

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION AND ITS PROMISE FIFTY YEARS LATER: IS THERE A FUTURE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AS A *FREE* FORM OF ENQUIRY?

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ABSTRACT: This paper offers a restatement of Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* and tries to judge whether its promise can be credibly renewed today by addressing the question about the present and future possibilities of the social sciences as *free* forms of enquiry. Relying on Weber, Mills and other thinkers, the paper sustains that the possibilities for a truly free social science essentially depend on three major 'conditions': the subjective stance or vocation, the sociological imagination proper, and an independent social science politics, conditions whose apt names can also be 'love', 'insight' and 'courage'. An analysis of the presence and strength of each of these conditions in contemporary social science and in academia shows the magnitude of the task faced for the existence of a *free* social science.

KEYWORDS: Truth, Vocation, Subject, *Eros*, University, Politics, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Rousseau, Marx, Weber, Mills, Badiou

In this age of commemorations, this is not meant to be a commemorative article, but a revisiting of Mills' landmark work fifty years later and an attempt to address the question as to whether there is a future for the social sciences as a *free* form of enquiry. It is this attempt, which should enable us to see whether *The Sociological Imagination's* promise can be credibly renewed, what may constitute a most fitting homage to Mills' achievement. Indeed for those who feel the love for the discipline, who are therefore faithfully devoted to the 'daemon' who, according to Weber, lords over it, or, if you prefer, to its immanent logic, Mills' book has lost none of its value. If anything the sense of urgency running through it has but become still more imperative. It is therefore a worthy and necessitated endeavour, one which I can only expect to instigate here by providing a tentative framework to tackle it and a few insights which may be as many hints about the possibilities for a truly free social science.

Posing that question amounts to openly declaring that there are serious doubts about the future of sociology or, more generally, of the social sciences, as a *free* form of

social and political enquiry. But expressing serious doubts does obviously not mean denying the possibilities for a free social science, which would be an epistemological deception; rather it is the manifestation of a deep concern about whether such possibilities, which are assumed as real, are to be actualised and made present, or suppressed by the ever-growing subjugation of scholarly and teaching practices to external, utterly alien commercial and managerial interests. Concern also about the extent to which social scientists, including those who may have *de facto* but not at heart decided to conform to those interests, will be able and indeed willing to honour their practices—willing therefore, in view of enormous pressures and given the accommodating attitude of their established disciplines, to run the risks inevitably involved in opposing the encroachment of academia and practising education and scholarship for their own sake. Concern, in brief, about the role of human reason and thereby liberty in the social sciences and in academia, “for in our time these two values, reason and freedom, are in obvious yet subtle peril” (SI 168).¹

The doubts are therefore genuine, and the question they elicit is by no means a rhetorical one. What is questioned is the weight that reason or thought has in the social sciences, and the presence of liberty, since the latter cannot be realised without the former. Bringing human reason closer to the commanding position due to it—this eminently philosophical task was the sociological imagination’s extraordinary promise—is the least one is entitled to demand from an intellectual activity devoted to the study of Man and society and from the privileged site of that activity. Indeed it remains to be shown that sociology, appraised in terms of the apt and noble standards set out by Mills—and, we are tempted to say, even in terms of any substantive, non-commercial and non-managerial standard—, is in a significant sense something other than “a set of bureaucratic techniques which inhibit social inquiry by ‘methodological’ pretensions, which congest such work by obscurantist conceptions, or which trivialize it by concern with minor problems unconnected with publicly relevant issues” (SI 20); that its results are in any meaningful sense something more or other than an endless measuring of rates of circulation of preferences and behaviours conducted in the service of the aforementioned spurious interests and in conformity with the taste of the day.

This way of posing the problem is not meant to be polemical, but an adequate description of the overwhelming main bulk of sociology. Of course sociology, as other disciplines, has had its peaks and its depths, but there would be no point in disputing about how much lower and longer today’s peaks and depths are. For the question is not immediately one of intellectual height and breadth, but of intellectual independence and autonomy in the first place. Nor is it a question of *maîtres à penser*, even if after Bourdieu’s departure it is very difficult to think of sociologists of comparable stature, but of everyday social science practices and the extent to which social scientists have accepted a

1. SI stands for *The Sociological Imagination*; all quotations from this work refer to the page numbers of the Oxford University Press edition, first published in 1959, and issued as paperback in 1967. The recent, 40th anniversary edition, published in 2000 with an Afterword by Todd Gitlin, follows exactly the same pagination.

debased role. What matters then is the urgent need to seriously think about the situation and prospects of social science as a free form of enquiry today—a need no one who cares about social science can dispute. If so, if thinking about that is necessary, then the fiftieth anniversary of Mills' book is as good an occasion as any other, for thought needs no commemorations; if so, then we ought to gain distance from our own social science practices and therefore abandon any complacency we may have about them; if so, then disciplinary boundaries cannot be a constraint. In this respect, the fact that able thinkers social scientists take into account tend to dismiss the social sciences, particularly sociology, as servants of masters or clients other than the pursuit of truth and the quest for knowledge, may provide us a clue about both the exact nature of the problem and how to start to address it.

Now the manner in which I have sought to treat the problem is by trying to outline an approach whose very development is meant to be a way of thinking about and judging not only why social science has failed to live up to the sociological imagination's promise, but the more important and more difficult, although directly related, question of what possibilities there are for credibly renewing the promise today. I found it necessary to give absolute priority to the latter question, to the point of using it as the guiding thread even for addressing the former one, just in case current social science practices have led us to forget, or make it difficult to imagine, that "social science is the practice of a craft", not a technique or a methodology; that it is concerned with "problems of substance" (SI 195) which the craftsperson feel as its own, for s/he is affected and disturbed by them, not with technical questions posed by or on the basis of alien interests; and that it involves, among other things, love of the craft, curiosity, sense of adventure and, if the problems are really important and substantial, surely trouble and risk. These and other important issues in social science and in academia will be brought out at different moments in the article, their treatment being subordinated to the development of the approach and to a faithful account of Mills' thought. This way of proceeding may be felt to be unconventional in a scholarly paper; however, and leaving aside the fact that social science conventions are themselves part of the problems addressed in the paper, I have chosen to risk arousing perhaps a certain initial perplexity, not to say reluctance, to the exposition of the arguments, and to trust the reader in this complicated endeavour, who will be able to complete what is left unfinished, interpret what is only suggested and draw implications not explicitly drawn. After all the approach I seek to outline is nothing but a challenge, in the traditional sense of an invitation, to think through a crucial problem for the future of the social sciences. To start to envisage that approach we have to address what is at the core of it as its foundational principle, namely, the question of truth.

I am aware that the mere mention of 'truth' may put social scientists off; after years of postmodern prattle, which have led many to endorse the self-indulgent belief that truth is a 'totalitarian' notion, this is probably to be expected. They will protest that they strive to appeal and be close to society or to as large audiences as possible. And this certainly they do: they pay homage to opinion and identities almost as a matter of course,

perhaps not realizing that all too often they merely flatter and pamper those audiences. But they believe that it is such appeal and proximity what gives them legitimacy, for they tacitly or explicitly link their stance to a ‘democratic’ attitude, as if the latter had taken the place of the universal character of truth or as if democracy could not be conceived other than in a mercantile fashion. In this one has to acknowledge that social scientists are the objective, if perhaps not entirely aware, mirrors of the society they study. And yet, the question must be posed, is social science meant to reflect society or is its task rather to think it through? For the latter, let us admit, cannot be done in the context of the former.

Truth for Mills is “the first” value of social science, a value he understands, to begin with, as the value “of fact” (SI 178). Yet Mills’ conception of truth is by no means positivist, not even epistemologically; as befits a thinker influenced by pragmatism, he thought that objective truth may “include meaning as well as ‘fact’” (1944, p. 19; see also SI 148, 211), which is a way of saying that mere ‘factual truths’, separated from the socio-political situation in which they obtain and from the research problems and questions which led to their discovery, are a sham.² Mills’ conception of truth was thus strongly oriented toward the political significance of truth and the virtue of truth-telling. As the title given to the recent selection of Mills’ writings (2008) by its editor aptly reveals, it underpins a “politics of truth” aimed at upholding “an adequate definition of reality” (1944, p. 134; 1959b, p. 221), alternative to the “official ... inadequate and misleading definitions of reality” (SI 191). As such it involves “the use of research to clarify significant issues and to bring political controversy closer to realities” (SI 64), and a continuous dynamics of detachment and engagement respectively concerned with knowledge and its effective communication (1944, p. 19 and 20). Mills was very clear that in the face of the prevailing “politics of organized irresponsibility” which distorts reality (*ibid.*, p. 18), “in a world of widely communicated nonsense, any statement of fact is of political and moral significance ... In such a world as ours, to practice social science is, first of all, to practice the politics of truth” (SI 178)—‘first of all’, but not only; this is a fundamental qualification, for a complete “statement of the values that guide our enterprise” also includes those of human reason and freedom (SI 179).

The capital problem that Mills’ politics of truth faced lies in the world in which such politics is to take effect, although not only there. For how can truth be communicated, let alone “in a politically effective manner”, in a world of widely communicated nonsense? How can truth-telling take place when the “means of effective communication” have been “expropriated from the intellectual worker”? How can reason compete with the “communicational machineries” of the modern mass communication? (Mills 1944, pp. 21, 18 and 23 respectively). How, in short, can reason prevail in a world of unreason? This is one of philosophy’s original and enduring problems par excellence, although almost no trace of it can be found in the social sciences, except in Bourdieu and critical theory. Mills confronted the problem with courage and acumen, which very few do;

2. In 1926, when the positivist wave was playing the tune, Dewey had spoken of the huge distance separating “‘facts’ and the meaning of facts” (1954, p. 3).

yet, awash with an enlightened faith partly naïve as he was, he does not seem to have entirely seen the problem full in its face. Mills' mission was one of enlightenment: he trusted that an effective communication of social science's knowledge to non-specialized publics would have a liberating or emancipatory effect and foster the development of a thinking, reasoning and spirited public. Bourdieu, who confronted the problem as a bitter battle for rule against philosophy,³ could not trust the emancipatory effects of sociological knowledge because that would go against the very essence of the sociology he developed: the science of the correspondences between social positions and forms of being, which can play an unmasking and demystifying role, particularly in relation to 'the dominant' and the privileged in one or more respects, and a confirmatory and partly a medical role in relation to 'the dominated', but cannot by itself subvert domination or lead to emancipatory social transformation—hence Bourdieu appealed to a mild variant of the old figure of the armed prophet: “a *Realpolitik* of the universal” or “of reason” relying on “the ordinary means of political action”, for just as it was once said that states cannot be governed with paternosters, so “to advance the cause of reason” one cannot “count solely on the force of rational preaching” (1997, p. 116 and 182).

There is a sociological trend currently enjoying some popularity, public sociology, which purports not just to be somehow inspired by Mills' work but to better it and to overcome the problem neither Mills nor Bourdieu were able to solve. It is therefore only fair to summarize its core claims here. Public sociology argues that there is a gap between the profession of sociology and the world sociology studies, that it can bridge such gap by entering into 'dialogue' with different publics in order to reach a consensus on which knowledge is said to be based, and that by thus doing sociology shows in deeds its defence of civil society against the encroachments of markets and states. These are indeed astonishing claims—and hardly credible, unless one assumes that the evils of both sociology and society Mills diagnosed have not intensified, that marketisation cum bureaucratisation and managerialism have not extended and tightened their grip on both society and sociology, indifference and creeping conformism have not continued; unless, to sum up, one believes that so-called civil society is not the active support of markets and states.⁴

3. Indeed much more than the *Pensées*, the *Pascalian Meditations* are Bourdieu's *Les Provinciales* against philosophy which should be subtitled 'A sociological critique of pure reason'.

4. See Burawoy 2007a. One cannot but feel sympathetic to Burawoy's invectives against “the tyranny of markets (propagated as freedom) and despotism of states (camouflaged as democracy)” and against “economics” and “political science” as disciplines “constituting the foundations of neoliberal thought” which “are producing ideologies that are threatening all arenas of autonomous politics, not least the university in which they thrive—the university that everyday becomes more like a private corporation than a responsive community of scholars and students” (2007b, p. 256). Nobody can with reason deny that. However, these tirades will in practice remain innocuous as long as they are not accompanied by a commensurate thought, for it can only be out of infinite self-complacency that sociology is not only left out of the culprits' file, but charged with the implausible “endeavour to fight off” (*ibid.*) the aforementioned tyrannies. Not wielding the ideological power economics and political science have does not make sociology any better. This is of course a platitude; and yet, we must ask: is a grouchy servant or simply a servant nobler than a crackpot master, to put it *a la* Mills? Perhaps the most important question to pose is: what have social scientists and

Neither paternosters nor certainly good intentions suffice. If social science is to sustain its noble aspirations in the current world it has to produce a radical gesture of revolt against that world—a world ostensibly inhabited by Zarathustra’s last humans and their notorious offspring of mindless specialists and enthusiasts that declares itself free, that decrees itself the only possible world and that proclaims as sacred the unprincipled dictates of profit and managerial efficiency which rule it. The values needed in order to produce such a gesture are, as they have always been, truth, reason and liberty. Only an unwavering devotion to truth and reason can make social science free. But the gesture will only be possible on the basis of an entirely new conception of truth, one that enable us both to break with that world and to begin to make a new one in which the human being is not reduced to its animal side.

Now to do this I can only refer to Alain Badiou, the philosopher who has reconstructed and re-ennobled categories as necessitated today as ‘truth’ and ‘subject’. Truth is by definition for all, as long as they think—but, we rush to add, all can think. Aren’t women and men thinking beings? Only this counts. For truth is by definition unarmed truth, hence, as Weber held, “truth is that which will only be valid for all those who want the truth” (1904, p. 184),⁵ who have the inner disposition to accept it or be seized by it. Any attempt to impose the truth would amount to dishonouring it by making violence to it; and of course it would not work, for truth, as Nietzsche said, only accepts suitors, not pre-arranged marriages, let alone magnificent institutions for its sheltering which would sooner rather than later found new orthodoxies and the consequent hunt for heretics.

What matters for us here is the idea, the fundamental axiomatic premise that all can think, that all are capable of truth. This does not mean that such capacity is *de facto* actualised always and everywhere. As a matter of fact we know how difficult, how exceptional, its actualisation may be, the more so perhaps today, after centuries of ruthless efforts devoted to organising society in order for the lowest in Man, its interests and appetites, to reign almost unchallenged. Let us add that the well-known name of these efforts is liberalism and that most social science, to the extent that it transforms life into a measurable object and accounts for human pursuits, attitudes, perceptions and judgements merely as effects of positionings in the social, economic, identity and taste market, is its servant. What it means is the effective recognition that, despite these difficulties, Man can nevertheless be, somewhere, at some moment, the thinking being he is supposed to be. As such, as a true recognition, it carries an inexorable implication for thought, namely, as the unrelenting prescription to think Man and society according

scholars, above all—since they seem to enjoy pre-eminence among the resistance—sociologists, done in the last four decades to prevent the university from becoming a private corporation? Let me stress that we are talking about the university, almost the oldest institution in the Western world, the shelter for the conservation and advancement of higher learning (Veblen 1993), the defence of which has been entrusted to scholars and scientists. As this is a purely empirical question, it should be very easy to answer.

5. I am indebted to Isabelle Darmon, currently about to complete a PhD thesis on Weber and the question of the human type at the University of Manchester, for her decisive help with the translation of Weber’s texts and also for her thorough comments on a complete draft of this paper.

to the premise ‘people think’—a prescription which is eminently egalitarian (all have this capacity for thought) but also aristocratic or noble (because thought is the highest in Man and what distinguishes him from animals), which is crucial, for people can also be made and are often made equal in fear, for instance. As we shall see, the implications of this axiomatic assumption for social science, which despite Rancière’s work remain largely unexplored, are equally inexorable, particularly in relation to two issues as crucial as its address (dealt with in section III below) and the constitution of its object, for it involves the consideration of equality not as a goal to be achieved or a project to be pursued, but as the very starting point of any enquiry—the former is the common stance; it amounts to an initial assumption, in conformity with the social hierarchies, of inequality and thus institutes a distance with the human beings social science studies which is pernicious, whether it is expressed as condescendence and pity, in the case of a downward distance, or as deference and obsequiousness, in the case of an upward one. The latter makes equality actual here and now, thus subverting social hierarchies from the very beginning.

The Badiouian prescription is of course meant to operate in the world as the world is, not precisely in order to lower the world, but on the contrary: interpreted Nietzscheanly, i.e. as an expression of the most spiritual will to power, or Badiouianly, since on this central question Nietzsche and Badiou are at one, i.e. as an expression of the immortal in Man, it is what enables us to deal with the world and to think it through in the light of its highest manifestations and possibilities.

In respect to our central question, such possibilities can be identified with relative ease. In effect, whether and to what extent there is to be a future for the social sciences as a free form of enquiry will depend, as has always been the case, on the existence of three major conditions, each of which was a constant object of preoccupation and analysis for Mills. To begin with, the subjective stance appropriate to the pursuit of such an activity or what Weber named the ‘calling’ or ‘vocation’. Secondly, the ‘sociological imagination’, a very special virtue or, in Mills’ terms, a “quality of mind” and—let us add, since it involves sensibility as well as insight—heart which guides social and political enquiry.⁶ And finally a sociological or social science politics, or a politics for the social sciences, honouring the aforementioned values and therefore opposed to the handing over of the disciplines and the accommodation of their practitioners to the powers that be. ‘Love’, ‘insight’ and ‘courage’ might be apt terms for naming these conditions.

None of these conditions can be separated from the possibilities for arousing and cultivating such love, such insight and such courage, that is to say, from education in

6. In reality this notion stands for an imagination of much wider scope, encompassing not only the human sciences, but all sciences as long as they are understood as creative and enquiring activities. It can thus become, depending on each one’s particular penchant, anthropological, literary, political, sociological (SI 14, 19) or indeed “mathematical” (Weber 1917, p. 7). It is important to clarify that, rather than a concept, the ‘sociological imagination’ is a view or perspective the power of which has much to do with precisely its blurred boundaries and the breadth and richness of insight it conveys. As a “general condition” (SI 211), it is involved in the three conditions we have identified, although its central core is arguably constituted by our second condition.

the noblest sense of the term. Furthermore social science cannot look at its own situation without looking at that of higher learning as a privileged site for its cultivation and transmission. It is important to emphasise in this connection that the social scientist's educational task, to which Mills devotes very significant paragraphs in his book, belongs to a "liberal, that is to say liberating, education" (SI 186) and therefore features among the highest tasks s/he has to accomplish.

It is manifest that these conditions are subject to unrelenting pressures, to "the antagonisms of the actual present" (Mills 1944, p. 22), and this not only in the form of external constraints and direct attacks on the part of the contemporary world, which cannot tolerate human creative energy out of its jurisdiction, but much more consequentially in terms of shaping and moulding social practices and their carriers. This means that they are highly susceptible to be undermined and finally to abdicate their mission, partly unnoticed and partly under the pretext of 'adaptation', 'modernisation' and similar tags. That is why the first condition, the subjective stance or vocation, is the most decisive one for the existence of a truly free social science. As is well known, the name of the inroads made into the subjective stance and its gradual undermining is corruption, and the proper name of corruption, according to Machiavelli, is human unfitness or servitude, a major problem for which no easy cure seems to be readily available. In what follows we shall deal with each of the three conditions in turn, starting with the vocation.

I. THE ACADEMIC VOCATION AND THE ACADEMIC AS A SUBJECT

By academic vocation it is meant here the Weberian idea of the calling to academia or to scholarship and teaching. Today, when the idea of 'duty in a calling' has plainly ceased to haunt our lives, even as the distant ghost Weber mentioned in the legendary last paragraphs of the *Protestant Ethic*, the very mention of a calling, and the consequent implication of duty in and love of it, will perhaps appear, particularly if the calling happens to be 'academic', as a hardly credible appeal to the solidity once enjoyed by old institutions and even as laughable. It may be worth reminding ourselves that there is now almost one hundred years since Veblen warned against the rule of the universities by the new sacerdotal class of businessmen which, in place of the old clergy and with their new faith, "the conviction that learning is of no use in business ... and that what is of no use in business is not worth while" (1993, p. 53), interfered with academic practice and diverted educational institutions from their proper aims. And that, practically at the same time as Veblen and referring to the Americanization of German universities through that very ascendancy of capitalist businessmen over an institution whose ethos and spirit was utterly at odds with theirs, Weber declared that "the old university constitution has become a fiction" (1917, p. 3). Today it is the very idea and the truth of the university that more and more resembles a chimera, unable to breathe in the context of the new postmodern (Tribe 2004) or neo-liberal 'university'. It is in this situation, when a majority of academics can still see that the type Mills used to dub 'crackpot businessman' needs not command their active or passive assent, that it seems timely to recall the

prime significance of the calling for a human life, that is to say, for a life that does not simply pass by, pulled and pushed by the incessant and shifting demands of the world to submit to what is, and to do so allegedly in earnest, but is lived consciously, deliberately, that is, with deliberation, and as fully as possible.

For a life thus lived is, in Weber's forceful expression, "a chain of ultimate decisions by means of which the soul, as in Plato, chooses its own fate—that is, the meaning of its doing and being" (1917b, p. 507-8). It is, in other words, a life capable of *eros*, of transforming love of both the world and self, a life that has been seized from within, which is therefore staunchly devoted to its object(s) of love, proudly conducted according to its own requirements and very jealous of the slightest encroachment on it—today, the name for all encroachments on any worthwhile human activity, whether education, research, care, ruling or shoemaking is of course 'management'. A human being capable of such a life is a subject, a daring being who risks making a wager and choosing, and who, enduring adverse odds, faithfully sticks to this choice and thus remains true to itself. Today we need to ask where that human life in academia is and where the academic subject, for the spirit, indeed the truth, of academia is, as Badiou would say, eternal; it may go under or disappear from public view but it cannot die. We need to enquire about this because the situation to which the university has relentlessly been led in the last decades makes it necessary and urgent to once again proclaim that truth openly.⁷

The vocation is therefore a choice which lifts the human being out of his animal condition, that condition of exclusive concern with oneself and indifference to all causes, and, by so doing, raises life above its mechanical or routine everyday course, transforming it into a consciously guided venture. Thus, it is not only a choice of a career, but, as Mills states, "a choice of how to live as well as a choice of a career" (SI 196). It is a choice, in other words, of an end which engages the whole person and her entire life; it therefore requires no "ulterior goal", nor external rewards and punishments, let alone to "flee from work into a separate sphere" (Mills 1958, p. 182), as if it were a mere means for a 'good' living, for a life of secure and quiet comfort. Accordingly, Mills asserts that the most admirable academics "do not split their work from their lives", whilst "such a split is the prevailing convention" among less admirable academics (SI 195). Indeed this unity not just between work and life but between vocation and person is a rare and most difficult achievement and, as Weber showed in his work and not only there, by no means exempt from "great" and "today ... renewed" "inner tensions and conflicts" (1910, p. 194-5). For Man as a unity is not something naturally given, but rather what might perhaps occur as a consequence of a sustained striving, in the midst of divided loyalties and competing appeals, for something beyond oneself which may turn out to be a quest for one's own self as well. "Whether he knows it or not, says Mills, the intellectual workman forms his own self as he works toward the perfection of his craft" (SI 196). Such a unity implies that the vocation makes full sense for the person as an activity worthwhile in itself, to be therefore pursued for its own sake and not merely as a means. Only when pursued as a cause which transcends oneself may the actual vocational prac-

7. The current situation of the university and of teachers and students is dealt with in section III.

tices induce a certain unity between vocation and person which is the condition of all true vocations.

Now Mills did not enter into the nature of such a choice, for he addressed the academic vocation mainly through the idea of ‘intellectual craftsmanship’ and its inverted or distorted images, those Mills portrayed above all under the label of ‘liberal practicality’; that is to say, he essentially focused on the practice of an already constituted vocation. However, it is fundamental to understand it, for it is a very peculiar kind of choice, one that, as Weber showed and as is indeed the case in all choices which concern the ultimate alternatives in life and therefore make very great demands on those who make them, exhibits a seemingly paradoxical nature involving both compulsion or necessity and choice or liberty; both are active forces and come together in the form of what we may call a ‘guided compulsive force’, intellectual guidance being essentially concerned with its inner logic and its conditions of deployment. This is a most extraordinary and complex figure, for “how do we force burning passion and a cool judgement together in the same soul”, asks Weber, so that neither passion nor intellectual guidance lose their commanding force but are ductile enough as to be relied upon both when, in the face of the passion that may blind us, we need to gather the “strength to subdue the soul”, and when, in the face of a world which seems to have “dashed all hopes”, we need to say “nevertheless” and, immune to discouragement, be ready to make still another effort? (1919, p. 74 and 88). If this is not the figure of *eros*, then it is the closest we may get to it. It is the Weberian variant of this figure, one in which the irresolvable tension between the volitional and intellectual components of *eros* are exacerbated for modern Man, which underlies the Weberian subject, that is, the being of insight and endurance who confronts the fate of the times and, instead of passively yearning and resignedly waiting, wholeheartedly embraces his longing, whether in science, politics or art, and, spurred by it, sets out to the task: meeting ‘the demands of the day’ and, beyond that, seeking to bring about the highest human possibilities, for if it is true that obligation is first, it is not less true that devotion is higher.

Naturally when meeting managerial targets is the master motive driving vocational practices, any language which deviates from counting, efficiency, ‘quality’ and the like is bound to be dismissed out of hand as anachronistic or out of place, and appeals to love of the craft, the more so in the form of *eros*, perhaps condescendingly taken as a fairy tale told by a poor idiot. Yet, it would be difficult to disagree with the idea that “craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake”, which is what Richard Sennett sustains in his latest book (2009, p. 9), where he endeavours to make his readers comprehend that we have lost the sense of craft. The problem with Sennett’s argument is that he does not revisit his initial premise to question whether, after all, such human impulse, enduring as it may be, might not be very weak, since it can be curbed without great difficulty. Indeed we have to ask, how is it that professionalism has been practically demolished in the last decades, and more often than not by professionals themselves? Why have faithful, dedicated, and proud devotions to a vocation in the most critical fields—education and health care, for example—been

subjugated and ruined with such an apparent calm and ease? How is it that the subjective dispositions necessitated in the most important human activities—necessitated so as to at least be able to, as Weber would say, raise oneself to their height and therefore respect their inherent dignity—are so easily and apparently so completely corrupted? These questions cannot be addressed without an analysis of this kind of subjective dispositions, of how they come about and what kind of dedication they involve, since they are not simply inclinations—although they may well have a strong relation to them—or forms of engagement, but callings.

To talk about the calling as a choice seems paradoxical in that, in a decisive sense, one does not choose a calling, but is chosen or called by it—thus apparently reversing Plato: “a demon will not select you, you will choose a demon” (*Republic* 617d-e). Nor is it a choice based on a cool calculation of one’s interests and preferences. A calling is much more compelling and alive than proclivities and calculations. Two clearly distinct determinations can be distinguished in this kind of choices which correspond to the two fundamental components of *eros*: on the one hand, there is a compulsion toward a cause felt as that to which one has been called or for which one has been born. It is a kind of inner necessity stemming from love or desire and thus inwardly generated. Contrary to the compulsion stemming from fear, that stemming from love cannot, by its very nature, be imposed from without. In reality not only fear, but all external determinations, including what W. Benjamin called “mechanical duty” in a remarkable piece on the life of students written in his youth, that is, a duty which “does not flow from the work itself” (1915, p. 78-9), lack the inner connection with the cause or activity which defines true vocations. Being thus immanent, it is part of one’s innermost being as given by nature, therefore inescapable and yet at the same time amenable to growth and development, and receptive to appropriate education—one able to arouse and foster it. It is this love which Weber summons us to “find and obey” in the very last sentence of *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, for he is the “daemon that holds the threads” of one’s life. The injunction ‘become who you are’ may be another way of expressing it.

This is Weber’s way of calling upon us to become subjects. In effect, and this is most important, this love or desire is constitutive of the subject, which means, firstly, that it is always active and operative in one’s soul and conduct—always, that is, on an everyday basis and thus honouring the inherent dignity of academic life in lecturing, in scholarly activity and also when participating in university, professional and governmental meetings and committees. This may be considered too risky or inconvenient, but for a lover of academia *cela va de soi*. For contrary to common understanding, *eros* is neediness and discontent with the world as the world is. Endlessly in pursuit of his object and in conflict with the world, he despises quietness and comfort and is always ready to stand up for what he loves, for in a way he is nothing but this quest and this contest. Indeed the Weberian *eros* is agonistic par excellence; it is also close to *polemos* (strife), another daemon—which, let us emphasise, does not make *eros* warmongering; nor is his struggle the liberal struggle for self-preservation, “that loveless and merciless economic struggle for existence which bourgeois phraseology designates as ‘peaceful cultural work’”

(1916, p. 62). On the contrary, agonistic struggle and conflict can be ennobling, since they are about a cause that transcends one's own self, which fits *eros*' character as homeless or, more precisely, as being at home in homelessness, for no achievement can provide definitive satisfaction or fulfilment. In brief, the Weberian *eros* appears as particularly becoming for leading a true human life in a world marked by tension and conflict between the life orders. As a rule, it is only thanks to a daily struggle that a life order, e.g. education and higher learning, not to mention the dignity of its carriers, can be defended against the economic life order and prevented from being inexorably transformed into a totally commodified and managerialised life order at all levels, one educationally unrecognisable.

A second major characteristic of this love or desire constitutive of the subject is that it is creative or productive, directed to the positive construction of something worthwhile or to the transformation of the world, which again contrasts with the mere avoidance of an evil. This productive character is a very complex feature, as it is usually only through long and disciplined hard work that the creative acts and productions of science, politics, art and eroticism may come to light. Here we only wish to underscore a fundamental and apparently paradoxical aspect of it, namely, that despite its neediness *eros* is par excellence about giving, not about taking or keeping. As can be seen in Plato's *Symposium*, *eros*' neediness is not that of the miser or the stingy, but the neediness of abundance, of a kind of spiritual pregnancy which, as Weber puts it in the very last sentence of *Politik als Beruf*, "wants to offer" itself to the world. Nothing can be more unerotic than the seeker of gain; nothing more antithetical to the subject than the modern *homo oeconomicus*, always seeking profit and always fearful of losing it.

This giving is continuous and uncompromising; it is what Weber calls *Hingabe*, a decisive term in his thought which stands for devotion or dedication. It involves much more than diligence, for "the scholar—Mills says, but we could equally say the teacher—must not only be diligent; he must be obsessed in his devotion".⁸ As the specific creation of *eros*, the core meaning of *Hingabe* lies in sacrifice or giving oneself over to a cause, to the point of "perish[ing] in the calling"; as Weber put it in the 'Intermediate Reflection' (1915-1920, p. 548). I am aware that the mere mention of 'devotion' or 'dedication' may sound shrill, to say the least, in liberal ears—those who, according to Mills, "conform to the prevailing fear of any passionate commitment" (SI 79). It is true that expressions signifying faithful subjective dispositions may be reminiscent of the fanatical devotee and similar figures of blind submission, and that the very terms for dedication or devotion have in the recent past been put to unspeakable uses. It should however go without saying, leaving aside now the fundamental question about the soulless and loveless human being, that this can certainly not disqualify dedications, no matter how passionate and obsessive, guided by reason or, more particularly, by understanding and judgement—which is the Weberian kind of dedication, whether in politics, science or art. This, although not only this, puts Weber in unequivocal continuity with the politico-philosophical tradition and in no less unequivocal rupture with liberalism (Hennis

8. Letter to Tovarich, fall 1959, in Mills 2000, p. 277.

2000).⁹

As this contrast is a fundamental feature of the vicissitudes of the vocation today, it seems necessary to bring out another of its central aspects. In effect, “the self-awareness and freedom from inner scruples” characteristic of the pursuit of “naked self-interest”, or, put differently, the subjective disposition involved in the quest for commodious and secure self-preservation, “is the polar antithesis of any kind of inner commitment” and dedication (Weber 1922, p. 15). The former is the human animal in us; the latter is potentially a subject or, in Weber’s terms, a personality. Weber was as far from denying the actual weight of the former—how could he, the teller of “what is”?¹⁰—as from praising it. Actually “rulership by virtue of a constellation of interests”, the purest type of which is the modern market, is so “diametrically pitted against” “rulership by virtue of authority” (ibid., p. 604) that Weber excluded it altogether from among the legitimate types of rulership. No need therefore to blame; telling ‘what is’, i.e. a naked power, may be much more revealing. What Weber did value was the strength of mind and heart to be inwardly alive and persevere in one’s devotion, for he was not only the teller of ‘what is’, but also the seeker after the highest possibilities who insisted that “nothing is worthy of man as man unless he *can* pursue it with passion”, even if *passion* alone, assuming that it could exist in any form other than as “sterile excitement”, is of course not sufficient (1917, p. 6; 1919, p. 74, Weber’s emphases).

Finally, the last but by no means least characteristic of that love or desire, one that somehow sums up all the others, of which it is their natural or logical consequence, is that it liberates from external pressures and enticements, above all from fear and undue concern with material possessions, comfort and security.

On the other hand, in addition to the volitional and fateful side, that kind of choices obviously involves human reason or, more precisely, those forms of reason farthest removed from the calculating reason which alone guides the acquisitive individual—farthest removed, in other words, from liberal reason—and closest to sensibility such as insight, deliberation and above all judgement. These forms of reason are all directly related to the ancient tradition of practical wisdom, *phronesis*, the intellectual virtue par excellence involved in action or *praxis*, i.e. the action which has its end in itself, and therefore fundamental both in understanding the immanent logic of the vocation and in guiding its deployment in the world.

The essential condition of a true choice is a thorough confrontation with the world as the world is; this requires a very special and exceptionally rare quality, namely, the ability to look “*il male in viso*”, to put it in Machiavelli’s apposite terms, or, in Weber’s, “the fate of the age in its stern face”, that is to say, directly, without shields or narcotics of any kind, least of all religious ones, and courageously, staring at that fate of the present world, no matter how grave it may be, so as to be able to “ruthlessly scrutinize the re-

9. This continuity and partly this rupture have been strongly suggested by Wilhelm Hennis against the well-established routine of making of Weber a liberal, probably the most telling distortion (and there have been many) of both the man and his thought.

10. “I say ‘what is’”, wrote Weber to Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, on 15 July 1909; quoted in Scaff (1989, p. 113).

alities of life”.¹¹ This is will to truth, if there is any; the Weberian subject, faithful to a modern Delphic god’s command ‘dare to know’ and to himself as carrier of “the youngest virtue” and “the only one left to us” godless descendants of the ‘one’ god,¹² intellectual probity or honesty, wills the truth, no matter how ugly or unpalatable it may be or appear to be. But this is only the first step, which must be completed through a second one requiring an even rarer quality, namely, “the ability to withstand” such realities and “to inwardly measure up to them” (Weber 1919, p. 86).

These are stringent demands indeed, so much so that they may not seem to be addressed to ordinary mortals. Actually they are not. They are addressed to the immortal in Man, to the best in each human being; and given this favourable disposition, the abilities to cope with them can be cultivated through education and through life itself provided we are quick to learn from the old Mephistophelian devil Weber referred to in his two famous lectures. For this is the devil who assists our uncompromising intellectual honesty, which has its limits after all, and drives it by means of *curiositas*, a fearless striving for knowledge and searching deep, and steadfastness of mind to the point of self-cruelty before the realities of life—thus preventing “our virtue” from becoming “our pomp and stupidity” (Nietzsche, *ibid.*), e.g. in the form of the empiricist hoarding of barren truths, and us from weakness, the inability to look reality in its stern face and the “very narrow and superficial blasé attitude toward the *meaning* of human action”, an attitude which knows nothing “of the tragedy in which all action ... is in truth enmeshed” (1919, p. 75, Weber’s emphasis).

Avoiding delusion and self-deception through a relentless pursuit of clarity about the world and ourselves are thus essential for a true choice. For it is not enough with a superficial ascertaining of one’s longings when one is bound to face the severest tests of endurance—tests which may easily lead to embitterment, resentment, even to inward collapse, usually mixed with conformism, a “thoughtless acceptance of the world and the profession” (Weber 1919, p. 87). One must therefore be certain about the ultimate values or the causes involved in one’s longings, the conditions and the consequences of their realization, and the discipline and sacrifices involved. Those are decisive tasks for which science, philosophy or the most rigorous thought can provide fundamental guidance. But “the individual must conquer *everything* else, all that he is striving to achieve, by himself in the struggle with life”, and the choice falls entirely on “the conscience of the individual”, who must judge and decide whether s/he is prepared to approve those values, to withstand those conditions, to accept those consequences, and to bear those sacrifices: “it is his duty to decide *this*”—a duty from which no teacher and no science can relieve him (Weber 1909, p. 72 and 73, original emphases).

We shall have more to say about teaching and scholarship in section three. Before that it seems fit to conclude this section by asking: what can we tell the young today? Shall we tell them, mimicking what they are told, that the aim of the university is to help a country and eventually them become rich, and to offer them an ‘experience’ that is in

11. Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* I 18.4; Weber (1917, p. 17; 1919, p. 86).

12. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* 1.3, ‘On the Afterworldly’; *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 227.

no sense different from those available outside the university? But that would be fraud; it would amount to deceiving them and being utterly irresponsible toward the cause of education. And what about the tiny few among them who, despite everything, may feel not the calling for academic life, but a certain tickling announcing it, what shall we tell them? Are we prepared to arouse and foster that daemon? We can only be credible if, as social scientists, we tangibly strive to honour the dignity of education and academia in our daily teaching and scholarly practices—a task whose importance transcends not only today’s students and us, but our present society as well, for it is at the core of the cultural life that we must contribute to bequeathing to future generations; and, as independent intellects, if we do not refrain from staring *il male in viso* and addressing in our research some of the important problems of our age, among which surely features most prominently the question about the ways in which the subjectivities involved in the pursuit of different vocations are hindered and corrupted, and about the possibilities for cultivating them.

II. THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Through the expression ‘sociological imagination’ Mills refers to what may be considered a genuine if very peculiar virtue, or, as he puts it several times throughout his book, a “quality of mind” and heart—we add only the term, the idea is Mills’—which enables its possessor both to grasp the world and to be affected by it. It is important to emphasise this latter aspect, since it has for the most part been neglected. This disregard of so central a component of the sociological imagination may well be symptomatic of the current state of the social sciences. If so it is a telling symptom, one that would seem to irresistibly point to those soulless research activities and bloated conceptualisations typical of the pompous theory and the bleak empiricism so appositely portrayed by Mills. For the sociological imagination involves both reason and sensibility, reflection and feeling, thought and passion; and since these components are not isolated but in constant interplay, it above all involves what I wish to call ‘sensitive’ reason.

It is well known that the sociological imagination is that extraordinary “quality of mind” which enables us “to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world”, “to shift from one perspective to another” (from macro to micro, from politics to psychology, from a religious to a military organization), “to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self—and to see the relations between the two”, and to understand “the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities” (SI 4, 7, and 15). It is also known that the imaginative social scientist’s paramount task consists in being able to identify the personal and collective experiences that characterise whole societies and even historical epochs, to formulate and articulate such experiences in terms of the awareness (or non-awareness) of cherished values and threats to them, e.g. the experiences of “uneasiness arising from the ‘depth’ of biography” and “indifference arising from the very structure of an historical society”, and to translate them into problems

amenable to be treated by human reason at the personal, collective and social scientific level, e.g. “indifference into issues, uneasiness into trouble” and of course private troubles into public issues, whilst all these steps must be one way or another included in any problem, if it is to be a genuine problem of an enquiring mind, addressed by the social scientist (SI 11, 131, 5).

Less well known and hardly remarked is the fact that it is thanks to the sensibility spurred by the imagination—a move which could without exaggeration be qualified as Rousseauian—that the capacity for feeling so decisive for the sociological imagination is extended beyond one’s local context and concerns toward larger social realities, up to and encompassing whole social orders and epochs. For how would it otherwise be possible, without this enlarged sensibility or “capacity for experience” (Mills 1958b, p. 165), to acknowledge the values that are cherished and threatened, to feel or identify with other people’s experiences, e.g. of uneasiness and indifference, to see affinities between diverse social situations and, more broadly, to be affected by “the cultural expectations ... demanded” of the social scientist (SI 14)—in brief, to capture the tone and the moral nerve of a society? No ‘neutral’ observer, the epistemological spectator of everything and methodological manufacturer of opinion surveys, can do that; nor can it be done through postmodern forms of particularistic engagements. Only a kind of witness or at any rate a being possessing “acute sensibility” (SI 70) can. It is this central role of the sensibility in interaction with the imagination that allow us to trace Mills’ insistence on loyalty to the original principles of the social sciences not just to the so-called founding fathers but further back to the very “founder”, as Lévi-Strauss claimed in a well-known article, “of the sciences of man” (1973), or at least to their modern founder, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the philosopher who rehabilitated the imagination and, assisted by the sensibility, assigned it to the very foundation of the polity.

Mills’ social science is thus a humane social science, sensitive to the daily experiences of the ‘ordinary men’ he often refers to. Mills’ purpose in this attempt to connect with the men and women in the streets is not to flatter them with attention or to offer them some comforting promise; rather, by linking biography and history, individual and society, self and world, Mills sought to show, first of all, that underlying people’s experience of difficulty, anxiety or apathy and the troubles and issues they confront are the fundamental problems, the problems of reason and liberty, which are not only the imaginative sociologist’s problems but also theirs. He also sought to communicate this knowledge to ordinary women and men, for “the social scientist is not only an ‘ordinary man’”, and “his very task” is “intellectually to transcend the milieu in which he happens to live”.¹³ Ordinary women and men are one’s fellows whom one identifies with, not the altogether other of the ‘neutral’ observer, and our common humanity is here shown by the common fundamental problems we face. This is the Marxian side of Mills’ social science, the side driven by the quest for emancipation or, as he used to say, liberation, from alienating social relations.

The other side of Mills’ social science is of course the Weberian one, the science of

13. See in particular SI 169-73; p. 184 for the quote.

Man, the science for which the highest concern is “not ‘how will human beings *feel* in the future’ but ‘how will they *be*’” (Weber 1895, p. 18, original emphases). We can introduce this now by highlighting, with Mills, the idea that the sociological imagination is that quality of mind and heart which “sets off the social scientist from the mere technician” (SI 211)—which reminds us of the ‘specialists without spirit or mind, voluptuaries without heart’ of the *Protestant Ethic’s* famous last paragraphs. And fittingly so, for in this Mills’ social science is Weberian through and through. As is one of the key problematics Mills addresses, namely: “the selection and the shaping” not only of “new qualities of mind” or “certain mental qualities”, but of “certain types of mind” carried out by institutionalized ways of conducting social enquiry and demanded and shaped by modern bureaucracies, whether state organisations or business companies (SI 101, 103, 106).

In this respect, the very interplay and dynamic interconnections which Mills set out to investigate between man, biography and self, on the one hand, and the structural patterns of society, history and world, on the other, can be seen as a variant of the central Weberian theme of the life orders and powers and the constraints they impose upon human action and development not merely in the form of external impediments but above all and in a much more consequential fashion in terms of selecting, moulding, forming and shaping particular human types—hence the key Weberian question of the kind of men favoured and shaped by the life orders and powers of modern society, above all by ‘that most fateful power of modern life’, that is, by capitalism and its huge bureaucracies,¹⁴ for modern bureaucracy, based on the ‘sine ira et studio’ principle, is for that very reason, i.e. on account of its inhuman character, most welcome by capitalism, which, Weber says in his treatment of bureaucratic power, develops the more perfectly the more bureaucracy is dehumanized. Over and above the otherwise most significant fact of devoting an entire chapter to what he calls ‘The Human Variety’, Mills shares the concern for the human type, for the kinds of human being, which is at the core of Weber’s social and political science but which, unfortunately, has almost completely disappeared from the social science agenda.

The very fundamental kinds of questions Mills poses as characteristic of the sociological imagination are nothing but a nearly full expression, certainly tinged with some mid-twentieth century concerns, of that Weberian perspective (see SI 6-7). The first kind of questions concerns the “varieties of social order” in terms of structure and meaning. The second one addresses the development of humanity; this is a truly philosophical question and a major concern today, particularly in light of the striking ascendancy

14. To avoid misunderstandings it may be convenient to point out that capitalism (in the sense of capitalistic market) and bureaucracy (whether public or private) are the two sides of a single power (capitalism *tout court*), and that it is both sides, and not only bureaucracy, that constitute what has become famously if erroneously rendered as ‘iron cage’ but Weber called ‘steel-hard shell’ (stahlhartes Gehäuse), which denotes something living (shell) and man-made (steel). The fact that contemporary bureaucracies are managerial ones involves a further hardening of the shell through the introduction of commodification and targets within the bureaucracies. The hierarchical structure not only remains, but is strengthened; it is the occupants of positions in the structure which become much more vulnerable and disposable (that is the actual meaning of ‘flexibility’).

of certain kinds of human beings the paradigmatic examples of which are “alienated man” and “The Cheerful Robot” (SI 171). And the third one focuses on the “varieties of men and women” that “prevail” and “are coming to prevail” in a given society and/or period, and the “ways [in which] they are selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted”.

No wonder then that the other side of the Weberian perspective, the side concerned with the possibilities left for human action and thus for life conduct and self-determination in the context of the shaping and moulding effects of ever more rationalized and impersonal life orders and powers, that is to say, with the possibilities left for reason and liberty, and, consequently, for politics (as opposed to social engineering and the governmentality machinery, whether in the form of ‘democratic’ governance, pundits’ multi-level committees, or managerial bureaucracy), be at the core of Mills’ project and the explicit object of two fundamental chapters, arguably the best ones, of *The Sociological Imagination*. It is a project focused on “the role of reason in human affairs and the idea of the free individual as the seat of reason”, which Mills sees as “the most important themes inherited by twentieth-century social scientists from the philosophers of the Enlightenment” (SI 167) and indeed from Greece, from philosophy.

A sense of urgency underlies that project. The danger comes above all from a frightening development, the fact that large, rationalized bureaucracies “have increased, but the substantive reason of the individual at large has not”, and that, as a consequence, there are “more and more spheres of life, work, and leisure, in which reasoning is difficult or impossible”—an argument that clearly resonates with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. “Rationally organized social arrangements”, far from being “a means of increased freedom”, actually “often they are a means of tyranny and manipulation, a means of expropriating the very chance of reason, the very capacity to act as a free man”. Characteristically, the “adaptation of the individual and its effects on the milieu and self result not only in the loss of his chance, and in due course, of his capacity and will to reason; it also affects his chances and his capacity to act as a free man”. Even more worrisome is the production of a new kind of human being which may come to predominate: a variant of the ‘mindless specialist, heartless sensualist’, itself a variant of Nietzsche’s ‘final humans’, which Mills calls “The Cheerful Robot”, “the man with rationality but without reason”, and considers as “the ultimate problem of freedom” today. We may think that this is a figure too attached to the expectations and fears of the mid-twentieth century; yet one only has to see the self-complacent attitude prevailing today about our world—supposedly the freest and most humanitarian ever seen—to recognise in it the aspirations underlying the cheerful robot (SI 168, 169, 170, 171 and 175).

In view of this, a major question arises for the social sciences: “Under what conditions are [human beings] willing and able to bear the burdens freedom does impose and to see these less as burdens than as gladly undertaken self-transformations?” (SI 175)—a crucial question to which Tocqueville had already provided fundamental clues by showing that modern democracy tends to disable modern men and women for bearing the high burden of liberty, thereby making them prey to demagogues and tyrants and to the

mild but devastating despotism of public opinion and modern forms of ad-ministration. And the definitive question, the truly ultimate question posed almost five hundred years ago in a brief treaty Montaigne attributed to his soulmate La Boétie, is phrased thus by Mills: “It will no longer do merely to assume, as a metaphysic of human nature, that down deep in man-as-man there is an urge for freedom and a will to reason ... because today it has become evident to us that *all* men do not naturally want to be free”.¹⁵ But truly refusing that metaphysics, that is, after having stared this *‘male in viso’* and ruthlessly scrutinized its nature, its effects and its implications, and abiding by the consequences of that refusal is not easy. Indeed it has not even occurred to social scientists in the last decades (apart from Mills, who is an exceptional case and does not seem to have left disciples) to pose the problem, perhaps because of a vague fear that the mere fact of posing it might make the foundations of their disciplines or their self-indulgent way of practising them tremble. Montaigne did all that and concluded—although this was not his whole conclusion—that the servitude is voluntary, that men and women tend to abandon their longing for liberty as soon as—and this is very soon—the first obstacles to its pursuit appear. But men and women—Montaigne suggests—do not seriously consider this surrender (‘abdication’ is the term Mills often uses) as a major or definitive loss, for in the process they become petty ‘tyranneaux’ themselves, and this is a role they seem to end up enjoying, to the point of mistaking it for the liberty they once longed for.¹⁶ Of course this is not very complimentary of the human condition. Perhaps Montaigne exaggerates; after all he lived through all those dreadful times of civil religious wars. And yet it will not be easy to disprove him—far from that. At any rate, Montaigne also thought that men and women can be companions, if only they make an effort and love themselves better, and even make friends, although this is very, very rare.

We can thus see the treasures the sociological imagination may bring us. What the imaginative social science provides is, in the first place, intellectual clarity about the values of reason and liberty, their actual possibilities and their limits (see SI 179, 173, 18). This is the main purpose of the social sciences according to Mills. By doing that they bring forth not only “lucid ... adequate summations, cohesive assessments” of the present situation, but “comprehensive orientations” to the present and future as history

15. SI 171 and 175, Mills’ emphases. See also Mills 1961, p. 231. The brief treaty is of course the *Discours de la servitude volontaire* (La Boétie 2002).

16. Montaigne’s teaching is radically different from Bourdieu’s symbolic domination, despite some obvious overlaps between them. As it seems to me that this is one of the greatest and most serious problems of contemporary social science, one by no means unrelated to the 20th century’s catastrophes, I feel it necessary to draw attention to the fact that Bourdieu sets too sharp a divide between what he calls ‘the dominant’ and ‘the dominated’, which seems to lead him to forget that it is precisely through servile submission that most often ‘agents’ seek to dominate and that both conducts are often the two sides of a single phenomenon. He states clearly that agents actively collaborate to their own domination, but this supposed agency is more the working of the incorporated *habitus* than the activity of agents. In brief, Bourdieu attributes too passive a role to ‘the dominated’, whom, as Rancière has shown, he transforms into victims. To be noticed is also the fact that Rancière’s devastating critique of Bourdieu’s sociology, a critique published in 1983 (Rancière 2007, last chapter) but restated in 2006 (Rancière 2007, preface), has passed almost unnoticed in sociology.

(SI 5, 8, 15). Fundamental here is the comprehensive orientation, which involves the historical dimension, and the position of the self within it. This suggests that the attempt to achieve a comprehensive understanding goes hand in hand with the effort to gain a greater self-knowledge. Indeed “the sociological imagination is the most fruitful form of self-consciousness” (SI 7), and sociology is always or should be, just like other human sciences, a form of self-knowledge, one that is not merely knowledge of the self, but, according to the comprehensive orientation, knowledge of what makes Man complete and of how he deals with his determinations and possibilities.

Intellectual clarity and comprehensive orientations in relation to liberty and reason are lofty goals. In attaining them the social sciences accomplish their specific mission and, according to Mills, fulfil an expectation and even a demand made of them by society. Moreover, providing intellectual guidance radically distinguishes imaginative social science from contemporary social science, which does not guide, but is itself guided. In brief: this kind of social science is useful and more than useful to society: it is necessitated by it and demanded by the age. Mills is very clear about this, which he considers the social sciences’ cultural task. The incredible ambitions he bred for the sociological imagination as a “style of thought and mode of sensibility” are unambiguously spelled out in his book’s first chapter (SI, particularly 13-18). We cannot criticise Mills for having strongly suggested that the sociological imagination can emulate the grand scientific visions of the natural sciences (he names Newtonian physics and Darwinian biology) in leaving a lasting trace by transforming for generations to come the way in which both anonymous and known people see and conceive of the world. Nor can we fault him for arguing that it can compete favourably with the arts and humanities, above all with literature, in providing orientation by formulating people’s experiences and linking them to historically evolving social structures. Lastly, we cannot blame him for having pointed out many of the grave flaws of contemporary natural sciences.

What Mills deserves criticism for is not exactly to do with having aimed high, but with having misjudged both the social expectations and demands for a culturally responsible social science which will provide a comprehensive vision to whole societies and cultures, and the power of social science to provide that vision. For the social sciences have never done that on their own; those social scientists who did, like for example Marx, Weber and Durkheim, to name only those considered sociologists, were by no means social scientists alone, but very learned in the philosophical tradition if not philosophers themselves. And their thought was not demanded exactly by society, but by the social science disciplines, which make a claim on them as ‘fathers’ but rarely come to terms with the whole of such thought as opposed to studying and using different aspects of it. Mills can also be criticised for suggesting that his renewed social science would provide the natural sciences with the necessary human orientation and regulation. He had aptly judged the cultural meaning of those sciences, i.e. the mastery of nature (atomic power being its then latest child) and the engineering of man (prepared and carried out with the eager collaboration of social science), as “doubtful” and “inadequate”, and their technological ethos as “more frightening and ambiguous than hopeful and progres-

sive”; but strangely enough, he did not seem to have learned from Weber that precisely a highly rationalized and impersonal market-driven activity as modern science (“set of Science Machines”, Mills says) is not susceptible to ethical regulation.

But Mills’ sociological imagination’s ambitions have also to be praised for being both high and substantial. For just as in order to reach the target the good archer, and indeed the truth seeker, aims beyond it, so in order to achieve what is possible one has to constantly reach for the impossible. This idea, with which Weber concludes *Politik als Beruf*, remains true in politics and not only in politics. Therefore if the social science disciplines, and particularly sociology, do not wish to definitely become a totally petrified technical activity, they have to gather all their strength, cast off the shackles of their subjugation, the service of profit and the ideology that preaches it, and become ambitious, for otherwise not only will they be unable to achieve even what is possible, but they will die as sciences. Now if the main casualty of the capitalist machinery is thought itself, as Mills was quick to see, then it is clear that the fundamental and today most urgent cultural, intellectual and political task is the fostering and protection of thought. The social sciences can make a decisive contribution to this task if they take on Mills’ ambitious project and uncompromisingly devote themselves to enquiring about the ways in which men’s and women’s capacity for thought, and therefore for action, is shaped and curtailed, about the kind of human beings they become in the process, and about the possibilities for reason and liberty and what is required to strengthen their command over human life.

III. SOCIAL SCIENCE POLITICS

To talk about a politics for the social sciences may suggest a torrent of misunderstandings and disapprovals, most of them probably around the ‘politicising’ of the social sciences—as if the latter were not currently politicized. Indeed, as Mills showed and as has since advanced further, the social sciences are heavily politicised, and more often than not by the worst kind of politics, that which pretends or believes itself to be an apolitical activity but *de facto* serves a very specific politics. But we cannot and need not address this issue here, or indeed the misunderstanding of politics itself that it may involve, not to mention the general depoliticising of society to which social science has historically contributed by privileging deterministic explanations and reducing politics to social engineering (Polanyi 1957, ch. 10). Let us only add, on this particular aspect, that Mills’ insistence (SI 177-79) on making explicit one’s position and values as a researcher and on reflecting upon the cultural and political meaning of social science in general and of our own specific contribution to it in particular, includes awareness about who is demanding which results and who is to use them, and is essentially aimed at bringing to light the actual politics one is pursuing and thus the gods or clients, if any, one is serving, and at encouraging a consciously chosen politics.

The reason why social science necessitates its own politics has directly to do with an enduring problem faced by the free quest for knowledge, namely, the relation be-

tween knowledge and power—a problem which “is, and has always been, the problem of the relation of men of knowledge with men of power” (Mills 1955, p. 131)—and, more broadly, the relation between knowledge and society. For even if men of power and—since, as seems clear now, there is not a single essential difference in this terrain related to gender—women of power are the natural enemies of free enquiry, society itself can be very hostile to it. The problem concerns the social sciences, but also academia as the, in principle, privileged site of free enquiry. What is in question is the ability of the social sciences to set and pursue their own, independent research agendas, and the special status of the university as shelter of higher learning and academic freedom. When one sees contemporary social science haunted by the last fad and anxious to meet and even surpass almost whatever requirements research funds may demand; when one observes more and more universities striving to outdo one another so as to attract more students and gain business approval by showing that they can go still lower, one realises how serious the situation is. Indeed what is surprising is not that the social sciences and academia are not highly respected today, but, in view of those undignified ways of acting, that they still enjoy any respect at all.

Mills points to three major ways or kinds of politics through which the social scientist “as a man of reason” can, in the wake of philosophy, relate to power and society (SI 179f): the philosopher-king, a figure whose irony social scientists tend to miss, partly perhaps as a consequence of Comte’s seriousness about the sociologist-high priest;¹⁷ the advisor to the prince, which in its bureaucratized version includes the current army of experts and consultants but may be a very sophisticated figure by no means exempt from the independence claimed by the independent thinker—this at least Machiavelli suggests by distinguishing between different kinds of brains in a chapter of *Il Principe* entitled ‘Of Those Whom Princes Have as Secretaries’; and the independent intellectual, the role Mills sees as best fitting a free social science and indeed himself.¹⁸ However, this role is very difficult to fulfil, for the independent intellectual obviously seeks to influence both the prince and society and in this attempt s/he is prone to, often unknowingly, end up in the power of those s/he tries to influence. In my view this perennial danger can only be prevented from, as all too often happens, ceasing to be a danger to become a reality, by remaining staunchly faithful to the Enlightenment understood according to the conception of truth and the Badiouian egalitarian prescription we have outlined in

17. Much closer to us, the label ‘the sociologist king’ has been ascribed, not without reason, to Bourdieu (Rancière 2007). It is also true that Bourdieu is one of the very few who practiced a form of social enquiry which can without hesitation be qualified as free. This recognition should not prevent us from clearly distinguishing between the power of Bourdieu’s thought and the academic power of Bourdieu’s sociology.

18. It is almost required to wonder whether Michael Burawoy is aware of the irony implicit in his observation that Mills “paints a romantic image of the lone sociologist uncorrupted by the academic environment—a portrait of his own isolation in and alienation from the academic world” (2008, p. 10). For this very same view, *mutatis mutandis* and therefore reversed, ought to be applied to Burawoy himself, who is after all at the core of the North-American academic establishment. The conclusion one is forced to draw from this way of thinking regarding the value of Burawoy’s view of Mills as a sociologist and, I am afraid, of public sociology itself, I refuse to accept. And yet regarding Mills such a conclusion seems to be much closer to the known facts.

the introduction.

The key implication of this position is that audiences, publics and any other particular social grouping disappear from the address of the social sciences. This is because the social sciences are addressed to all in their condition of thinking beings, for, as Rousseau says in book IV of his *Émile*, “before the one who thinks all civil distinctions disappear” (1969, p. 345). In this way, if it is true that we deviate in a fundamental respect from Mills’ attempt to rely on and address non-specialised publics (see 1954 and 1996, chapter 13), it is also true that in another, more fundamental respect, Mills’ overall intent is preserved and perhaps even strengthened. Above all it is this universal address that matters. This does not of course mean that the independent social scientist cannot or does not *de facto* address particular publics, including, for instance, religious audiences, as Weber and indeed Mills did. But this they did neither on their own initiative nor with a view to ‘convert’ them, but because they were asked to and, in thus being asked, the assumption could be made that these believers, who by definition put faith above reason, were open to what the human mind on its own, unaided or unhindered by revelation and miracles, can tell about certain important problems. Thus even these religious audiences, which in a fundamental respect constitute the very antithesis of science or the life of the intellect, were addressed by Weber above all and in the first place as thinking beings. It is in this capacity, and in this capacity alone, that believers are addressed by the independent social scientist, expecting of them “no less—but also *no more*—than the admission that *if* the process [Weber refers to the history of religion to illustrate his argument] is to be explained without those supernatural intrusions ... then it must be explained in the way science attempts to do”. It is thus by calling upon the believers’ human capacity to reason that the social scientist or “the academic teacher must aim to be, and make sure that he is, of use to both”, the Catholic and the Freemason (these are the examples Weber refers to in *Wissenschaft als Beruf*), “through his knowledge and methods” (1917, p. 16, Weber’s emphases). This is the overriding address: the being of reason, capable of truth.

There is of course more to the address than that; this ‘more’ involves paying attention to other features which make the listener or addressee distinctive as a group, above all to the different levels of power and responsibility wielded and assumed by those actually addressed, which Mills (SI 185) sees as absolutely fundamental for the independent social scientist. But the address continues to be in essence an appeal to reason and judgement and thus not necessarily flattering, as Weber’s well-known habit of pointing out the inconvenient facts to his audiences clearly shows—a habit, let us add, that Weber could afford because he tried hard to understand the strivings and longings of different kinds of people and groups. In reality shaking the actual audiences out of their intellectual indolence by inducing them to accept unpalatable truths is for Weber only the preparation for a much wider task aimed at fostering their ability to reason, to gain insight and to judge by exposing them to the truly important problems in their full complexity. Only thus can the gravity of the problems, the difficulties they pose and the consequences of the available options be understood, and choices and decisions be made. Weber’s relentless effort to facilitate “a ‘pitiless sobriety of judgement’”, to encourage

“the recognition of practical ‘problems’ in their full ‘consequence’”; to prevent the fundamental questions and the great problems from being transformed into merely technical matters,¹⁹ and to reinvigorate the consideration of the truly important alternatives—this is high politics, an educational task of the highest order.

Such a task is no different in essence from the university teacher’s task: to present problems in such a way that “an untrained but receptive mind can understand them and—what for us is most decisive—go on to think about them independently”, which Weber sees as “perhaps the most difficult pedagogic task of all” (1917, p. 5); or, in Mills’ equally apt terms: the teacher’s “foremost job is to reveal to [students] as fully as he can just how a supposedly self-disciplined mind works”, so that they become “men and women who can and who will by themselves continue what” the teacher “has begun ... the self-educating, self-cultivating man and woman” able to conduct their own lives by themselves (SI 79 and 187). And regarding the great alternatives, the teacher’s duty as a social scientist is to provide clarity about them: to “make clear the full range of moral alternatives before he gives his own choice” (SI 79), and “compel, or at least help, the individual to *give an account of the ultimate meaning of his own actions to himself*”; a teacher who “succeeds in this”, continues Weber, “is acting in the service of ‘moral’ forces, performing his duty to create clarity and a sense of responsibility” (*ibid.*, p. 20, Weber’s emphasis). Only by doing that, whether as a teacher or an independent intellectual, can social science still be a power in the direction of life.

Now the question is whether the university is today the appropriate site to carry out this task. For the university has plainly ceased to be, completely penetrated by the market and public opinion as it is today, the ‘shelter’ it once perhaps was. And yet it is not less clear that higher learning and free enquiry can only be pursued and advanced in a site protected from the many powers that endlessly threaten them. The situation is thus extremely complicated, for whereas the current university is fully exposed and indeed capitalism does not tolerate any shelter whatsoever, yet the shelter is necessitated—assuming, as we ought to, that higher learning and free enquiry are a good without which no human life worth living, and presumably no society which understands itself as democratic, can possibly do. In reality, of all institutions the university is unquestionably the one most dependent on the innermost conviction about its high mission and the most unfaltering devotion to it, that is, on the academics’ vocation, on their love of the craft. In this the university is like human life itself to the extent that it is a truly free or political way of life. ‘No shelter without love’ is not just a catchphrase, but an exact account of the permanent reality of academia and the sole one today, when no possibility at all for the existence of the shelter is left which does not pass through its open and active defence in a daily struggle on the part of the university’s natural denizens, the teachers and the students. Likewise, regarding academic freedom, the decisive question Weber posed one hundred years ago has to be posed again today: “do we *have* what can

19. I paraphrase Hennis; quote from 1995, p. 129. Hennis’ thorough study of Weber’s probably most misunderstood and certainly most misused idea, the infamous ‘value freedom’ postulate, is absolutely indispensable—in reality as is the rest of his work on Weber.

properly be described as ‘academic freedom’ and is there anything essential in this area that clericalism [or, today, the new business clergy] could take away from us?” (1908b, p. 65, original emphasis). The answer we can give, if we are true to ourselves, can only be: no, in absence of love and unable to defend the intrinsic dignity of academic practices, all that is left is self-interests, the interest in a permanent salary, career progression and an untroubled life. We should therefore not be surprised if this is the dominant perception society has of its academics, and if their claims to academic freedom are promptly dismissed as mere self-interest. For academic freedom, which lies at the heart of the shelter, is not a right for *beati possidentes* (Weber 1909, p. 70), self-satisfied with themselves to enjoy, but the tangible result of a daily conquest.

There is nothing to lament; on the contrary, for today’s lovers of academia this situation, which differs only in its urgency from the permanent reality of academia, should be a perfect occasion to regain the respect and moral authority of the university. And essentially the same can be said of the social sciences. But to carry out this task individual lovers, necessary and precious as their daily doings are, are not sufficient, and a veritable academic subject, i.e. a collective one, is necessitated. Now we have to acknowledge that the prospects for the emergence or re-emergence of such a subject are rather dim, despite a number of encouraging but dispersed signs. With the growing subservience to world-wide university rankings and the so-called ‘world-class university concept’, most universities, even if they may differ widely in other respects, have already become (e.g. in the Anglo-American world) or are fast becoming (e.g. in Europe, promoted by the ‘Bologna Process’ and governmental anxiety about scores in the ‘Shanghai ranking’) business-driven managerial bureaucracies whose workings are lethal—in the strict sense of the expression—for teaching, research and academic life in general. That is how many universities have at a single stroke embraced the so-called ‘quality’ procedures and de facto banned substantive reason and judgement. We cannot dwell here on a sociological description of these machineries. Suffice it to say that they are incredibly efficacious in producing “academic operators” who “may be friendly enough on a personal level, but are frighteningly ingratiating and petty” (Weber 1911, p. 124; 1908a, p. 55); in corroding trust, solidarity and companionship among teachers, between teachers and students and among students; and in disabling them for their joint task. To say that in the thick atmosphere thus created all are potentially enemies of all is only a fair description of the situation. Academics have only themselves to blame for these developments, which invariably have been and are carried out with their active collaboration or their passive acquiescence.

The students themselves, long ago degraded to ‘clients’, are now becoming long-term debtors, with the growing trend to impose huge student fees—a development also promoted in Europe by the ‘Bologna Process’. What truly counts is thus etched in the youngsters’ minds with the inescapable force of the economic yoke. It is easy to see, for those who want to see, that carrying this new yoke is not likely to encourage them to become better students, but rather to demand easiness and ‘good timeness’ and to request their qualification regardless; nor is it likely to foster their nobler passions, particu-

larly when something does not go according to their expectations. Never have students been as powerless, never so completely deprived of their own voices as now, when the only power left to them is a merely negative, individual power to litigate and to fill in voice-silencing forms. In truth what is surprising is that very many students still conduct themselves as students and are ready to make an effort to learn. But the implacable effects of the new university will soon be felt by these students as well; after all the yoke put on them is the veritable keystone of these machineries, the final guarantee of their effectiveness.

The social sciences do not seem to have been particularly interested in doing serious research, including thorough empirical studies, on this kind of machineries, whether in higher education or in other fields such as health care, and the regime of control in which they are put to work. Taking into account the gravity of what is at stake, this is to be regretted, for such research would be fundamental in making clear the kind of human beings they require and shape, the predominant relationships between them, the fate of their professions and the lot of their students and patients—an thus in providing the basis for answering the questions: is this what we want? Is this what ‘advanced’ and ‘free’ societies can offer us?²⁰ If it is inspiration and not only will what the social sciences are lacking, perhaps they can seek it in Montaigne’s teachings referred to in section two.

In reality the social sciences are in a bad position to see the importance of the problems at stake and to address them, for it is essentially the same principles and managerial indicators, and consequently the same shaping and moulding mechanisms, which underlie both the new university and the workings of the social science disciplines. Most research is thus unsurprisingly dictated by those very principles and indicators and therefore aimed one way or another at measuring opinions and tastes, or the expediency and efficiency of whatever group or sphere of activity is investigated. Obsessed as it is with measuring, contemporary social science does not seem to be able to see that measuring fundamentally serves to feed the machineries and thereby to tighten the grip of the capitalist managerial culture, for which the only thing that ultimately counts, the measure of measures, “the question of questions” applied “instinctively and all the time ... to everything, and thus also to the productions of the arts and sciences, of thinkers, scholars, artists, statesmen, peoples” is: “who and how many will consume this?”²¹ This is how measuring makes social science lose completely sight of all that is important, which is neither ‘measurable’ nor ‘auditable’. But the worst of all is that it disables judgement, which is what is needed to deal with all that is important. Contemporary social science is thus the very antithesis of a social science guided by the high politics of educating judgement referred to above.

It can therefore be anything but surprising that the measure of measures be now

20. Bourdieu’s *Homo Academicus* (1992), fundamental as it probably is, suffers from a certain lack of love or sensibility and an excess of determinism. Thus, although very bright and most helpful, this is not exactly the kind of study I have in mind here.

21. Nietzsche, *Daybreak* 175, ‘Fundamental idea of a commercial culture.’

carried to its logical conclusion and applied to social scientists and academics in general, or that this be done, except in France, almost without opposition and, as usual, with the collaboration of social scientists. In effect, the idea is to measure the ‘scientific output’ of scholars in the human sciences through a ‘bibliometric index’ made up of the number of articles published and the number of citations obtained—an idea perfectly fitting the European-wide managerialism introduced by the ‘Bologna process’ and everywhere promoted and lobbied for by the private companies exploiting bibliometric databases and the growing industry around it. The objective is to apply that index, whether in the form of ‘citation impact’ or other variations of it, and the resulting rankings to ‘all and each’ (to every individual academic and, aggregated, to departments, universities, countries, macro-regions) and to use it as a yardstick for funding universities, research grants and, as is already happening in the USA and China, hiring academics and determining their salaries. I need not dwell here on the foundations of this and similar indicators and rankings: they are governing tools and instruments of cultural and political domination whose bases do not certainly lie on reason or science; indeed from a scientific point of view they are a sham, which does not prevent them from being most efficacious with respect to the gravest consequences they bring about, e.g. in terms of the kind of scholarship, the type of scholars and the kind of competition (for, let’s be clear, the problem is not at all ‘competition’, but the object and nature of competition) they promote and shape. Suffice it to say by way of summary and paraphrasing Weber that, with this new shackle added, ‘the housing for the new serfdom’ is now complete and ready for social scientists and indeed for academics. Whether they are submitting to it eagerly or passively it does not really matter; today the only question that matters is whether they have been so disabled as to be powerless to avoid it and, more importantly, to put a stop to the whole process.

It is very difficult to see how this situation could have been reached were there any academic pride left. And yet it is also clear that there is still love and pride, even if they tend for the most part to be discreetly deployed and cautiously held. But today this inner strength has to come out and become part of a true academic subject in order to make present what right now is possible. In the social sciences it is possible to develop a truly independent social science politics able to undertake the tasks that need to be undertaken. To “avoid furthering the bureaucratization of reason and of discourse” (SI 192), which invariably goes hand in hand with the flattering and pampering of consumers, is the least one can expect from a social science worthy of the name. The social sciences must therefore cease feeding the economic machinery by measuring rates of circulation of opinions, tastes or social positions, an employ for which no ‘science’ in any proper sense of the word is needed, as consulting and marketing companies show every day. Beyond that, they must produce a powerful opening gesture by setting their own research agendas, with their own problems and their own, independent publications outside the bibliometric industry.

Very little, if anything, of this can be done in the context of current official arrangements; new ones are necessitated, but about these the only thing that can be said here

is that they should be self-governed, i.e. based on and faithful to the noblest ideals and principles which have guided the best social science. Let us only add a few suggestions concerning publications and associations. Open-access online publications are an option for both new and already existing journals. The fact that they are 'open' does not of course mean that they cannot be serious; indeed they can and should be the most rigorous peer-reviewed journals.²² And essentially the same obtains in what concerns social scientists' associations; today it is more difficult but by no means impossible to imagine, as Mills wished, individual social scientists as "rational members of a self-controlled association, which we call the social sciences" (SI 181). Finally, with respect to academia, associations of university teachers exclusively centred on the defence of the shelter for free enquiry and higher learning and, as befits *eros*' austerly, not concerned with corporate interests, would also be fundamental to reawaken academic pride "in the face of the business approach" (Weber 1908a, p. 57), to restore the intellectual and moral integrity of scholarship and teaching and to regain respect for the university. Such associations cannot be confused with the academic subject, for the latter includes teachers, students, librarians and other non-academic staff and indeed all lovers of academia without 'civil' distinctions, although they can be of great help in fostering it.

To pursue this social science politics and fulfil the sociological imagination's promise obviously involve risk and trouble (SI 191), and therefore *courage*. For no science, no insight, no imagination has ever been possible without courage in enquiry.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Anyone who stares at the situation of academia and the social sciences today has to recognise that the presence of the liberal managerial doctrine is so pervasive that very few escape its grip, as it even affects many who disagree, or believe they do, with it. This doctrine is not merely antithetical to any faithful dedication to a cause or vocation; it is lethal for thought and love, its first targets and casualties. But what are thought and love if not the human being itself? Thus, with these capacities severely weakened, the possibilities for reconstructing the shelter and fulfilling the promise are very limited.

But they do exist. For those who want to make present such possibilities there is what we will always have: the eternal truth of academia, the truth of a life that refuses to make the *sacrificium intellectus* and rebels against being turned into a loveless, tyrannical life. Today the social sciences have to show that they are part of that truth. For social scientists the possibilities are clearly there, visible and accessible; they are not minor

22. There would be much to say about peer-review, which has certainly not been immune to the developments we have described. Suffice it to quote Bauman's diagnosis, which seems to capture its predominant logic: "Then comes the peer-review system of learned journals, calculated to prompt the author to steer the middle line between the 'anonymous referees'. In this ring, caution and inoffensiveness beat daring and creativity hands down. By the time publishers accept the manuscript on the strength of the author's name rather than a certificate of conformity, the energy of rebellion has long dissipated and the courage to rebel had all the time in the world to wilt and fade. This process works reasonably well when it comes to straining off the untalented; but many others may share their lot for not hiding their originality carefully enough". Zygmunt Bauman, 'The man from Waco', *Times Literary Supplement*, July 7, 2000.

at all, but full of potentially inspiring developments. All what they have to do is gather their courage and start addressing the truly important problems—a task in the accomplishment of which they would be in the best company, whilst the social sciences would prove to be of some use in the direction of life. In addition, social scientists must make a decisive contribution to another major endeavour concerning a free way of life, namely: developing the kind of university that is needed, presumably also in ‘advanced democratic societies’, that is, as the great European thinker and poet born in Seville, Antonio Machado, wished, a “Popular University of Higher Learning”, instead of the current ‘Expensive University of Cheap Learning’. For—continues Machado—we would not accept cheating once, let alone twice, as do those who sell cheap learning at very high prices; “we give what we most cherish: a first-class learning”.²³

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²³. Machado, *Juan de Mairena* xxxv. It is unfortunate that the quoted section has not been included in the abridged English translation (1963) by B. Belitt or indeed that the book has not been reedited.

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