

The arguments politics as a vocation politics essay



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Max Weber, in his famous lecture ' Politics as a Vocation', expounded upon the field of politics as a profession. He provided his perspective on the type of political leadership as well as on the vocation of politics. Weber also contributed his definition of the state, where he says that a state is defined by its monopolized legitimate authority to exercise violence within its territorial jurisdiction. Weber goes on to describe three main categories of leadership or ' authority' i. e. traditional, charismatic and legal-rational.

One aspect of noteworthy attention in the lecture is that Weber begins with defining the scope of his forthcoming speech. He specifies the realm of his thoughts by beginning to draw boundaries to his discussion when he says that, " You will naturally expect me to take a position on actual problems of the day. But that will be the case only in a purely formal way and toward the end." He also specifically starts off with negating the dimensions he will not be exploring in his lecture by saying that certain questions pertaining to the lecture must be eliminated. This clearly defines the limitations of his text and sets the premise for the audiences' expectations.

The whole lecture elucidates upon the definitions of important concepts such as politics, state and also discusses politics as an occupational choice.

Weber, very astutely transitioned from explaining the larger concept of politics to defining the state. This also specifies the boundaries of the definition of the state that he is playing around with. Weber discusses the political and sociological context of the state throughout the lecture. In his initial explanation about the state his comments echo the Hobbesian view of the state of nature and the social contract theory when Weber opines that, " 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 expressing his views on the concept of the state, Weber defines the state as the sole legitimate entity that has the authority to practice violence within its territorial jurisdiction. He further says that although violence or force is not the only means of establishing authority but it is particular to the state. Here to the Hobbesian views are resonated, similar to Weber Hobbes also says that state has the authority to administer and regulate people and in order to come together in a community everybody submits their free will to a social contract with the state.

At the instance where Weber claims that "every state is found on force" he seems to be conforming to a violent view of state-making. Although he does try to justify himself by reasoning that anarchy would prevail if there is no state and in order to form a community there needs to be forceful action by the state agents. However, this is a very cynical view also supported by Hobbes who considers the state of nature as brutish and evil. This view can also be contested by the fact that there are historical incidences when state-regulated or state-initiated violence led to the ultimate demise of, instead of the strengthening or formation of a state. This can be seen in the African Borgu society where princes and leaders of that community initiated and participated full fledged in the armed banditry of the merchants in the area. Ultimately this led to the merchants changing their route and the cities that once became economic hubs were reduced to slums.

Another important aspect of the lecture is the outlining of the three forms of legitimized authorities that Weber provides i. e. traditional, charismatic and legal-rational. He says that these authorities are more like inner justifications people give to themselves in order to remain in the communal setting of the state. These forms, although declared as 'pure' only theoretically, by Weber are still called as the ideal and only true forms of authority. This reveals his inability to detach himself from his claims and consider a critical opinion about them as he does in other instances of the same lecture.

Weber also discussed the existence of administrative staff that supported the purpose of a politician. This is a bureaucratic view of the sphere of politics. It also alludes to the Marx dominated German school of thought that Weber was liberally exposed to. This is further solidified when he analogized his view of the administrative staff working for the politician to the workers in a factory and the proletariat. In fact Weber draws parallels of the division of state power by the 'prince' to the setting up of a business enterprise.

A facet of Weber's claims as a whole is that they come at a time when his country, Germany, was undergoing a political revolution and had all sorts of chaotic ideas coming from various sections of the society. The air of that region in general was quite volatile and almost everyone wanted to turn violent at the drop of a hat so Weber's arguments are quite pertinent to the time and area that he lived in when he made these announcements.

Violence, even though an important aspect prevalent in all times and at all places because of the basic human nature being violent, does not necessarily hold the same crucial position in the society at present since the <https://assignbuster.com/the-arguments-politics-as-a-vocation-politics-essay/>

world as a whole is exposed to peaceful platforms like the UN where non-violent conflict resolution may be achieved. However, it is not to say that the occurrence of violence can be completely ruled out since countries and states are autonomous in their own rights and non-violent conflict resolution is not binding on any state, hence Weber's claims are still pertinent.

Throughout his essay, Weber hints to the strong ties between politics and violence. In fact he calls violence a means to politics, which, in this instance, is the end. He also defines politics as the mode or platform for distribution of power and authority within the various elements of the state. Historical examples of the effectiveness of Weber's arguments also exist as can be seen in the ancient Roman and post-apartheid South African societies where violence was either State regulated, as seen in the Roman gladiators, or violence was legitimized by not being stopped by the politicians in order to achieve their political aims, as seen in post-apartheid South Africa.

A rather interesting concept, and highly relevant to present times, introduced by Weber is that of the ' professional politicians'. Here he introduces the kind of politicians who, according to him make politics their vocation. He says that there are two types of such politicians; ones who live " off" politics and those who live " for" politics. These are distinguished by the need to earn money from their political endeavors by those who live off politics. Such politicians may not necessarily have the problems of the average citizen at heart but because they earn their bread and butter through politics so they are extremely well versed in the art of politics. The other type is those who have other means of income and do not necessarily have to depend on politics as a main source of livelihood. They may have the

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public's issues at heart or they may have their own ulterior motives to fulfill. The example of both these types of politicians can be found in the case of the French Revolution. Here the revolutionaries had an agenda of ridding the country off the royal dominance and making it a democratic regime, these revolutionaries had other occupations too but the issue was so close to their hearts that they came together to fight for it. This is case of those who live "for politics". On the other hand, the royal family just intended to maintain their domination over the area. Even the monarch's marriage with the extremely hated queen Marie Antoinette was a means of strengthening ties with allies. The royals did not consider the problems of the French citizens and they led their own frivolous, nonchalant lifestyle. This is a true depiction of such a leader who lives "off politics".

A criticism of Weber's arguments in his lecture may be that he is an idealist and demands too much for a perfect politician to be. He also shoots down the element of honesty to the extent of spirituality, in politics by calling it not a realm for saints. He seems to have committed a converse fallacy of hasty generalizations here when through the example of the Christian Sermon on the Mound he goes on to generalize that religion has no scope in politics because politics demands ruthlessness apart from violence whereas religion preaches honesty and humbleness to the extent of sainthood. However, he can be said of being one of the first to realize the true democratic version of politics as he separates religion from politics and the state when he separates sainthood from political realm.

Finally, Weber's contribution to politics and sociology are commendable and competent elements of Weber's lecture include his detailed explanation of <https://assignbuster.com/the-arguments-politics-as-a-vocation-politics-essay/>

his conception of the state, despite the time and geographical boundary his definition may imply. Weber's lecture also provides a general framework for categorizing leadership, extension of his theory can bring it more up-to-date. Another element worth praise is the development of the concept of bureaucracy and he can be credited for being the pioneer of this concept.