Two Meanings of Disenchantment: Sociological Condition vs. Philosophical Act— Reassessing Max Weber's Thesis of the Disenchantment of the World

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Abstract

Although the primary meaning of Max Weber's concept of disenchantment is as a sociological condition (the retreat of magic and myth from social life through processes of secularization and rationalization), as Weber himself makes clear in his address, "Science as a Vocation," disenchantment can also be a philosophical act: an unusual form of moral discourse that derives new ethical direction out of the very untenability of a previously robust moral tradition. The philosophical variant of disenchantment is significant both because it contradicts numerous elements of the sociological version and because it suggests there are forms of cognition unique to moral philosophy (insofar as the derivation of a moral teaching from the very absence of one is foreign to both a religious and a scientific mindset).

> *"Que sommes-nous donc sans le secours de ce qui n'existe pas?"*
> —*Paul Valéry*

For Anthony Kronman

According to the biographical account of Max Weber written by his wife, the most fundamental animating concern underlying Weber's vast body of research was the following dynamic: "He was moved,

above all, by the fact that on its earthly course an idea always and everywhere operates in opposition to its original meaning and thereby destroys itself" (Weber 1975, 337).[1] This dialectic between an idea's intended meaning and the effective truth of it actual implementation can be found in a variety of places within the Weberian corpus. It appears prominently, for example, in Weber's account of the religious origins of the capitalist work ethic. And it informs Weber's theory of bureaucratization as a process which begins as a technical apparatus in the service of a preexisting political will only to develop into the supreme power within a state, imposing its own rigor of specialization and economic efficiency. But this dialectic also bears a more intimate relation to Weber than that of simply summarizing a pattern that recurs in Weber's interpretation of world events. The doctrine of unintended consequences applies not only to the ideas that have inspired world history, but to Weber's own idea about one of the central meanings of this history—specifically, his claim that this history has been marked by a continual process of disenchantment.

Although Weber did not coin the word disenchantment, he is responsible for importing the term into social science and for elevating it to an overarching principle of Western development. Weber employs the concept literally to describe a process of "de-magicization" (the literal translation of the German *Entzauberung*) by which myth and illusion are removed from social life. This process is an important aspect of Weber's modernity thesis, as disenchantment participates in central modern developments such as secularization, rationalization, and the crisis of meaning. The primary definition of disenchantment, the one for which Weber is best-known and which is usually provided by interpreters of Weber, involves precisely this sociological function of the term (see, e.g., Allen 2004, Ringer 2004, Strong and Owen 2004, Lassman and Velody 1989, Löwith 1982, Gerth and Mills 1946). Moreover, insofar as disenchantment has become a well-established concept within contemporary social theory, the sociological meaning Weber intended for it has exerted an almost total and unchecked influence (see, e.g., Adorno and Horkheimer 1947, Gauchet 1997, Bennett 2001, Berman 1981).

But disenchantment also has a *philosophical* significance that cannot be assimilated within the usual sociological reduction—and

Weber himself, in his address "Science as a Vocation" ("*Wissenschaft als Beruf*"), testifies to this fact, if only unintentionally and without explicit thematization. In the philosophical usage, disenchantment is above all an activity. It is a self-reflective meditation. It asserts that something of value is missing and, then, almost paradoxically finds some form of compensatory value in the very fact of this absence. Disenchantment as a philosophic practice is thus a form of moral discourse. It may contain sociological elements, but its primary purpose is always to clarify the ethical horizon of the present age—the age in which the author or speaker of disenchantment lives. Because it is an ethical discourse and not sociological observation, disenchantment in the philosophical sense is not readily replicated. It depends heavily on the charismatic gifts of the philosopher and the fecundity of the historical moment in which he or she lives. Moreover, whereas the sociological usage refers to disenchantment impersonally—as a feature of the external world, a world independent of the author and the reader—disenchantment in the philosophical sense is always addressed to "us": the collective contemporaries who experience the ethical problem that a specific moral tradition has lost its motivating and determinative force.

This extra-sociological meaning of disenchantment has always been coextensive with the dominant sociological conception. In English, the etymology of "disenchantment" reveals this quite clearly. The root of the term disenchantment is "chant" as in a song or a spell. And the oldest meaning of disenchantment is not the sociological one which predominates today, but an occult one: disenchantment in the sense of a recitation of a magic spell that removes an underlying spell. Here the elimination of magic is itself tied to magic—since it is only through the practice of magic that magic spells can be lifted. Moreover, in this earliest usage, disenchantment is first and foremost an activity (the act of disenchanting) and only secondarily a passive state of being (the fact of being disenchanted).[2]

In German, the term "*die Entzauberung der Welt*" ("the disenchantment of the world") is inspired by Schiller's notion from a century earlier of "*die Entgötterung der Natur*" ("the de-divinization of nature")—*the flight of the gods* which figures as a prominent theme not just in Schiller, but throughout the Romantic tradition of the nineteenth century

(Greisman 1976).[3] As a pronouncement, the flight of the gods cannot be brought within the secularism it would otherwise seem to herald. Of all the Romantics, Nietzsche understood this most clearly. Nietzsche's parable of the madman who pronounces the death of god has the madman utter this pronouncement, not within a church of believers, but within a marketplace of non-believers (Nietzsche 1982, §125).[4] The laughter which greets the madman is the laughter of those who do not believe. It is just this "madness" of drawing serious attention to the non-existence of what is commonly understood not to exist—with the expectation that something of value can be gleaned out of the very fact of this absence—that defines the philosophic practice of disenchantment and distinguishes it from *both* religious and secular perspectives. Heidegger's doctrine—God is dead, therefore we must mourn—draws on Nietzsche and further reveals the flight of the gods to be irreducible to, and indeed in opposition to, a secular, utterly this-worldly perspective (see, e.g., Heidegger 1971, 89–142). Such reasoning makes no sense from the perspective of modern science. Not only is the non-existence of God unverifiable, but, even if it could be established, no logical deductions could be concluded from such non-existence. Yet to admit this does not thereby render Heidegger's conclusion arbitrary or meaningless. Heidegger's argument still makes sense—but it is *philosophical* sense that is at stake.

By focusing on magic rather than gods, Weber's concept of disenchantment for the most part avoids explicit confrontation with this Romantic legacy and the essentially philosophic (as opposed to scientific or religious) nature of the pronouncement that the gods have flown. Moreover, Weber most of the time does not *pronounce* disenchantment, but rather relies on the term to describe an external reality, so that it refers either to a process of historical development, or to a factual condition of a given society or culture, or to a feeling of a particular individual or group. Whatever the precise application, disenchantment in this sociological sense designates an objective set of circumstances that any other scientific researcher ought to be able to identify and replicate. However, in his address "Science as a Vocation," Weber's engagement with disenchantment is profoundly colored by the Romantic tradition and by the archaic, occult meaning of the term. Here, disenchantment is not simply a process, condition, fact,

or feeling; it is also an activity, a way of thinking, an ethical discourse that generates moral direction out of the very insistence that moral direction is lacking.

Because the philosophical version of disenchantment has been overlooked relative to the dominant sociological variant, because it raises the possibility of a distinctly philosophic (as opposed to sociological or religious) mode of cognition, and because it suggests that the very notion of disenchantment is self-refuting (insofar as those who insist upon it simultaneously counteract it)—for these reasons I think it is worth recovering the alternate, philosophical meaning of the term. Fortunately, Weber himself shows the way toward this rehabilitation. An analysis of Weber's philosophic practice of disenchantment in his address "Science as a Vocation" makes it clear that this usage actually *violates* the secularism, scientific-rationality, and psychological afflic- tion of disillusion with which the sociological concept of disenchant- ment is identified. The pronouncement of disenchantment alters the meaning of the term.

In order to demonstrate this dialectic between the abstract idea of disenchantment and the performative significance this idea achieves by virtue of its "earthly course" in Weber's public address "Science as a Vocation," I begin with a detailed discussion of the sociological meaning of disenchantment for which Weber is best known. Following this, I examine "Science as a Vocation" with the aim of attending to the ways Weber's philosophic practice of disenchantment cannot be brought within the dominant sociological meaning of the term.

Weber's Sociological Usage of Disenchantment

The sociological meaning of disenchantment uses the term objectively and literally to designate factual aspects of a given society or historical period. It is here that the literal meaning of the German *Entzauber- ung*—"de-magicization"—plays its most definitive role. Disenchant- ment is the relative retreat of supernatural elements and modes of explanation from the world and their replacement with a this-worldly perspective. As a technical sociological term, disenchantment serves a variety of functions. Most basically, it opens up as a factual realm amenable to scientific research the degree to which a given culture is imbued with a sense of magic: how much magic, superstition, spirits,

demons, orgiastic rituals, and gods play a role in social life. The concept of disenchantment serves as a basis for making comparisons between the spiritual life of different cultures. In this it resembles other socio-logical concepts, such as Marx's emphasis on individual estrangement, Durkheim's focus on the structural strain of society-at-large, and the dialectic of folk and urban life emphasized by Tönnies and Vierkandt (Greisman 1976, 496). Weber is distinctive in thematizing this spiritual element in terms of the belief in magic: the degree to which a culture is imbued with a sense of mystery—a sense of not being alone in the world, but rather sharing public life with unseen beings that take a purposive interest in human interaction and designs.

Although generally suspicious of the evolutionary approach of philosophies of history, Weber turns to disenchantment as a master concept that summarizes the meaning of modernity. And in describing the progression of Occidental history as a history of disenchantment, Weber defines disenchantment, sociologically, in terms of three other, overarching world-historical processes: secularization, the development of modern science, and the psychological condition of disillusion borne from the crisis of meaning.

Secularization. The linkage of disenchantment to secularization is a commonplace within Weber scholarship. In fact, within cursory accounts of Weber, secularization is often presented as a shorthand reduction of the meaning of disenchantment.[5] Although this reduc-tion misses out on other key aspects, disenchantment is indeed closely linked to secularization. This linkage is twofold. First, religions become increasingly rationalized: that is, they oppose magical elements and come to define themselves in terms of this-worldly ethical demands.[6] Weber repeatedly defines disenchantment as the removal of magic and mystery from social life. By magic, Weber means both the belief in forces *behind* the natural world, such as spirits, demons, ghosts, and gods as well as the power of charismatically endowed humans to manipulate these supernatural beings in accordance with human purposes and designs. Thus, for example, the prophetic religions of Judaism and Christianity reject the ancient cultic rituals and sacrifices of the pagan world. Later developments within these religions are themselves opposed to perceived magical or superstitious elements. For instance, Weber says that Puritanism embodied a disenchanted

form of religiosity as compared to Catholicism, since the Puritan rejects many of the traditional Christian sacraments and rituals as mere superstition. "The genuine Puritan even rejected all signs of religious ceremony at the grave and buried his nearest and dearest without song or ritual in order that no superstition, no trust in the effects of magical or sacramental forces on salvation, should creep in" (Weber 1958, 105). Second, by the late stages of modernity, religion itself comes to be seen as magical or superstitious. With the advent of modernity, religion is increasingly pushed from the rational into the irrational realm. This process is gradual and constant throughout Occidental history, but reaches a point of near completion in the twentieth century: "[O]nly today does religion become *the* irrational or anti-rational supra-human power" (Weber 1946, 351).

Modern Science. The use of scientific means—which Weber connects to the discovery of the concept (Plato), the conscious commitment to experimentation and empirical methods (Renaissance), and the technical mastery afforded by these—is considered by Weber to be the single most important contributor to disenchantment. Scientific methods and inventions lead to far more effective control of the world than spells, myths, and magic. Scientific rationalization means that "there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather than one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted." Weber is careful to distinguish the potential calculability and rational comprehension of the world from the actual knowledge of it. Rationalization does not "indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives." Rather, what is altered is the relationship an individual and society have toward what is not known or understood. Unlike primitive cultures still imbued with a sense of the magical, in the modern context "one need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means" (Weber 1946, 139).

Disillusion/Modern Malaise. The sociological concept of disenchantment also encompasses a psychological description of the *disillusion*—i.e., the crisis of meaning and general malaise—that is

said to characterize modern life. The most direct linkage between disenchantment, the retreat of magic and myth from social life, and the psychological condition of disillusion concerns the psychological consequences of no longer believing in a magical, spiritual, or divine realm that exists *behind* or *beyond* the everyday material world. A thoroughly disenchanted world knows only the one-dimensionality of verifiable experience and material facts. This creates a crisis of meaning. As Weber explains, "As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world's processes become disenchanted, lose their magical significance, and henceforth simply 'are' and 'happen' but no longer signify anything. As a consequence, there is a growing demand that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an order that is significant and meaningful" (Weber 1978, 1:506). This dialectic of the feeling of meaninglessness and the consequent search for meaning is a direct result of the withdrawal of myth and magic from public life.

Weber's analyses of religion, business, statecraft, bureaucracy, and even music in their own ways insist upon the deadening psychological impact of the systematic elimination of magic from social life—or, what Weber aptly terms the "cold skeleton hands of rational orders" (Weber 1946, 347). Although Weber posits charisma as an irreducible and inextinguishable force within human history, he describes modern societies as those in which the occurrence and influence of charisma have receded. Modern bureaucracy engineers an unprecedented degree of specialization, thereby routinizing charisma and crowding out personal qualities of leadership within the administrative state. This means that even where a sense of the mysterious and magical continues to exist, it is relegated to the private sphere of eroticism, mystical religion, and intimate personal relations.[7] The exigencies of modern capitalist economies impose themselves on individuals as external forces, too vast and complex to be mastered. "The technical and economic conditions of machine production . . . today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism . . . with irresistible force" (Weber 1958, 181). Moreover, the incessant process of technological innovation and cultural change means that the modern individual has no choice but to be engaged in processes that are constantly outdated by new and improved inventions. Rationalization is never complete. This imposes an "imprint of meaninglessness"

on modern life that had been lacking within traditional societies (Weber 1946, 138, 140).[8] The metaphors by which Weber describes the desperation of the workaday modern life are exceptionally dark, of which the Iron Cage—inhabited by what Weber, quoting Goethe, describes as "sensualists without heart, specialists without spirit"—is no doubt the most famous.[9]

This understanding of disenchantment in terms of modern malaise, disillusion, meaninglessness, and the loss of human vivacity is not only common within Weber scholarship, but a familiar fixture within the vernacular of twentieth century social theory. When Adorno and Horkheimer (1982, 3) import the concept of disenchantment into their critique of the Enlightenment, for example, they not only rely upon the Weberian meaning of the term as the retreat of myth and magic from social life, but they link this process to the malaise of modern life.[10] Within their classic text, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, disenchantment names the life lived without myth or illusion, subjected to the oppressive immediacy of mere fact, in which the distinction between animate life and inanimate material is increasingly difficult to maintain. Disenchantment functions as a descriptive term denoting the social and psychological affliction that arises in the face of the cold, atomizing logic of instrumental rationality and the administrative state.[11] Likewise, contemporary interpreters of Weber's concept of disenchantment are virtually universal in conceiving of it as if it were synonymous with disillusion—as a distinctly modern malady caught up with meaninglessness and the flattening of spiritual life.[12]

Sociologically, then, Weber uses disenchantment as a basis on which to compare the spiritual life of different cultures and societies, as a master-concept to comprehend the general processes of rationalization and secularization, and as a description of the one-dimensional, utterly this-worldly workaday life typical of modernity. It should be stressed that in each of these cases, disenchantment is not itself thematized, but enters only indirectly to summarize or conceptualize an underlying historical process. Weber rarely uses the word disenchantment. It appears only occasionally to supplement a primary discourse on the role of magic in religion, or the development of modern science, or historical processes by which the work ethic became devoid of the religious passion that had first inspired it.

The one place where Weber does directly thematize disenchant-
ment—his 1917 address "Science as a Vocation"—generates an alternate
meaning of the term, one that cannot be brought within the rubric of
the dominant sociological variant. It might seem that there ought to
be no difference between the passive observation of disenchantment as
a sociological process and the philosophical insistence that the present
moment is defined by disenchantment in a specific sense. But this
is not the case. The discourse of disenchantment alters its meaning.
Like the radical skeptic who can only remain silent, since the asser-
tion there is no truth violates itself to the extent that this utterance is
itself true, so must the sociological concept of disenchantment remain
detached from any prolonged and direct discussion of its occurrence.
Philosophical reflection on disenchantment disturbs the sociological
conceptualization of the concept in terms of secularization, scientific
rationality, and modern malaise.

Weber's Philosophical Engagement with Disenchantment in "Science as a Vocation"

In "Science as a Vocation," Weber engages disenchantment in a differ-
ent way from the sociological usage. Here disenchantment does not
refer to an objective set of conditions in the external world. Instead,
it is an activity, a way of thinking, a style of ethical discourse. The
core of this philosophical variant is to *speak* disenchantment: i.e., to
turn to a disenchantment narrative as a form of ethical discourse.
With the philosophical concept, disenchantment is not observed as
a fact or historical process but insisted upon as an ethical necessity.
It is something that is practiced, written, suggested, urged. It is a call
to recognize that the moral and spiritual direction previously under-
stood to be available is no longer available—or, that such direction
was never available. Yet, despite this element of pessimism, what is
most noteworthy about the philosophical form of engagement with
disenchantment is its productivity. The very meditation on the lack of
traditional moral direction serves as the basis for deriving a *new* ethical
standpoint with reconstructed moral imperatives. The philosopher
finds a moral teaching in the very absence of one.

Given the fact that the philosophic practice of disenchantment
directs itself to the ethical horizon of the present day, and not only to

an intergenerational and abstract community of scholars, the form of Weber's reflections—namely, that "Science as a Vocation" was not just written, but *delivered* before a gathering of students and faculty on the evening of November 7, 1917, at the University of Munich—is not entirely an incidental footnote of marginal significance, but, on the contrary, indicative of the address' special sensitivity to the specific ethical circumstances impinging upon Weber's contemporaries. The lecture was occasioned by an invitation from a public forum series entitled *"Geistige Arbeit als Beruf"* ("Intellectual Work as a Vocation") that had been organized by the *Freistudentische Bund*, a left-liberal student organization. Weber's delivery of the address stands in contrast to his other vocational lecture, "Politics as a Vocation," given two years later as part of the same series, which was neither published in the form that it was spoken, nor a lecture Weber was especially keen to give (Strong and Owen 2004, xiii).

In "Science as a Vocation," Weber's philosophic engagement with disenchantment is profound, yet to a certain extent concealed. Weber deflects identification with the role of philosopher. For one thing, his self-understanding is as a sociologist, not a philosopher. Moreover, it is the vocation of the scientist, not the philosopher, that constitutes the official subject matter of the address. Further, one of Weber's central arguments in the address is that the scientist has no special insight into matters of ethics and the subject matter of traditional philosophy, and therefore ought to restrict teaching to the conveyance of facts.

For too long has the fact-value distinction been deconstructed to be surprised that "Science as a Vocation" is in fact an intensely ethical text (see, e.g., Putnam 2002, Taylor 1967, MacIntyre 1971). The ethical imperatives of scientific specialization, decisionism, clarity, the refusal of the intellectual sacrifice of religion, and strength to endure a world without gods and prophets can all be found within the text. That "Science as a Vocation" is an intensely ethical text is part of what makes it philosophical, to be sure—and something that other interpreters have rightly noted.[13] But in drawing attention to the philosophical character of Weber's practice of disenchantment, what is meant is not simply that ethical values are involved, but, additionally, the following four divergences from the sociological usage.

Disenchantment Pronounced, Not Reported. First, disenchantment is pronounced rather than reported. Weber's concern is to induce a feeling of disenchantment in his listeners. Disenchantment is presented not simply as a fact that can be recorded, but as a fact to which the individual must be reconciled:

> The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intel-
> lectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world.'
> Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from
> the public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life
> or into the brotherliness of direct and human relations. (Weber
> 1946, 155)

This testimony to disenchantment, occurring near the end of the address, would almost be like the sociological use of the concept, if Weber used the word "fate" to signify an inescapable and objective feature of the modern landscape. But it is precisely the escapism of the youthful audience which draws Weber's repeated attention throughout the address. The assembled youth, it turns out, are prone to deny, repress, ignore, or otherwise withhold from view the fate of disenchantment. They leave the classroom in the ecstatic search for religious experience, they seek prophets, they refuse to sit at their desks and specialize, they will not inhabit the workaday life. Weber shares the youthful frustration with the rationalization of the world, but insists that the only hope, if any, is to accept the "inescapable condition of our historical situation. We cannot evade it so long as we remain true to ourselves" (Weber 1946, 152). This call to reconcile oneself to fate means that disenchantment is something to be practiced, not observed. Rather than a historical condition whose existence Weber simply reports, disenchantment is an as-yet unrealized perspective he wants to elicit and cultivate in his audience. Accordingly, numerous times throughout the essay, there is the injunction to accept the fate of disenchantment. Such acceptance is validated as strength: "It is weakness not to be able to countenance the stern seriousness of the times" ("Denn Schwäche ist es: dem Schicksal der Zeit nicht in sein ernstes Antlitz blicken zu können") (Weber 1946, 149; Weber 1982, 547). And it is also linked to manliness: one must "bear the fate of the times like a man" (Weber 1946, 155).

Emphasis on the Unavailability of Past Tradition / Negative Dependence on that Tradition: But what is the fate of the times? What is the inevitable condition of our historical situation? It cannot be that that Weber seeks only an acceptance of disenchantment and rationalization as world-historical forces. The very universality of these concepts, their claim to theorize the meaning of Occidental history in general, means that *every* age is to a certain extent an age of disenchantment: an age in which magic retreats and mysterious forces become exposed as mere superstition. Even if Weber conceptualizes the twentieth century as the near completion of this process, as a time of almost total disenchantment, it is nonetheless apparent that "Science as a Vocation" remains focused on a particular moment within this larger process: the collapse of the comprehensive worldview embodied in the universal religions of salvation.

Weber explains the collapse of the comprehensive religious worldview as itself a function of two movements. The first of these is the breakdown of a unified standard of value. A religious ethic appeals to the "one thing that is needful"—as if there were a master value that encompassed all the others. Modernity, according to Weber, means attunement to the impossibility of such a unification. The idea of a universal value disintegrates into separate value spheres, each with its own distinctive logic. Specifically, the domains of cognitive truth, moral rightness, holiness, and aesthetics come to be distinguished from each other—and, more than this, each sphere comes to be defined in opposition to the other spheres. Weber refers to this development with the religious metaphor of *polytheism*:

> [W]e realize again today that something can be sacred not only in spite of its not being beautiful, but rather because and in so far as it is not beautiful. You will find this documented in the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah and in the twenty-first Psalm. And, since Nietzsche, we realize that something can beautiful, not only in spite of the aspect in which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect. You will find this expressed earlier in the *Fleur du mal*, as Baudelaire named his volume of poems. It is commonplace to observe that something may be true although it is not beautiful and not holy and not good. Indeed it may be true in precisely those aspects. But all these are only the most elementary cases of

the struggle that the gods of various orders and values are engaged
in. (Weber 1946, 147–8)

The other source of the breakdown of the comprehensive worldview
of universal, salvational religions is that the various "gods" of the re-
emergent polytheistic order lie *hidden*—that is, they will not initiate
contact with the human order, but must instead be accessed by effort
and commitment. In other words, the question of which matrix of
values one chooses to follow at the expense of all others must ultimately
rest on the singular shoulders of the individual conscience. Radical-
izing the theological notion of *deus absconditus*—the hidden-ness of
God[14]—Weber does not deny that the meaning of human experience
still lies in service of higher values, but insists the relationship to the
higher must be self-chosen and self-willed. The exceedingly difficult
and at times desperate struggle which Weber equates with an au-
thentically modern existence lies precisely here—in the isolation of
self-directed ethical life:

> We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disen-
> chanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense.
> As Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times
> to Apollo, and, above all, as everybody sacrificed to the gods of his
> city, so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been
> disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine
> plasticity. (Weber 1946, 148)

> Today the routines of everyday life challenge religion. Many old
> gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take
> the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our
> lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another.
> (Weber 1946, 148–9)

What needs to be stressed about Weber's fixation on the collapse
of comprehensive worldviews of salvational religions—and what
contributes to the philosophic, rather than sociological, meaning of
disenchantment within "Science as a Vocation"—is the *negative depen-
dence* of Weber's discourse upon the very religious tradition he would
otherwise seem to be deeming irrelevant and outdated to a modern
perspective. Here it is important to recognize that Weber's treatment
of religion in "Science as a Vocation" cannot easily be grouped within
either a religious or a secular framework, at least as these two poles

are customarily understood. That the address is not religious, that it shares nothing with a theological or devotional approach to scripture, divinity, and salvation, is obvious. Weber's discussion of religion leads him not only to pronounce the untenability of religions of salvation for the modern consciousness, but to denigrate traditional religious belief as a haven for the weak and unmanly (1946, 155).[15]

That "Science as a Vocation" is not secular in any familiar sense is equally clear, however. The point is not simply that Weber discusses religion at too great a length, and with too much earnest interest, for the text to escape the religious tradition it would otherwise appear to reject. There are, after all, clear models for the secular discussion of religion. There is the model of the scholar of religion, for example, who describes the beliefs, rituals, meaning, and other practices of a religion, often with much more detail and sensitivity than the lay practitioner. And there is the model of the militant secularist or atheist who engages religion polemically, laying out a convincing case for why belief in God and scripture should be abandoned. But "Science as a Vocation" cannot be placed within either of these secular genres. Although it is true that Weber elsewhere and primarily takes a scholarly approach to the study of religion—*Economy and Society*, for example, treats a variety of religious communities and concepts, and is remarkable for various distinctions of religious life it encompasses (ritualistic vs. ethical, other-worldly vs. this-worldly, priestly vs. prophetic)—in "Science as a Vocation," hardly anything is conveyed in the way of sociological knowledge about specific religious communities and their practices. Instead, Weber distills the great variety of religious practices and beliefs that comprise the universal, salvational religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam into a single, generalized doctrine abstracted from particular communities of belief. These religions, Weber explains, provide the believer with a unified sense of value. They underwrite an optimism that the various spheres of value—such as truth, beauty, holiness, and goodness—coalesce and are not in conflict. Moreover, these religions assert the history and future promise of divine interaction in the world as well as a personal God sitting in judgment of each person's soul. The universal religions could answer the question "How should I live" with specific regulations for the methodical conduct of daily life, ethical norms, and aspirations of a world to come. This

generalized teaching of religion does not cohere with the sociological approach Weber usually employs. The difference is that whereas Weber's sociology of religion is above all concerned with conveying knowledge about past religious traditions, Weber's treatment of religion in "Science as a Vocation" is actually directed at the secular audience sitting before him. The generalized doctrine of religiosity that Weber constructs says much less about past religious traditions than it does about the post-religious present, for it designates precisely those general and abstract qualities that the secular audience/reader is presumed *to lack*.

Likewise, despite Weber's dismissal of a religious worldview as incompatible with modernity and intellectual honesty, it is actually not at all the purpose of "Science as a Vocation" to argue in behalf of this claim. The untenability of the comprehensive worldview is assumed as a given, rather than demonstrated through argument. That is to say, Weber does not explain *why* the comprehensive worldview of universal religions of salvation has been shattered. When he refers, for example, to the modern sensibility about the limited functionality of science—science's incapability of providing answers about happiness, the meaning of the world, or ethics—he does not demonstrate or explicate this aspect of modernity, but appeals to it as a pre-existing, well-established fact to which the audience and reader will no doubt agree.[16] What interests Weber is neither the precise content or nature of the comprehensive worldviews of universal religions as these were experienced by the believers of the past, nor the reason for their no longer being persuasive to the secular modern. Rather, it is *the fact of the unavailability* of the past religious tradition for the contemporary age that is essential to the meaning of disenchantment pronounced in the address. Of course, one needs to know something about these religions and their meaning in order to feel their lack. Disenchantment, as a philosophical pronouncement, is thus engaged in two struggles: against those who think they possess what is in fact missing and against those who have no sense of what is missing. This means that Weber takes the universal religions of salvation both more seriously and less seriously than the casual religiosity of the layperson and occasional churchgoer.

The practice of disenchantment is inseparable from a teaching about the meaning of what has been lost and, in this sense, preserves a connection to the otherwise refuted past tradition. But the teaching is not a teaching in the scholarly mode. Whereas scholarship teaches with an eye to recovering the past, providing knowledge of the institutions and belief structures of past cultures, the philosophic teaching insists upon the *missingness* of the past—the fact that the past tradition no longer determines the thinking of the present. To the assembled audience of listeners and readers, the disenchanting philosopher says, in effect, "See these doctrines which I am going to describe—these we do not let ourselves believe." Eliciting this conscious state of disbelief is the overriding aim.

In emphasizing the unavailability of the comprehensive worldviews of universal religions of salvation, Weber's practice of disenchantment occupies an intermediate space between religious and secular mentalities. It is not by chance that Weber relies on religious metaphor to describe the post-Christian ethical landscape. Not only does the invocation of polytheism maintain the high seriousness of ethical reflection, but it allows Weber to present the decisionist ethic he upholds in terms of a kind of resurgent monotheism: one must choose which of the warring gods to follow. As we shall see, the very fixation on the unavailability of the religious ethical tradition is made to generate ethical conclusions.

Apophatic Reasoning. The third aspect which distinguishes Weber's philosophical practice of disenchantment from his sociological usage of the term is the use of *apophasis*[17] (reasoning by negation) to develop positive ethical content out of the fact that the comprehensive worldviews of universal religions are unavailable to the modern sensibility. It is a mistake in my view to understand the address, as some interpreters have, as standing for the principle of "self-imposed epistemological modesty" (Villa 2001, 236). While this principle may be a fair characterization of the chastened scientific ethos affirmed by the address, it misses out on two equally significant features of the lecture: the ethical teaching conveyed by the address to scientists and non-scientists alike and, what is more, the bold idiosyncrasy of the *apophasis* by which this teaching is derived.

Weber's discussion of Tolstoy is relevant in this regard. Weber defines ethical direction as an answer to Tolstoy's question: "What shall we do and how shall we live?" Weber's primary point is to insist that this question cannot be answered by rational means and that the modern consciousness accepts this impossibility as a matter of course. If early innovators of the scientific method held on to the hope that the scientific method might provide access to true being (Plato), true art (Leonardo), true nature (Francis Bacon), and even to the true God (Swammerdam), Weber (1946, 142) quips: "Who—aside from certain big children who are indeed found in the natural sciences—still believes that the findings of astronomy, biology, physics, or chemistry could teach us anything about the *meaning* of the world?" Here Weber comes close to disenchantment as it is usually understood in the sociological-psychological sense as disillusion, exhaustion, and even nihilism. But Weber does not rest with a simple negation of Tolstoy's question. He does not rest with an outright negation of ethical life. Even though Tolstoy's question cannot be answered, Weber returns to it a second time, reposing the question of a rationalized ethics in the face of its unanswerability:

> If Tolstoy's question recurs to you: as science does not, who is to answer the question: 'What shall we do, an, how shall we arrange our lives' or, in the words used here tonight: 'Which of the warring gods should we serve? Or should we serve perhaps an entirely different god, and who is he?' then one can say that only a prophet or a savior can give the answers. (Weber 1946, 153)

Weber's point, of course, is that there is no such prophet or savior. He takes it for granted that he speaks in "a godless and prophetless time" (Weber 1946, 153). Why, then, does Weber repose a question he has just claimed to be unanswerable, only to say once again that it cannot be answered? It is distinctive of the apophatic mode of reasoning to engage in a prolonged meditation on what is unavailable and, from this meditation, to develop positive ethical content out of what would otherwise appear to be sheer absence. That Weber intends to perform such an apophasis is clear from what he goes on to say about the non-existence of gods and prophets:

> The prophet for whom so many of our younger generation yearn simply does not exist. But this knowledge in its forceful significance

> has never become vital for them [Der Prophet, nach dem sich so
> viele unserer jüngsten Generation sehnen, ist ebe nicht da, ihnen
> niemals in der ganzen Wucht seiner Bedeutung lebendig wird].
> (Weber 1946, 153; Weber 1982, 551)

Knowledge? How can the non-presence of gods and prophets consti-
tute knowledge, let alone vital knowledge and forceful significance?
Is not the very conclusion of disenchantment, psychologically at
least, supposed to inhere in a crisis of meaning? But the philosophic
approach to disenchantment is defined precisely by the willingness
to find the loss of a primary source of ethical direction itself relevant
for the derivation of a secondary or supplementary ethical code. This
discovery of knowledge in an absence—in the unavailability of the
enchanted past—is a form of reasoning that, while in no way arbi-
trary, nonetheless cannot be assimilated to the standards of logic and
empiricism which govern the modern scientific mindset:

> That science does not give an answer to this question is indisput-
> able. The only question that remains is the sense in which science
> gives 'no' answer, and whether or not science might yet be of some
> use to one who puts the question correctly [Die Tatsache, daß sie
> diese Antwort nicht gibt, ist schlechthin unbestreitbar. Die Frage
> ist nur, in welchem Sinne sie »keine« Antwort gibt, und ob sie statt
> dessen nicht doch vielleicht dem, der die Frage richtig stellt, etwas
> leisten könnte] (Weber 1946, 143; Weber 1982, 540).

Weber's particular apophasis takes roughly this form: there are no gods
or prophets, as these have fled the world, nor is there any comprehensive
worldview as promised by the universal religions of salvation—*therefore*
we must choose for ourselves. We—the manly, scientific ones who
take responsibility—must legislate our own values, choose which
gods to follow, and tolerate the conflict our choices will inevitably
produce. In other words, out of the very unavailability of direction
from traditional moral sources, Weber derives a new imperative: the
decisionist ethic to choose for oneself.

That Weber intends decisionism not merely as a factual recognition
that we are ourselves the choosers of our values (since there is no higher
power choosing for us), but additionally as a duty to make a conscious
and durable choice pervades the entire essay but is explicitly raised by
his admonition for "decisive choice" (Weber 1946, p. 152).[18] And it

is also clear from the other ethical duties Weber goes on to outline at the end of address: not to tarry for gods and prophets and, instead, to have the courage "to clarify one's ultimate standpoint"; to meet the demands of the day with an ethic of responsibility; and to demonstrate intellectual integrity through finding and obeying one's own demon (Weber 1946, 155–6). Far from an abandonment of ethics, Weber's decisionism is a call to take one's stand in the irreconcilable struggle of value-spheres and find in one's own self the foundation of one's choice. Importantly, Weber insists upon the selection of a single god within the polytheistic order—deeming as inauthentic and unmanly a casual, noncommittal experimentation with alternate ethical choices. Not everyone has a calling to be a scientist or a professional, but Weber strongly suggests that each has a distinctive calling to which he or she must attend. And so it is not just the duty to decide but the duty to decide honestly as well as once and for all that defines the ethical meaning of decisionism.

The key point is not the content of Weber's ethics—which could after all be developed further than I have treated them here, especially in their implication for the relationship between students and teachers—but the *apophatic* form of the reasoning underlying their derivation. The "*therefore*" by which Weber links the negation of religious worldviews to the development of decisionist ethics is entirely unjustified from the sociological perspective. A purely secular and scientific mind could find no significance in the non-existence of gods and prophets. Weber migrates from sociologist to philosopher insofar as the absence of gods and prophets becomes a fertile source for moral reflection.

The sociological approach understands disenchantment as the spread of logic and scientific reason, whereas the philosophic practice of disenchantment engages in a form of moral discourse that does not participate within this dominant scientific paradigm. In fact, it is distinctive of the philosophical discourse on disenchantment that it involves at least one significant moment where the argument reaches a point of confusion or illogic—a moment in which there is a leap that, while not at all arbitrary, nonetheless lacks the force of acceptability one would expect to find within the deductive or inductive forms of reasoning common within the natural and social sciences.

This "intellectual sacrifice" is, of course, nothing like the religious reversion Weber condemns—it is not a return to faith. It is, rather, the *apophatic* form of reasoning which can be assimilated neither into the irrefutable or verifiable cognitive processes of scientific reasoning nor the "*credo non quod sed quia absurdum est*" that Weber identifies with the religious and theological standpoint.

The Charismatic and Quasi-Prophetic Status of Weber's Address. The final way in which the philosophic pronouncement of disenchantment departs from the sociological meaning of the concept concerns the function of charisma. Specifically, whereas disenchantment in the sociological sense describes how modern processes such as bureaucratization and rationalization rob social life of charismatic authority, the pronouncement of disenchantment is itself an instance of charisma. The *apophasis* at the core of such a pronouncement, the derivation of an ethical teaching from the very lack of one, is a procedure which, precisely because of its alogical and paradoxical elements, can be successfully carried out only by the charismatic authority of an inspired personality.

Weber (1978, 1:241) defines charisma as "a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader.'" It is above all the figure of the magician, the demagogue, and the prophet who are ideal types of the charismatic personality. Of these, it is the charisma of the prophet that Weber's delivery of "Science as a Vocation" most closely approaches. "The prophet, like the magician, exerts his power simply by virtue of his personal gifts. Unlike the magician, however, the prophet claims definite revelations, and the core of his mission is doctrine or commandment, not magic" (Weber 1978: 1:440). Disenchantment, which as we have seen is defined sociologically as the withdrawal of magic and prophets, would appear to stand diametrically opposed to charisma. But Weber takes on prophetic traits in his very pronouncement that gods and prophets no longer inhabit the earth. The cognitive element of the address—the assertion that there are neither gods nor

prophets in the modern world—ought not obscure the *performative* aspect. There is no escaping the paradox that before the youth stands a man condemning value-instruction in the lecture-room, himself instructing values—the necessity of accepting disenchantment, the important of "decisive choice," the irreconcilable conflict between religion and science—within a lecture room. Weber alerts the gathering of students to the scientific sin they commit when they expect edification from their educators, when they believe they have found it, and when they flee their workaday lives in the search of scientific inspiration. As would be scientists, they are told that their ways are impure. They worship idols: happiness, truth, and even the biblical God. They commit blasphemy when they go outside science in the orgiastic search for inspiration. Moreover, as was typical of the biblical prophets of salvation, Weber's practice disenchantment rails against false prophets who, in this context, are those who claim that science can be combined with happiness, moral rightness, and artistic expression. Further, like the scriptural prophets, who before the Babylonian exile were universally prophets of doom, Weber understands his role in "Science as a Vocation" as well as the role of the ideal scientists he describes as bringing "inconvenient facts" to bear upon the students. The teacher's job is to expose the necessary implications of specific ethical commitments as well as to make clear the inescapable conflict between various value-spheres. The successful communication of these inconvenient facts is more than a mere intellectual task, Weber explains, but a "moral achievement" ("*sittliche Leistung*") A teacher who performs this task "stands in the service of 'moral' forces; he fulfills the duty of bringing about self-clarification and a sense of responsibility" (Weber 1946, 147, 152).

By themselves, these observations about the charismatic aspects of Weber' address "Science as a Vocation" are more suggestive than they are fully dispositive. The same criticism also might be leveled against any anecdotal eye-witness account of the great power of Weber's personal charisma and charm, such as Karl Loewenstein's (1966, 102) recollection of Weber: "[H]e was not only an unsentimental and daemonic personality; he was also the charismatic man that he himself described. He had that exceptional gift of casting his spell upon everyone encountered. No one who knew him escaped the

spell. His disciples and his friends paid him homage. His adversaries paid him respect."[19]

It is important, then, to consider additional factors. Of these, the most significant is the point that the connection between charismatic prophecy and the pronouncement of disenchantment goes both ways. It is not just that Weber's practice of disenchantment bears traces of the prophetic consciousness, but, from the other side, that the scriptural prophets were themselves disenchanters in the very literal sense of opposing magic and superstition. Everywhere, Weber says, prophetic religions are defined in part by an opposition to magic as mere superstition (see, e.g., Weber 1978, 1:44; Weber 1952, 278–86). Ritual and cultic mysteries are rejected in the name of an ethical relationship to God—i.e., a relationship to God that is realized through upstanding conduct in this world. Relatedly, whereas the ills motivating pagan religions tended to be the external ills of concrete problems, with the rise of the prophetic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam it is a metaphysical state of salvation that comes to be the key concern.[20] In other words, like the philosophic practice of disenchantment, the prophetic mission is both negative and constitutive. The rejection of magic is carried out in the name of an ethical god and an abstract concept of salvation. The difference is that the positive teaching of the prophets is not developed apophatically: the fact that the rites and sacrifices of the pagan cults are false is not itself determinative of the scriptural religion and revelation expounded by the prophetic conscience. Nonetheless, prophecy and the philosophic practice of disenchantment share this same common structure in which a past tradition is refuted as mere superstition, just as a new set of injunctions and moral concerns is upheld in its place.

To be sure, any recognition of similarities between the philosophic practice of disenchantment and biblical prophecy needs to be chastened by an awareness of certain dissimilarities. Weber repeatedly returns to the distinctiveness of prophecy—to the ways in which it is profoundly different from philosophy, the commitment to social reform, and other forms of ethical teaching. In "Science as a Vocation," Weber speaks out against the melding of the academic and prophetic roles. Academic prophecy cannot be done (scholars and teachers do not possess the prophetic art), it should not be done (the attempt at academic

prophecy is unethical), and it should not be expected (youth should abandon their foolishness and cease looking for prophetic leaders in the classroom). Weber (1946, 150) states frankly: "The qualities that make a man an excellent scholar and academic teacher are not the qualities that make him a leader to give directions in practical life." Moreover, in his analysis of prophecy within his sociology of religion, Weber describes the precise differences between prophet and philosopher. The prophet offers salvation—a cure of concrete or abstract, metaphysical ills—whereas the philosopher, as a teacher of ethics, is concerned to show what is or should be (Weber 1946, 352). Weber defines this notion of salvation which is cultivated and promised by prophecy as "the distinctive gift of active ethical behavior performed in the awareness that god directs this behavior, i.e., that the actor is an instrument of god" (Weber 1978, 1:541). Thus, the prophet is distinguished from the philosophical ethicist and social reformer by possessing a distinctive doctrine of salvation and the conduct of life and laying some claim to the status of savior. Moreover, prophetic wisdom is not acquired though study or learning, but comes from revelation (Weber 1978: 1:446).

   This difference—that the prophet offers salvation through divine revelation—clearly distinguishes prophecy from the philosophic practice of disenchantment and from philosophy in general. But Weber also suggests a less defensible distinction: that the prophet is charismatic, whereas the philosopher is not. Weber (1978: 1:439) describes the prophet as a "a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment"; whereas the philosopher lacks this quality. In fact, Weber (1978: 1:445) suggests that this is the main difference between the two: "what primarily differentiates such figures [philosophical ethicists and academic teachers of philosophy] from the prophets is their lack of that vital emotional *preaching* which is distinctive of prophecy." Weber says that this emotional element makes the prophet more like a popular leader or demagogue or political publicist than a teacher or a philosopher.

   And yet, Weber recognizes that the distinction between prophets and philosophers is not absolute, but a matter of degree. There can be similarities between prophets and philosophers—and these similari-

ties are especially acute when the philosopher is a teacher of ethics. As Weber admits, there are "various transitional phases linking the prophet to the teacher of ethics, especially the teacher of social ethics." Both have disciples, give private counsel, advise rulers about public affairs, and possibly try to initiate a new ethical order. Greek sages such as Empedocles and Pythagoras "stand closest to the prophets," Weber observes. And in general, the philosophers of the ancient world resemble the Hebraic prophets in their "mode of life" (Weber 1978, 1:444–6).[21]

Indeed, Weber's treatment of Socrates appears to recognize that at least some kinds of philosophers enjoy a charismatic and quasi-prophetic status. Socrates, after all, opposed the professional teaching of the Sophists, taught in the open public not in an educational institution, and, by all accounts, enjoyed authority solely by virtue of his person and personality.[22] Weber does not deny Socrates a certain charisma, yet insists on some enduring differences between Socratic philosophy and the practice of prophecy:

> The activity of Socrates . . . must be distinguished conceptually from the activities of a prophet by the absence of a directly revealed religious mission. Socrates' 'genius' (*daimonion*) reacted only to concrete situations, and then only to dissuade and admonish. . . . For this reason, Socrates' *daimonion* cannot be compared at all to the conscience of a genuine religious ethic; much less can it be regarded as the instrument of prophecy (Weber 1978, 1:446).

Even if it is true that Weber is correct to distinguish Socrates from a prophet, Weber's reduction of Socrates to a purely negative thinker is a misidentification. Socrates generates positive ethical content out of his very profession of ignorance vis-à-vis a universal standard of virtue: for example, the duty to philosophize, tolerance, and the twin injunctions against inflicting and fleeing from death (Green 2004, 43–69). This misidentification is identical to Weber's misidentification of himself. For just like Socrates, Weber, in "Science as a Vocation, engages in a negative project of dissuasion and admonition that nevertheless eventuates in clear and positive teaching for ethical life.

The basic point is that while Weber's primary concern is to differentiate Socrates from the prophets, he recognizes that Socrates possesses an *expertise in negation* and that this expertise is connected

to charismatic features: the possession of a *daimonion*, an authority disconnected to any professional office and which in fact was employed against such offices, and a clear capacity to generate public interest. In Socrates, Weber does appear to recognize a limited kind of philosophical charisma—a charisma bound up with a gift for negation. It is this type of charisma that Weber himself exhibits in the address "Science as a Vocation."

Conclusion

These then are the main differences between sociological and philosophical disenchantment. First, the sociological concept of disenchantment objectifies the retreat of the magical, the mysterious, and the religious as a distinctive feature of Occidental history, whereas the philosophical version experiences this retreat as a disruptive *loss*. Second, the sociological concept understands disenchantment as a product of the empiricism, experimental method, and instrumental reason of scientific rationality, whereas the philosophic practice of disenchantment departs from scientific rationality through the reasoning by negation of *apophasis*. Third, the sociological approach treats disenchantment as part of a modernity thesis—as a description of what is most contemporary in culture—whereas the philosophic approach is not specific to a certain period in history and, in fact, requires the capacity to look back at what has been lost. To live fully in respect of the fate of the times—so that even the idea of a god or prophet would cease to be meaningful—would contradict the experience of disenchantment and make it impossible. Disenchantment in the philosophical sense requires the perception that something of value is *missing* and this can only be understood via a historical sensibility. Fourth, the sociological approach treats disenchantment as synonymous with secularization, whereas the philosophical approach preserves a negative relationship to what is lost. Philosophic disenchantment must be distinguished, therefore, from the disillusion of an utterly this-worldly perspective. Fifth, the sociological approach observes disenchantment, but does not speak it. The pronouncement that something of value is missing, and the prolonged meditation on the meaning of this fact, alters the sociological meaning. Sixth, whereas the sociological concept is not polemical, the philosophical pronouncement of disenchantment

engages in a two-fold struggle. On the one hand, the experience of enchantment is precluded from the disenchanted—as Weber says, the recognition of disenchantment comes *after* a period of belief, ecstasy, ritual—in which these are exposed as superstition. But just as much, disenchantment must occur *before* the complete forgetting of what is lost. In Weber's case, this means inculcating a negative relationship to the comprehensive worldviews of universal religions against the pure secularism which does not even know the meaning of the religious past.

The significance of the philosophical practice of disenchantment is not simply that it has been overlooked by students of the concept (whether Weber scholars or social theorists who have made use of the term), but that it calls for a reappraisal of Weber's thesis that one of the central meanings of world history is the "disenchantment of the world." Specifically, the suggestion would be that "the disenchantment of the world" is a self-refuting concept: to insist upon it (to say that the present moment is characterized by disenchantment in a particular sense) is simultaneously to counteract it, insofar as such insistence recalls the allegedly lost enchanted past, preserves a meaningful, if negative, relationship to it, and thereby makes it impossible to understand the supposedly lost beliefs and practices of the past strictly in terms of superstition, folly, or unreason. In the particular case of Weber's usage of the term, the self-violating character of disenchantment is especially apparent. As I have tried to make clear, Weber's impassioned call, in "Science as a Vocation," for his contemporaries to reconcile themselves to the disenchantment of the world (specifically, the breakdown of the comprehensive worldview associated with universal religions of salvation) proceeds in a manner that contradicts the secularism, rationalization, and crisis of meaning which Weber elsewhere attaches to disenchantment in the sociological sense.

The self-refuting nature of disenchantment does not mean that the concept is fundamentally flawed and thereby ought to be abandoned. For one thing, as a description of *earlier* developments in world history, disenchantment does not violate itself; it is only when the present moment is presented as an instance of disenchantment that the thesis of the disenchantment of the world breaks down. And in any case, the *philosophic practice* of disenchantment has an importance that exceeds

whatever logical difficulties beset disenchantment as a summation of world history. Most of all, the *apophasis* at the heart of the practice of disenchantment—the reasoning by negation through which the untenability of a moral tradition is itself determinative of a new ethical teaching—indicates that there are modes of cognition unique to the philosopher which thereby locate philosophy in an intermediate yet autonomous space between scientific and religious perspectives.

Notes

1. This essay, though relatively short, has been long in the making. Its first germination can be traced to work undertaken in a 1998–1999 seminar on Marx and Weber taught at Yale Law School by Anthony Kronman and James Whitman. An earlier draft of this essay was presented in 2005 at the History of Ideas and Theory of Science Department of Gothenburg University, and I grateful to the students of that department—and especially to the faculty members Eva Dahl, Sven-Eric Liedman, and Bo Lindberg—for their suggestions and encouragement. Sharon Krause and Nancy Rosenblum read earlier versions of the essay and I would like to thank them for their support. I am particuraly indebted to Dennis Thompson who was exceptionally generous with the time, attention, and critical comments he devoted to this essay. Conversations with my sister, Julia Green, also proved essential at a critical juncture of the writing process. This essay is dedicated to Anthony Kronman, who as my teacher first introduced me to Weber and who has been a model of the philosophic vocation ever since.

2. The *OED*, for example, includes the following instances of early usages of the terms "disenchant" and "disenchantment": "Alas let your own brain disenchant you" (1586); "Reason and Religion will yield you countercharms, able to disenchant you" (1659); "He may do all that is fitting for her disenchanting" (1620); "A noble stroke or two Ends all the charms, and disenchants the grove" (1691); "All the conjurers might assist at the disenchantment" (1794).

3. The phrase, the "de-divinization of nature" ("*die entgötterte Natur*"), comes from Schiller's poem, "The Gods of Greece" ("*Die Götter Greichenlands*").

4. It is only afterward, Nietzsche tells us, that the madman goes to several churches to pronounce the death of God a second time. Importantly, it is just the initial pronouncement that Nietzsche describes.

5. Thus, for example, Quentin Skinner (1998, 50) can write: "disenchanted, lacking any sense of God as an immanent force or morality as objectively grounded."

6. Weber (1972, 512) explains: "To judge the level of rationalization a religion represents we may use two primary yardsticks which are in many ways interrelated. One is the degree to which the religion has divested itself of magic; the other is the degree to which it has systematically unified the relation between God and the world and therewith its own ethical relationship to the world" (Cited and translated in Treiber [1985, 817]).

7. Eroticism, Weber (1946, 345) says, becomes a "gate to the most irrational and thereby real kernel of life, as compared with the mechanisms of rationalization." And in "Science as a Vocation," Weber (1946, 155) explains: "Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations. It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental, nor is it accidental that today only within the smaller and intimate circles, in personal human situations, in pianissimo, that something is pulsating that corresponds to the prophetic pneuma, which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together."

8. Weber (1946, 140) compares this situation to the life of Abraham, or ancient life in general, in which death comes as a completion to a full existence. Whereas Abraham could die "old and satiated with life," the life of the modern is never full or complete, due the constant processes of cultural and technological transformation.

9. As an other example, consider Weber's pronouncement (Weber 1946, 128) in 1919: "Not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness. . . . When this night shall have slowly receded, who of those for whom spring apparently had bloomed so luxuriously will be alive."

10. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* asserts: "The program of the enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy. . . . Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant."

11. Griesman (1976, 499) observes: "Although few concepts find their way into [Adorno's] work without critique or revision, Weber's definition of disenchantment as the elimination of myth and magic from social life is adopted without significant alteration."

12. Lawrence Scaff (1989, 224) writes of disenchantment as a situation in which we are "driven by purposive-rational or instrumental orientations, divided into opposed life-orders and value-spheres, without genuinely new prophetic truths, yet racked by endless searches for absolute experience and spiritual wholeness." Similarly, Charles Taylor (1991, 3) defines disenchantment in terms of a discrediting of communal orders which had provided a sense of meaning to the world and the activities of social life. And Jane Bennett (2001, chap. 4) defines disenchantment as a loss of wonder in the material world, stemming from calculation as well as deficits of community and meaning. Hans Blumenberg (1983, 147–8) however, is somewhat of an exception. While he speaks of "the disappearance of inherent purposes," he presents the dynamics of disenchantment in a more positive view, emphasizing how it creates room for self-assertion and thereby generates "incomparable energy." Moreover, Blumenberg insists upon the self-defeating character of the teleological religious worldviews whose loss disenchantment would appear to mourn.

13. Wolfgang Schluchter (1994, 91), for example, observes that the vocational lectures are "key texts to [Weber's] answers to central questions of modern culture." They are to be distinguished from his methodological and political writings. "They

pursue another goal; they are philosophical texts, with which they lead at once to the acknowledgment of that which is [*Tatsachenerkenntnis*] and of the self and at the same time persuade the individual to responsible work in the service of a suprapersonal cause [*Sache*]." [Translation by Strong and Owen (2004, xiv)].

14. The principle of *deus absconditus* has scriptural basis in Isaiah 45:25. Although an important tenet of Lutheran Protestantism and Pascalian Catholicism, it is especially crucial to the predestinarian theology espoused by Calvin. As a religious principle, *deus absconditus* means not that there is no external realm of objective moral knowledge, but that such a realm cannot be accessed for certain by the human who wishes to obey God's will. It means that God has become inaccessible to humankind, so that salvation must proceed via an existential leap of faith rather than through a rationally achieved knowledge of God.

15. Weber (1946, 155) states: "To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he rather return silently, without the usual publicity build-up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him."

16. Thus, Weber (1946, 142–3) can invoke the rhetorical question as if it were a convincing argument: "Who—aside from certain big children who are indeed found in the natural sciences—still believes that the findings of astronomy, biology, physics, or chemistry could teach us anything about the meaning of the world?" The figure of the "big child" is repeated, when Weber says only big children have celebrated science as the way to happiness.

17. Apophasis is reasoning by negation through which the non-existence or inapplicability of a moral entity is itself determinative of a moral teaching. A good example of apophatic reasoning is Heidegger's dictum: God is dead, therefore now is a time of mourning. Both the negative premise (God is dead) and the conclusion drawn from the premise (the necessity of mourning) defy the strictures of scientific reason—the former violates the empirical restraint that propositions be falsifiable, while the latter violates any conventional notion of logic (since death has no *necessary* relationship to mourning, but might after all be celebrated). Yet, the statement still makes philosophical sense. Apophasis can be distinguished from three other forms of negation: rejection, disillusion, and replacement/compensation. Rejection is that wholesale form of negation by which the negated object is cast aside once and for all. Rejection renders the negated object irrelevant. Reasons for rejection include the absurdity or simple falsity of the negated object. Modern science, for example, rejects Ptolemy's earth-centric theory of the universe. Disillusion is the psychological distress of coming to understand the falsity or inapplicability of a certain set of moral commitments. A disillusioned person has been stripped of a moral foundation and, hence, stands naked where before he had been clothed. In other words, in disillusion, a person who had previously known what to believe or how to act comes to occupy a new position in which there is confusion, uncertainty, and a profound rupture in the ethical fabric by which the individual organizes ethical duties and obligations. Apophasis is different. First, it provides an ethical teaching, so no one is left in the lurch. Second, apophasis tends to elicit the sense of loss, rather than only respond to it.

If disillusion experiences loss only as a problem, with apophasis it is validated as the very device by which a new moral teaching is derived. Thus, practitioners of apophasis often must engineer the feeling of loss rather than simply respond to one. So, while disillusion does preserve an enduring connection to what is lost, this connection is itself negative, i.e., disconcerting, sad, unfortunate. Finally, compensation is the replacement of one set of ethical commitments with another, once the former have lost their appeal or suitability. An example is Rousseau's suggestion that the civil freedom of republican citizenship might replace the natural freedom and independence enjoyed by noble savages in the state of nature. This resembles apophasis in the movement from one ethical imperative to another. But there is a key difference. With compensation, the link between the two ethical solutions is extremely weak. At most, the loss of the former ethical direction provides a rationale for deriving a new source. But the actual derivation and formal justification for the new ethical commitment is separated from the former version. Thus, with Rousseau, the rationale for the social contract might reside in the loss of natural freedom and natural equality, but the derivation and formal justification for Rousseau's conception of the social contract has nothing to do with the *Second Discourse*. That this is true can be seen from the fact that the intelligibility of *The Social Contract* would in no way be lessened if Rousseau had never written the *Second Discourse*, or if the state of nature featured in the *Second Discourse* were accepted as hypothetical or entirely fictive. With apophasis, on the other hand, the negated object is itself determinative of the new ethical horizon. In the absence of the negated object, the new ethical imperative would lose its justification. So, in the Heidegger example, without the death of God, the call to mourning would make no sense. With apophasis, the negation of the object is itself understood to produce a quasi-logical deduction for the compensatory moral teaching.

18. The German (Weber 1982, 550) reads: "überall freilich geht diese Annahme, die ich Ihnen hier vortrage, aus von dem einen Grundsachverhalt: daß das Leben, solange es in sich selbst beruht und aus sich selbst verstanden wird, nur den ewigen Kampf jener Götter miteinander kennt,—unbildlich gesprochen: die Unvereinbarkeit und also die Unaustragbarkeit des Kampfes der letzten überhaupt möglichen Standpunkte zum Leben, die Notwendigkeit also: zwischen ihnen sich zu entscheiden." As Weber explains here, decisionism means not simply that people legislate their own values, but that there is a necessity [*Notwendigkeit*] to engage in a conscious act of self-legislation.

19. Likewise, Jörg von Kapher, one of Weber's students at the University of Munich where "Science as a Vocation" was delivered, described the impression Weber made on the students: "He was realistic [*sachlich*] through and through. The full heroism of realism which presumably is the heroism of our age, came alive in him. . . . The entire warmth of his personality shone upon anyone in whom he thought he had found an idea or a valuable impulse. This warmth was enlivening, invigorating, and hope-giving. Thus working under his direction meant not only scholarly enrichment, but an increase in strength and joyfulness." Referring to the depersonalized character of the relationship Weber maintained with his

students, Kapher concluded: "Perhaps this depersonalized relationship is the only possibility of sharing a peson's capacity for devotion and enjoying his gifts once we leave the community of common blood [*Blutsgemeinschaft*]. Perhaps it is a law of this strength that it cannot be directly aimed at those whom it ultimately enlivens. Presumably, someone who cannot offer us anything but his goodwill and a readiness to love us is never a help but sometimes a burden. Those who have given people the most and whose love appears to us as immeasurable were servants of something alien, of a god, of a cause. In the name of this they were able to demand what was hardest for human beings: 'Take your cross and follow me.' (Matthew 10:38) They do not support comfort, but they give strength" (quoted in M. Weber 1975, 662–3).

20. Whereas pagan culture turned to magic and ritual to purposively effect the external environment, salvational religion involves the quest for an abstract state of soul. Weber (1978: 1:438) emphasizes the irrational elements of this transition, describing as the departure "from the rational wish to insure personal external pleasures for oneself by performing acts pleasing to the god, to a view of sin as the unified power of the anti-divine (diabolical) into whose grasp man may fall. Goodness is then envisaged as an integral capacity for an attitude of holiness, and for consistent behavior derived from such an attitude. During the process of transformation, there also develops a hope for salvation as an irrational yearning to be good for its own sake, in order to gain the beneficent awareness of such virtuousness."

21. Weber (1978, 1:446) observes: "In their mode of life, [the philosophers of the ancient world] may be nearer to the mystagogic-ritual prophecy of salvation, as in the case of the Pythagoreans, or to the exemplary prophecy of salvation, as in the case of the Cynics."

22. Here it is relevant to recall some of the ways Weber (1946, 245–52) describes charisma—namely, that is: beyond the everyday; the "very opposite of the institutionally permanent"; an authority that requires inner determination and inner restraint; something directed to and received only by a select group and that ignites "a devotion borne of distress and enthusiasm"; and, finally, something that constitutes a sovereign break with norms of tradition or rationality. Socrates would appear to manifest each of these qualities.

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