

aren't willing to get your hands dirty, but if you think that politics justifies whatever dirt you pick up, then you're liable to end up elbow-deep in blood. How can we allow politicians to do harm without encouraging them to think that the harm they do doesn't matter? Weber had no real solution to this dilemma. He insisted that politicians had to hold themselves personally responsible for their dirty deeds, but it's not clear what that means: is feeling bad about doing bad really enough? At the very least, he thought that anyone who wants to be a leader in a modern state should be alive to the ethical difficulties. You will sometimes have to be bad to do good. At the same time, you shouldn't think that the good ever absolves you of the bad. Weber called it dealing with the devil (Machiavelli never said that, which led some to think *he* must be the devil). The personal strain of holding yourself together under such diabolical pressures might send many of us mad, which is why Weber thought politics was not for most people. It was for politicians.

Weber was grappling with these questions at a particularly violent time. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, Germany stood on the brink of civil war. Weber saw Bolshevik revolutionaries on the left and proto-fascist paramilitaries on the right glorifying violence as a force for good in a wicked world: he thought these wannabe politicians were self-deluded and deeply irresponsible. At the same time he feared that the democratic leaders of the new Weimar Republic would be too squeamish to stand up to them: in the hope of saving the integrity of their shiny new state they would abjure the hard decisions that might preserve it. The wrong people

were wallowing in violence while the right people were running scared of it. Political catastrophe loomed.

In the short run, Weber's fears were overblown. (He died in 1920, and the Weimar Republic survived him.) In the longer run, however, he was right to be so worried. (The Weimar Republic eventually died in 1933, and we all know what came next.) When it came to the crunch, German democracy did not know how to defend itself, with calamitous consequences. Yet many contemporary democracies are far removed from these kinds of terrors. Weber was contemplating the collapse of civil order and the destruction of his country: 'the polar night of icy darkness', as he called it. Violence was everywhere in the final years of his life and threatening to run out of control. In that respect, he was closer to the world Hobbes knew than he is to ours. These days there are few safer places in the world to find yourself than Germany, a peaceful, stable, law-abiding democracy. And when politics is safer, we are able to expect our politicians to be nicer. Weber can seem like he belongs to another, nastier age.

But the dilemma of dirty hands has not gone away, and not only in those parts of our world that still resemble post-First-World-War Germany. (Post-Mubarak Egypt is one, post-Saddam Iraq is another.) Even nice, law-abiding politicians still find themselves doing the nastiest things. The current Obama administration has ramped up the use of drone warfare in response to the threat that terrorism continues to pose to the security of the American state. The rationale is straightforward: drones kill, but in killing they save lives. They can be targeted directly at the bad guys, who can be taken out