is geared to the self-understood precondition that regular and reliable income will accrue to those who manage politics.

Either politics can be conducted “honorifically” and then, as one usually says, by “independent,” that is, by wealthy, men, and especially by rentiers. Or, political leadership is made accessible to propertyless men who must then be rewarded. The professional politician who lives “off” politics may be a pure “prebendary” or a salaried “official.” Then the politician receives either income from fees and perquisites for specific services—tips and bribes are only an irregular and formally illegal variant of this category of income— or a fixed income in kind, a money salary, or both. He may assume the character of an “entrepreneur,” like the *condottiere* or the holder of a farmed-out or purchased office, or like the American boss who considers his costs a capital investment which he brings to fruition through exploitation of his influence. Again, he may receive a fixed wage, like a journalist, a party secretary, a modern cabinet minister, or a political official. Feudal fiefs, land grants, and prebends of all sorts have been typical, in the past. With the development of the money economy, perquisites and prebends especially are the typical rewards for the following of princes, victorious conquerors, or successful party chiefs. For loyal services today, party leaders give offices of all sorts—in parties, newspapers, co-operative societies, health insurance, municipalities, as well as in the state. *All* party struggles are struggles for the patronage of office, as well as struggles for objective goals.

[...]

After all, things in a private economic enterprise are quite similar: the real “sovereign,” the assembled shareholders, is just as little influential in the business management as is a “people” ruled by expert officials. And the personages who decide the policy of the enterprise, the bank-controlled

“directorate,” give only directive economic orders and select persons for the management without themselves being capable of technically directing the enterprise. Thus the present structure of the revolutionary state signifies nothing new in principle. It places power over the administration into the hands of absolute dilettantes, who, by virtue of their control of the machine-guns, would like to use expert officials only as executive heads and hands. The difficulties of the present system lie elsewhere than here, but today these difficulties shall not concern us. We shall, rather, ask for the typical peculiarity of the professional politicians, of the “leaders” as well as their followings. Their nature has changed and today varies greatly from one case to another.

We have seen that in the past “professional politicians” developed through the struggle of the princes with the estates and that they served the princes. Let us briefly review the major types of these professional politicians.

Confronting the estates, the prince found support in politically exploitable strata outside of the order of the estates. Among the latter, there was, first, the clergy [...] The humanistically educated literati comprised a second such stratum. There was a time when one learned to produce Latin speeches and Greek verses in order to become a political adviser to a prince and, above all things, to become a memorialist. This was the time of the first flowering of the humanist schools and of the princely foundations of professorships for “poetics.” This was for us a transitory epoch, which has had a quite persistent influence upon our educational system, yet no deeper results politically. In East Asia, it has been different. The Chinese mandarin is, or rather originally was, what the humanist of our Renaissance period approximately was: a literator humanistically trained

and tested in the language monuments of the remote past. When you read the diaries of Li Hung Chang you will find that he is most proud of having composed poems and of being a good calligrapher. This stratum, with its conventions developed and modeled after Chinese Antiquity, has determined the whole destiny of China; and perhaps our fate would have been similar if the humanists in their time had the slightest chance of gaining a similar influence.

The third stratum was the court nobility. After the princes had succeeded in expropriating political power from the nobility as an estate, they drew the nobles to the court and used them in their political and diplomatic service. The transformation of our educational system in the seventeenth century was partly determined by the fact that court nobles as professional politicians displaced the humanist literati and entered the service of the princes.

The fourth category was a specifically English institution. A patrician stratum developed there which was comprised of the petty nobility and the urban rentiers; technically they are called the “gentry.” The English gentry represents a stratum that the prince originally attracted in order to counter the barons. The prince placed the stratum in possession of the offices of “self-government,” and later he himself became increasingly dependent upon them. The gentry maintained the possession of all offices of local administration by taking them over without compensation in the interest of their own social power. The gentry has saved England from the bureaucratization which has been the fate of all continental states.

A fifth stratum, the university-trained jurist, is peculiar to the Occident, especially to the European continent, and has

been of decisive significance for the Continent's whole political structure. The tremendous after-effect of Roman law, as transformed by the late Roman bureaucratic state, stands out in nothing more clearly than the fact that everywhere the revolution of political management in the direction of the evolving rational state has been borne by trained jurists. This also occurred in England, although there the great national guilds of jurists hindered the reception of Roman law. There is no analogy to this process to be found in any area of the world.

[...]

According to his proper vocation, the genuine official—and this is decisive for the evaluation of our former regime—will not engage in politics. Rather, he should engage in impartial “administration.” This also holds for the so-called “political” administrator, at least officially, in so far as the *raison d'état*, that is, the vital interests of the ruling order, are not in question. *Sine ira et studio*, “without scorn and bias,” he shall administer his office. Hence, he shall not do precisely what the politician, the leader as well as his following, must always and necessarily do, namely, *fight*.

To take a stand, to be passionate—*ira et studium*—is the politician's element, and above all the element of the political *leader*. His conduct is subject to quite a different, indeed, exactly the opposite, principle of responsibility from that of the civil servant. The honor of the civil servant is vested in his ability to execute conscientiously the order of the superior authorities, exactly as if the order agreed with his own conviction. This holds even if the order appears wrong to him and if, despite the civil servant's remonstrances, the authority insists on the order. Without

this moral discipline and self-denial, in the highest sense, the whole apparatus would fall to pieces. The honor of the political leader, of the leading statesman, however, lies precisely in an exclusive *personal* responsibility for what he does, a responsibility he cannot and must not reject or transfer. It is in the nature of officials of high moral standing to be poor politicians, and above all, in the political sense of the word, to be irresponsible politicians. In this sense, they are politicians of low moral standing, such as we unfortunately have had again and again in leading positions. This is what we have called *Beamtenherrschaft* [civil-service rule], and truly no spot soils the honor of our officialdom if we reveal what is politically wrong with the system from the standpoint of success. But let us return once more to the types of political figures. Since the time of the constitutional state, and definitely since democracy has been established, the “demagogue” has been the typical political leader in the Occident. The distasteful flavor of the word must not make us forget that not Cleon but Pericles was the first to bear the name of demagogue. In contrast to the offices of ancient democracy that were filled by lot, Pericles led the sovereign *Ecclesia* of the demos of Athens as a supreme strategist holding the only elective office or without holding any office at all. Modern demagoguery also makes use of oratory, even to a tremendous extent, if one considers the election speeches a modern candidate has to deliver. But the use of the printed word is more enduring. The political publicist, and above all the journalist, is nowadays the most important representative of the demagogic species.

[...]

If the journalist as a type of professional politician harks back to a rather considerable past, the figure of the party

official belongs only to the development of the last decades and, in part, only to recent years. In order to comprehend the position of this figure in historical evolution, we shall have to turn to a consideration of parties and party organizations.

[...]

Parties, in the sense usual with us, were at first, for instance in England, pure followings of the aristocracy. If, for any reason whatever, a peer changed his party, everybody dependent upon him likewise changed. Up to the Reform Bill [of 1832], the great noble families and, last but not least, the king controlled the patronage of an immense number of election boroughs. [...]

Now then, the most modern forms of party organizations stand in sharp contrast to this idyllic state in which circles of notables and, above all, members of parliament rule. These modern forms are the children of democracy, of mass franchise, of the necessity to woo and organize the masses, and develop the utmost unity of direction and the strictest discipline. The rule of notables and guidance by members of parliament ceases. “Professional” politicians *outside* the parliaments take the organization in hand. They do so either as “entrepreneurs”—the American boss and the English election agent are, in fact, such entrepreneurs—or as officials with a fixed salary. Formally, a fargoing democratization takes place. The parliamentary party no longer creates the authoritative programs, and the local notables no longer decide the selection of candidates. Rather assemblies of the organized party members select the candidates and delegate members to the assemblies of a higher order. Possibly there are several such conventions leading up to the national

convention of the party. Naturally power actually rests in the hands of those who, within the organization, handle the work *continuously*. Otherwise, power rests in the hands of those on whom the organization in its processes depends financially or personally—for instance, on the Maecenases or the directors of powerful political clubs of interested persons (Tammany Hall). It is decisive that this whole apparatus of people—characteristically called a “machine” in Anglo-Saxon countries—or rather those who direct the machine, keep the members of the parliament in check. They are in a position to impose their will to a rather far-reaching extent, and that is of special significance for the selection of the party leader. The man whom the machine follows now becomes the leader, even over the head of the parliamentary party. In other words, the creation of such machines signifies the advent of *plebiscitarian* democracy.

The party following, above all the party official and party entrepreneur, naturally expect personal compensation from the victory of their leader—that is, offices or other advantages. It is decisive that they expect such advantages from their leader and not merely from the individual member of parliament. They expect that the demagogic effect of the leader’s *personality* during the election fight of the party will increase votes and mandates and thereby power, and, thereby, as far as possible, will extend opportunities to their followers to find the compensation for which they hope. Ideally, one of their mainsprings is the satisfaction of working with loyal personal devotion for a man, and not merely for an abstract program of a party consisting of mediocrities. In this respect, the “charismatic” element of all leadership is at work in the party system.

In very different degrees this system made headway,

although it was in constant, latent struggle with local notables and the members of parliament who wrangled for influence.

[...]

Now then, what has been the effect of this whole system? Nowadays the members of Parliament, with the exception of the few cabinet members (and a few insurgents), are normally nothing better than well-disciplined “yes” men. With us, in the Reichstag, one used at least to take care of one’s private correspondence on his desk, thus indicating that one was active in the weal of the country. Such gestures are not demanded in England; the member of Parliament must only vote, not commit party treason. He must appear when the whips call him, and do what the cabinet or the leader of the opposition orders. The caucus machine in the open country is almost completely unprincipled if a strong leader exists who has the machine absolutely in hand. Therewith the plebiscitarian dictator actually stands above Parliament. He brings the masses behind him by means of the machine and the members of Parliament are for him merely political spoilsmen enrolled in his following.

How does the selection of these strong leaders take place? First, in terms of what ability are they selected? Next to the qualities of will—decisive all over the world—naturally the force of demagogic speech is above all decisive. Its character has changed since the time speakers like Cobden addressed themselves to the intellect, and Gladstone who mastered the technique of apparently “letting sober facts speak for themselves.” At the present time often purely emotional means are used—the means the Salvation Army also exploits in order to set the masses in motion. One may call the

existing state of affairs a “dictatorship resting on the exploitation of mass emotionality.” Yet, the highly developed system of committee work in the English Parliament makes it possible and compelling for every politician who counts on a share in leadership to cooperate in committee work. All important ministers of recent decades have this very real and effective work-training as a background. The practice of committee reports and public criticism of these deliberations is a condition for training, for really selecting leaders and eliminating mere demagogues.

Thus it is in England. The caucus system there, however, has been a weak form, compared with the American party organization, which brought the plebiscitarian principle to an especially early and an especially pure expression.

According to Washington’s idea, America was to be a commonwealth administered by “gentlemen.” In his time, in America, a gentleman was also a landlord, or a man with a college education—this was the case at first.⁵ In the beginning, when parties began to organize, the members of the House of Representatives claimed to be leaders, just as in England at the time when notables ruled. The party organization was quite loose and continued to be until 1824. In some communities, where modern development first took place, the party machine was in the making even before the eighteen-twenties. But when Andrew Jackson was first elected President—the election of the western

⁵ Not true: “Of the ninety-nine men who signed the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, only eight are known to have had fathers who attended college” (Gordon S. Wood, *Revolutionary Characters*, p. 25).

farmers” candidate—the old traditions were overthrown. Formal party leadership by leading members of Congress came to an end soon after 1840, when the great parliamentarians, Calhoun and Webster, retired from political life because Congress had lost almost all of its power to the party machine in the open country. That the plebiscitarian “machine” has developed so early in America is due to the fact that there, and there alone, the executive—this is what mattered—the chief of office-patronage, was a President elected by plebiscite. By virtue of the “separation of powers” he was almost independent of parliament in his conduct of office. Hence, as the price of victory, the true booty object of the office-prebend was held out precisely at the presidential election. Through Andrew Jackson the “spoils system” was quite systematically raised to a principle and the conclusions were drawn.

What does this spoils system, the turning over of federal offices to the following of the victorious candidate, mean for the party formations of today? It means that quite unprincipled parties oppose one another; they are purely organizations of job hunters drafting their changing platforms according to the chances of vote-grabbing, changing their colors to a degree which, despite all analogies, is not yet to be found elsewhere. The parties are simply and absolutely fashioned for the election campaign that is most important for office patronage: the fight for the presidency and for the governorships of the separate states. Platforms and candidates are selected at the national conventions of the parties without intervention by congressmen. Hence they emerge from party conventions, the delegates of which are formally, very democratically elected. These delegates are determined by meetings of

other delegates, who, in turn, owe their mandate to the “primaries,” the assembling of the direct voters of the party. In the primaries the delegates are already elected in the name of the candidate for the nation’s leadership. Within the parties the most embittered fight rages about the question of “nomination.” After all, 300,000 to 400,000 official appointments lie in the hands of the President, appointments which are executed by him only with the approval of the senators from the separate states. Hence the senators are powerful politicians. By comparison, however, the House of Representatives is, politically, quite impotent, because patronage of office is removed from it and because the cabinet members, simply assistants to the President, can conduct office apart from the confidence or lack of confidence of the people. The President, who is legitimized by the people, confronts everybody, even Congress; this is a result of “the separation of powers.”

In America, the spoils system, supported in this fashion, has been technically possible because American culture with its youth could afford purely dilettante management. With 300,000 to 400,000 such party men who have no qualifications to their credit other than the fact of having performed good services for their party, this state of affairs of course could not exist without enormous evils. A corruption and wastefulness second to none could be tolerated only by a country with as yet unlimited economic opportunities.

[...]

Scarcely fifteen years ago, when American workers were asked why they allowed themselves to be governed by

politicians whom they admitted they despised, the answer was: “We prefer having people in office whom we can spit upon, rather than a caste of officials who spit upon us, as is the case with you.” This was the old point of view of American “democracy.” Even then, the socialists had entirely different ideas and now the situation is no longer bearable.

[...]

Therefore, today, one cannot yet see in any way how the management of politics as a “vocation” will shape itself. Even less can one see along what avenue opportunities are opening to which political talents can be put for satisfactory political tasks. He who by his material circumstances is compelled to live “of politics will almost always have to consider the alternative positions of the journalist or the party official as the typical direct avenues. Or, he must consider a position as representative of interest groups—such as a trade union, a chamber of commerce, a farm bureau, a craft association, a labor board, an employer’s association, et cetera, or else a suitable municipal position. Nothing more than this can be said about this external aspect: in common with the journalist, the party official bears the odium of being *declassé*. “Wage writer” or “wage speaker” will unfortunately always resound in his ears, even though the words remain unexpressed. He who is inwardly defenseless and unable to find the proper answer for himself had better stay away from this career. For in any case, besides grave temptations, it is an avenue that may constantly lead to disappointments. Now then, what inner enjoyments can this career offer and what personal conditions are presupposed for one who enters this avenue?

Well, first of all the career of politics grants a feeling of

power. The knowledge of influencing men, of participating in power over them, and above all, the feeling of holding in one’s hands a nerve fiber of historically important events can elevate the professional politician above everyday routine even when he is placed in formally modest positions. But now the question for him is: Through what qualities can I hope to do justice to this power (however narrowly circumscribed it may be in the individual case)? How can he hope to do justice to the responsibility that power imposes upon him? With this we enter the field of ethical questions, for that is where the problem belongs: What kind of a man must one be if he is to be allowed to put his hand on the wheel of history?

One can say that three pre-eminent qualities are decisive for the politician: passion, a feeling of responsibility, and a sense of proportion.

This means passion in the sense of *matter-of-factness*, of passionate devotion to a “cause,” to the god or demon who is its overlord. It is not passion in the sense of that inner bearing which my late friend, Georg Simmel, used to designate as “sterile excitation,” and which was peculiar especially to a certain type of Russian intellectual (by no means all of them!). It is an excitation that plays so great a part with our intellectuals in this carnival we decorate with the proud name of “revolution.” It is a “romanticism of the intellectually interesting,” running into emptiness devoid of all feeling of objective responsibility.

To be sure, mere passion, however genuinely felt, is not enough. It does not make a politician, unless passion as devotion to a “cause” also makes responsibility to this cause the guiding star of action. And for this, a sense of

proportion is needed. This is the decisive psychological quality of the politician: his ability to let realities work upon him with inner concentration and calmness. Hence his *distance* to things and men. “Lack of distance” *per se* is one of the deadly sins of every politician. It is one of those qualities the breeding of which will condemn the progeny of our intellectuals to political incapacity. For the problem is simply how can warm passion and a cool sense of proportion be forged together in one and the same soul? Politics is made with the head, not with other parts of the body or soul. And yet devotion to politics, if it is not to be frivolous intellectual play but rather genuinely human conduct, can be born and nourished from passion alone. However, that firm taming of the soul, which distinguishes the passionate politician and differentiates him from the “sterilely excited” and mere political dilettante, is possible only through habituation to detachment in every sense of the word. The “strength” of a political “personality” means, in the first place, the possession of these qualities of passion, responsibility, and proportion.

Therefore, daily and hourly, the politician inwardly has to overcome a quite trivial and all-too-human enemy: a quite vulgar vanity, the deadly enemy of all matter-of-fact devotion to a cause, and of all distance, in this case, of distance towards one’s self.

Vanity is a very widespread quality and perhaps nobody is entirely free from it. In academic and scholarly circles, vanity is a sort of occupational disease, but precisely with the scholar, vanity—however disagreeably it may express itself—is relatively harmless; in the sense that as a rule it does not disturb scientific enterprise. With the politician the case is quite different. He works with the striving for power

as an unavoidable means. Therefore, “power instinct,” as is usually said, belongs indeed to his normal qualities. The sin against the lofty spirit of his vocation, however, begins where this striving for power ceases to be *objective* and becomes purely personal self-intoxication, instead of exclusively entering the service of “the cause.” For ultimately there are only two kinds of deadly sins in the field of politics: lack of objectivity and—often but not always identical with it—irresponsibility. Vanity, the need personally to stand in the foreground as clearly as possible, strongly tempts the politician to commit one or both of these sins. This is more truly the case as the demagogue is compelled to count upon “effect.” He therefore is constantly in danger of becoming an actor as well as taking lightly the responsibility for the outcome of his actions and of being concerned merely with the “impression” he makes. His lack of objectivity tempts him to strive for the glamorous semblance of power rather than for actual power. His irresponsibility, however, suggests that he enjoy power merely for power’s sake without a substantive purpose. Although, or rather just because, power is the unavoidable means, and striving for power is one of the driving forces of all politics, there is no more harmful distortion of political force than the parvenu-like braggart with power, and the vain self-reflection in the feeling of power, and in general every worship of power *per se*. The mere “power politician” may get strong effects, but actually his work leads nowhere and is senseless. (Among us, too, an ardently promoted cult seeks to glorify him.) In this, the critics of “power politics” are absolutely right. From the sudden inner collapse of typical representatives of this mentality, we can see what inner weakness and impotence hides behind this boastful but entirely empty gesture. It is a product of a shoddy and superficially blasé attitude towards the meaning of human conduct; and it has no relation

whatsoever to the knowledge of tragedy with which all action, but especially political action, is truly interwoven.

The final result of political action often, no, even regularly, stands in completely inadequate and often even paradoxical relation to its original meaning. This is fundamental to all history, a point not to be proved in detail here. But because of this fact, the serving of a cause must not be absent if action is to have inner strength. Exactly what the cause, in the service of which the politician strives for power and uses power, looks like is a matter of faith. The politician may serve national, humanitarian, social, ethical, cultural, worldly, or religious ends. The politician may be sustained by a strong belief in “progress”—no matter in which sense—or he may coolly reject this kind of belief. He may claim to stand in the service of an “idea” or, rejecting this in principle, he may want to serve external ends of everyday life. However, some kind of faith must always exist. Otherwise, it is absolutely true that the curse of the creature’s worthlessness overshadows even the externally strongest political successes.

With the statement above we are already engaged in discussing the last problem that concerns us tonight: the *ethos* of politics as a “cause.” What calling can politics fulfill quite independently of its goals within the total ethical economy of human conduct—which is, so to speak, the ethical locus where politics is at home? Here, to be sure, ultimate *Weltanschauungen* clash, world views among which in the end one has to make a choice. Let us resolutely tackle this problem, which recently has been opened again, in my view in a very wrong way.

But first, let us free ourselves from a quite trivial

falsification: namely, that ethics may first appear in a morally highly compromised role. Let us consider examples. Rarely will you find that a man whose love turns from one woman to another feels no need to legitimate this before himself by saying: she was not worthy of my love, or, she has disappointed me, or whatever other like “reasons” exist. This is an attitude that, with a profound lack of chivalry, adds a fancied “legitimacy” to the plain fact that he no longer loves her and that the woman has to bear it. By virtue of this “legitimation,” the man claims a right for himself and besides causing the misfortune seeks to put her in the wrong. The successful amatory competitor proceeds exactly in the same way: namely, the opponent must be less worthy, otherwise he would not have lost out. It is no different, of course, if after a victorious war the victor in undignified self-righteousness claims, “I have won because I was right.” Or, if somebody under the frightfulness of war collapses psychologically, and instead of simply saying it was just too much, he feels the need of legitimizing his war weariness to himself by substituting the feeling, “I could not bear it because I had to fight for a morally bad cause.” And likewise with the defeated in war. Instead of searching like old women for the “guilty one” after the war—in a situation in which the structure of society produced the war—everyone with a manly and controlled attitude would tell the enemy, “We lost the war. You have won it. That is now all over. Now let us discuss what conclusions must be drawn according to the *objective* interests that came into play and what is the main thing in view of the responsibility towards the *future* which above all burdens the victor.” Anything else is undignified and will become a boomerang. A nation forgives if its interests have been damaged, but no nation forgives if its honor has been offended, especially by a bigoted self-righteousness. Every new document that comes to light after

decades revives the undignified lamentations, the hatred and scorn, instead of allowing the war at its end to be buried, at least morally. This is possible only through objectivity and chivalry and above all only through dignity. But never is it possible through an “ethic,” which in truth signifies a lack of dignity on both sides. Instead of being concerned about what the politician is interested in, the future and the responsibility towards the future, this ethic is concerned about politically sterile questions of past guilt, which are not to be settled politically. To act in this way is politically guilty, if such guilt exists at all. And it overlooks the unavoidable falsification of the whole problem, through very material interests: namely, the victor’s interest in the greatest possible moral and material gain; the hopes of the defeated to trade in advantages through confessions of guilt. If anything is “vulgar,” then, this is, and it is the result of this fashion of exploiting “ethics” as a means of “being in the right.”

Now then, what relations do ethics and politics actually have? Have the two nothing whatever to do with one another, as has occasionally been said? Or, is the reverse true: that the ethic of political conduct is identical with that of any other conduct? Occasionally an exclusive choice has been believed to exist between the two propositions—either the one or the other proposition must be correct. But is it true that any ethic of the world could establish commandments of identical content for erotic, business, familial, and official relations; for the relations to one’s wife, to the greengrocer, the son, the competitor, the friend, the defendant? Should it really matter so little for the ethical demands on politics that politics operates with very special means, namely, power backed up by *violence*? Do we not see that the Bolshevik and the Spartacist ideologists bring about

exactly the same results as any militaristic dictator just because they use this political means? In what but the persons of the power-holders and their dilettantism does the rule of the workers” and soldiers” councils differ from the rule of any power-holder of the old regime? In what way does the polemic of most representatives of the presumably new ethic differ from that of the opponents which they criticized, or the ethic of any other demagogues? In their noble intention, people will say. Good! But it is the means about which we speak here, and the adversaries, in complete subjective sincerity, claim, in the very same way, that their ultimate intentions are of lofty character. “All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” and fighting is everywhere fighting. Hence, the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount.

By the Sermon on the Mount, we mean the absolute ethic of the gospel, which is a more serious matter than those who are fond of quoting these commandments today believe. This ethic is no joking matter. The same holds for this ethic as has been said of causality in science: it is not a cab, which one can have stopped at one’s pleasure; it is all or nothing. This is precisely the meaning of the gospel, if trivialities are not to result. Hence, for instance, it was said of the wealthy young man, “He went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.” The evangelist commandment, however, is unconditional and unambiguous: give what thou hast—absolutely everything. The politician will say that this is a socially senseless imposition as long as it is not carried out everywhere. Thus the politician upholds taxation, confiscatory taxation, outright confiscation; in a word, compulsion and regulation for all. The ethical commandment, however, is not at all concerned about that, and this unconcern is its essence. Or, take the example,

“turn the other cheek”: This command is unconditional and does not question the source of the other’s authority to strike. Except for a saint it is an ethic of indignity. This is it: one must be saintly in everything; at least in intention, one must live like Jesus, the apostles, St. Francis, and their like. *Then* this ethic makes sense and expresses a kind of dignity; otherwise it does not. For if it is said, in line with the acosmic ethic of love, “Resist not him that is evil with force,” for the politician the reverse proposition holds, “thou *shalt* resist evil by force,” or else you are responsible for the evil winning out. He who wishes to follow the ethic of the gospel should abstain from strikes, for strikes mean compulsion; he may join the company unions. Above all things, he should not talk of “revolution.” After all, the ethic of the gospel does not wish to teach that civil war is the only legitimate war. The pacifist who follows the gospel will refuse to bear arms or will throw them down; in Germany this was the recommended ethical duty to end the war and therewith all wars. The politician would say the only sure means to discredit the war for all foreseeable time would have been a *status quo* peace. Then the nations would have questioned, what was this war for? And then the war would have been argued *ad absurdum*, which is now impossible. For the victors, at least for part of them, the war will have been politically profitable. And the responsibility for this rests on behavior that made all resistance impossible for us. Now, as a result of the ethics of absolutism, when the period of exhaustion will have passed, *the peace will be discredited, not the war.*

Finally, let us consider the duty of truthfulness. For the absolute ethic it holds unconditionally. Hence the conclusion was reached to publish all documents, especially those placing blame on one’s own country. On the basis of

these one-sided publications the confessions of guilt followed—and they were one-sided, unconditional, and without regard to consequences. The politician will find that as a result truth will not be furthered but certainly obscured through abuse and unleashing of passion; only an all-round methodical investigation by non-partisans could bear fruit; any other procedure may have consequences for a nation that cannot be remedied for decades. But the absolute ethic just does not *ask* for “consequences.” That is the decisive point.

We must be clear about the fact that all ethically oriented conduct may be guided by one of two fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims: conduct can be oriented to an “ethic of ultimate ends” or to an “ethic of responsibility.” This is not to say that an ethic of ultimate ends is identical with irresponsibility, or that an ethic of responsibility is identical with unprincipled opportunism. Naturally nobody says that. However, there is an abysmal contrast between conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of ultimate ends—that is, in religious terms, “The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord”—and conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of responsibility, in which case one has to give an account of the foreseeable results of one’s action.

You may demonstrate to a convinced syndicalist, believing in an ethic of ultimate ends, that his action will result in increasing the opportunities of reaction, in increasing the oppression of his class, and obstructing its ascent—and you will not make the slightest impression upon him. If an action of good intent leads to bad results, then, in the actor’s eyes, not he but the world, or the stupidity of other men, or God’s will who made them thus, is responsible for the evil.

However a man who believes in an ethic of responsibility takes account of precisely the average deficiencies of people; as Fichte has correctly said, he does not even have the right to presuppose their goodness and perfection. He does not feel in a position to burden others with the results of his own actions so far as he was able to foresee them; he will say: these results are ascribed to my action. The believer in an ethic of ultimate ends feels “responsible” only for seeing to it that the flame of pure intentions is not quenched: for example, the flame of protesting against the injustice of the social order. To rekindle the flame ever anew is the purpose of his quite irrational deeds, judged in view of their possible success. They are acts that can and shall have only exemplary value.

But even herewith the problem is not yet exhausted. No ethics in the world can dodge the fact that in numerous instances the attainment of “good” ends is bound to the fact that one must be willing to pay the price of using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones—and facing the possibility or even the probability of evil ramifications. From no ethics in the world can it be concluded when and to what extent the ethically good purpose “justifies” the ethically dangerous means and ramifications.

The decisive means for politics is violence. You may see the extent of the tension between means and ends, when viewed ethically, from the following: as is generally known, even during the war the revolutionary socialists (Zimmerwald faction) professed a principle that one might strikingly formulate: “If we face the choice either of some more years of war and then revolution, or peace now and no revolution, we choose—some more years of war!” Upon the further question: “What can this revolution bring about?” Every

scientifically trained socialist would have had the answer: One cannot speak of a transition to an economy that in our sense could be called socialist; a bourgeois economy will re-emerge, merely stripped of the feudal elements and the dynastic vestiges. For this very modest result, they are willing to face “some more years of war.” One may well say that even with a very robust socialist conviction one might reject a purpose that demands such means. With Bolshevism and Spartanism, and, in general, with any kind of revolutionary socialism, it is precisely the same thing. It is of course utterly ridiculous if the power politicians of the old regime are morally denounced for their use of the same means, however justified the rejection of their *aims* may be.

The ethic of ultimate ends apparently must go to pieces on the problem of the justification of means by ends. As a matter of fact, logically it has only the possibility of rejecting all action that employs morally dangerous means—in theory! In the world of realities, as a rule, we encounter the ever-renewed experience that the adherent of an ethic of ultimate ends suddenly turns into a chiliastic prophet. Those, for example, who have just preached “love against violence” now call for the use of force for the *last* violent deed, which would then lead to a state of affairs in which a violence is annihilated. In the same manner, our officers told the soldiers before every offensive: “This will be the last one; this one will bring victory and therewith peace.” The proponent of an ethic of absolute ends cannot stand up under the ethical irrationality of the world. He is a cosmic-ethical “rationalist.” Those of you who know Dostoyevsky will remember the scene of the “Grand Inquisitor,” where the problem is poignantly unfolded. If one makes any concessions at all to the principle that the end justifies the means, it is not possible to bring an ethic of ultimate ends

and an ethic of responsibility under one roof or to decree ethically which end should justify which means.

My colleague, Mr. F. W. Forster, whom personally I highly esteem for his undoubted sincerity, but whom I reject unreservedly as a politician, believes it is possible to get around this difficulty by the simple thesis: “from good comes only good; but from evil only evil follows.” In that case this whole complex of questions would not exist. But it is rather astonishing that such a thesis could come to light two thousand five hundred years after the Upanishads. Not only the whole course of world history, but every frank examination of everyday experience points to the very opposite. The development of religions all over the world is determined by the fact that the opposite is true. The age-old problem of theodicy consists of the very question of how it is that a power which is said to be at once omnipotent and kind could have created such an irrational world of undeserved suffering, unpunished injustice, and hopeless stupidity. Either this power is not omnipotent or not kind, or, entirely different principles of compensation and reward govern our life—principles we may interpret metaphysically, or even principles that forever escape our comprehension. This problem—the experience of the irrationality of the world—has been the driving force of all religious evolution. The Indian doctrine of karma, Persian dualism, the doctrine of original sin, predestination and the *deus absconditus*, all these have grown out of this experience. Also the early Christians knew full well the world is governed by demons and that he who lets himself in for politics, that is, for power and force as means, contracts with diabolical powers and for his action it is *not* true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who fails to see this is, indeed, a political infant.

[...]

Normally, Protestantism, however, absolutely legitimated the state as a divine institution and hence violence as a means. Protestantism, especially, legitimated the authoritarian state. Luther relieved the individual of the ethical responsibility for war and transferred it to the authorities. To obey the authorities in matters other than those of faith could never constitute guilt. Calvinism in turn knew principled violence as a means of defending the faith; thus Calvinism knew the crusade, which was for Islam an element of life from the beginning. One sees that it is by no means a modern disbelief born from the hero worship of the Renaissance which poses the problem of political ethics. All religions have wrestled with it, with highly differing success, and after what has been said it could not be otherwise. It is the specific means of legitimate violence as such in the hand of human associations which determines the peculiarity of all ethical problems of politics.

[...]

If one says “the future of socialism” or “international peace,” instead of native city or “fatherland” (which at present may be a dubious value to some), then you face the problem as it stands now. Everything that is striven for through political action operating with violent means and following an ethic of responsibility endangers the “salvation of the soul.” If, however, one chases after the ultimate good in a war of beliefs, following a pure ethic of absolute ends, then the goals may be damaged and discredited for generations, because responsibility for *consequences* is lacking, and two diabolic forces which enter the play remain unknown to the

actor. These are inexorable and produce consequences for his action and even for his inner self, to which he must helplessly submit, unless he perceives them. The sentence: “The devil is old; grow old to understand him!” does not refer to age in terms of chronological years. I have never permitted myself to lose out in a discussion through a reference to a date registered on a birth certificate; but the mere fact that someone is twenty years of age and that I am over fifty is no cause for me to think that this alone is an achievement before which I am overawed. Age is not decisive; what is decisive is the trained relentlessness in viewing the realities of life, and the ability to face such realities and to measure up to them inwardly.

Surely, politics is made with the head, but it is certainly not made with the head alone. In this the proponents of an ethic of ultimate ends are right. One cannot prescribe to anyone whether he should follow an ethic of absolute ends or an ethic of responsibility, or when the one and when the other. One can say only this much: If in these times, which, in your opinion, are not times of “sterile” excitement—excitement is not, after all, genuine passion—if now suddenly the *Weltanschauungs* politicians crop up *en masse* and pass the watchword, “The world is stupid and base, not I,” “The responsibility for the consequences does not fall upon me but upon the others whom I serve and whose stupidity or baseness I shall eradicate,” then I declare frankly that I would first inquire into the degree of inner poise backing this ethic of ultimate ends. I am under the impression that in nine out of ten cases I deal with windbags who do not fully realize what they take upon themselves but who intoxicate themselves with romantic sensations. From a human point of view this is not very interesting to me, nor does it move me profoundly. However, it is immensely moving when a

mature man—no matter whether old or young in years—is aware of a responsibility for the consequences of his conduct and really feels such responsibility with heart and soul. He then acts by following an ethic of responsibility and somewhere he reaches the point where he says: “Here I stand; I can do no other.” That is something genuinely human and moving. And every one of us who is not spiritually dead must realize the possibility of finding himself at some time in that position. In so far as this is true, an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements) which only in unison constitute a genuine man—a man who *can* have the “calling for politics.”

[...]

Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective. Certainly all historical experience confirms the truth—that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible. But to do that a man must be a leader, and not only a leader but a hero as well, in a very sober sense of the word. And even those who are neither leaders nor heroes must arm themselves with that steadfastness of heart which can brave even the crumbling of all hopes. This is necessary right now, or else men will not be able to attain even that which is possible today. Only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say “In spite of all!” has the calling for politics.