

New Horizons in English Studies 10/2025

## LITERATURE



Luo Lu

UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

GINNYAA@126.COM

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0009-0004-1835-9246](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1835-9246)

---

# Enchanted Prophet in the Disenchanted World: A Comparative Study of Max Weber and Kahili Gibran's Conceptualization of *Prophet*

**Abstract.** Since its first publication in 1923, Kahili Gibran's *The Prophet* has been exceptionally well received as the highest-selling and most-translated books ever (Waterfield 1998, 257; Buck 2010, 113; Kalem 2018). The ironical popularity of this religious figure – a prophet who preaches in enchanted terms rather than scientific language – in modern times, which we generally consider disenchantment of the world, is worthy of inquiry. So, this essay attempts to investigate what it means to be a “prophet” in modern times and how conditions of disenchantment are thought through and dealt with through such a spiritual figure. It adopts Max Weber's formulation of disenchantment because he indicates the persistence of prophetic beings when theorizing disenchantment in his two lectures, *The Scholar's Work* (1917) and *The Politician's Work* (1919). Through a close reading of Weber's work lectures and Gibran's spiritual poetry in a comparative manner, this paper demonstrates that, despite their apparent opposition, in Weber's conceptualization of scholars and politicians, two modern works that take the place of religious prophets and Gibran's conceptualization of the universalized prophet in modern times, they both emphasize the self-restraint of authority and the autonomy of individuals. They turn to the practice of work as an alternative way for individuals to obtain the meaning of life when religion could no longer provide such a thing. More precisely, by working with love in Gibran's term, that is, with personal conviction and responsibility for Weber, people could come to their own meanings. The search for a new spring of meaning in modern times should be directed inwardly at human beings and individual selves rather than outwardly at divine powers or external authorities. As far as it concerns, we must remain vigilant about the prophetization of Weber and Gibran themselves.

**Keywords:** prophet, disenchantment, work, Max Weber, Kahili Gibran

## 1. Introduction

Max Weber ([1917] 2020, 18) has characterized the modern time as *the disenchantment of the world* – the elimination of all spiritual forces from all areas of people's lives. However, it is at such a time that Kahili Gibran ([1923] 2022) created the mysticist Almustafa, a proclaimer of gods, to deliver truth to the secular world<sup>1</sup> in the poetry *The Prophet*. To be exact, Gibran, attracted to the Bible (J. Gibran and K. Gibran [1991] 1998, 313), followed elaborately the Bible style to seek in language the *spirit* (Bushrui and Jenkins 1998, 17). This spiritual book, in which Almustafa preaches in *enchanted* terms rather than scientific language, has been exceptionally well received. Since its first publication in 1923, *The Prophet* has become one of the highest-selling and most-translated books of all time (Waterfield 1998, 257; Buck 2010, 113; Kalem 2018).<sup>2</sup> The ironical popularity of the wholly spiritual and presumably religious figure – a prophet – in the disenchanted modern era is worthy of inquiry.

Consequently, this essay attempts to investigate the existence of prophets in modern times. What does it mean to be a “prophet” in the disenchanted world? How are conditions of disenchantment thought through and dealt with through such a spiritual figure? Given its extensive and seminal influence, Gibran's *The Prophet* appears to be a felicitous text to penetrate the modern religious and spiritual being. Concerning disenchantment, this paper adopts Weber's formulation out of numerous thinkers who contribute to this peculiar archive because Weber indicates the persistence of prophetic beings – a resistance to the ever-increasing drive towards disenchantment (Grosby 2013, 303) – in his conceptualization of disenchantment in two lectures, *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (the Scholar's Work, 1917) and *Politik als Beruf* (the Politician's Work, 1919),<sup>3</sup> delivered at the same period as *The Prophet*.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Mary Haskell's reminiscence, who helped revise Gibran's English writing in composing *The Prophet* (J. Gibran and K. Gibran [1991] 1998, 314), Gibran explained to her that in Arabic Almustafa means “the Chosen and Beloved” (341–2). This term is generally used to refer to the Prophet Muhammed in Islamism (Buck 2010, 119). Gibran's naming the prophet Almustafa is arguably no arbitrary choice but out of the influence of Islam and Sufism on him (Al-Khazraji, Abdullah and Wong 2013b, 212) as he was profoundly influenced by the Sufi poets, such as Jalal al-Din Rumi (Bushraui and Jenkins 1998, 77; Buck 2010, 117).

<sup>2</sup> According to Gibran's publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, the English version alone has sold over ten million copies (Buck 2010, 113). Besides, Kahlil Gibran Collective suggests that the first edition has been translated into more than a hundred languages (Kalem 2018).

<sup>3</sup> This paper adopts Damion Searls' English translation. In his new version, Searls (2020, xxx) translated the German word “*Beruf*” in Weber's lecture titles into “work,” instead of the extensively used “vocation.” Noteworthy, this change has nothing to do with the understanding of the original term as Searls (2020, xxx) agrees with former translators that “*Beruf*” contains two meanings – everyday word for a job and religious word for a higher purpose. However, considering the rare usage of “vocation” and its lack of meaning in practical application nowadays, he adopted “work” instead (Searls 2020, xxxi). Hereinafter, this paper will use “work,” when discussing Weber's idea of “*beruf*.” Additionally, Searls (2020, xxxi) proposes that the translation

I know that Weber's theses on the matter and the literary and critical value of Gibran's *The Prophet* have provoked ongoing controversies. But this paper is not interested in either debate per se. It is not here to criticize Weber or Gibran's works or to defend them from criticism. Instead, the subject is restricted to how Weber and Gibran conceptualize the religious *prophet* in the context of the *modern* world in their own works. I attend specifically to how they respectively formulated the idea of work, a concept of mutual concern for both of them, which, I will show through a comparative analysis, is fundamental to understanding Weber and Gibran's conceptualization of prophet and religion and how they attempted to respond to the historical condition of their times. This paper intends to demonstrate that, despite their apparent opposition, Weber and Gibran both turn to the practice of *work* as an alternative way for individuals to obtain the meaning of life.

## 2. Protestant Work and the Resistant Drive towards Weber's Disenchantment

In the two work lectures, Weber ([1917; 1919] 2020) discussed the definition of disenchantment and how it was achieved through intellectualization and bureaucratization, which were conducted by two works – scholars and politicians. When elaborating on the process of disenchantment, Weber simultaneously notes the aspects of enchantment involved. More precisely, scholars and politicians are themselves enchanted. He formulated these two modern works with substantial comparisons with religious prophets. I suggest that the underscored connection between scholars, politicians, and prophets could be better understood with references to Weber's ([1904] 2003) conceptualization of work in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. A close reading of the essential differences between scholars, politicians, and prophets further reveals Weber's preliminary conception of the new way to the meaning of life after the disenchantment.

In Weber's conceptualization, work binds up worldly labor with religious conviction. His work is a Protestant conception with a twofold connotation: the religious calling and the professional job “in the sense of a life-task set by God and a definite field in which to work” (Weber [1904] 2003, 79). The “fundamental connection between worldly activity and religious principles” (Weber [1904] 2003, 85) is examined as follows:

One thing was unquestionably new: the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume. This it was

---

of “*Wissenschaft*” as “science” is a widespread mistranslation. “*Wissenschaft*” includes both natural sciences and the humanities, which the English word “science” and “scientist” fail to match (Searls 2020, xxxi). Therefore, Searls (2020, xxxii), taking into account the content of the lecture, chose “scholar” over “science,” which this paper endorses and adopts, too.

which inevitably gave everyday worldly activity a religious significance, and which first created the conception of *calling* in this sense ... The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his *calling*. (Weber [1904] 2003, 80)

What Weber ([1904] 2003, 79–94) suggests by incorporating Martin Luther’s *calling* is that after the Reformation, labor is more than an economic means but a *spiritual* end in itself to be performed (Tawney 2003, 3). He ([1904] 2003, 95–155) argues that, with the elimination of magic, for instance, the distrust in the effect of Catholic sacrament on salvation, Protestants had no other psychological course but to practice *asceticism* to attain the *grace* of God, which provides them with the ultimate meaning of their temporal life. The morally neutral evaluation of worldly activities at that time further drove them to veer from monastic life to worldly asceticism, with the former denounced for its selfish withdrawal from temporal obligations, as Thomas Aquinas maintained (Weber [1904] 2003, 80–81). This moral justification of worldly activities endows the performance of labor with supreme spiritual and cultural values. In this sense, work – labor in a calling that is invested with moral value – becomes a spiritual means that renders the individual life in the secular world meaningful. Moreover, for the Protestants, work, whose fulfillment could be seen and measured, becomes proof of obtaining God’s invisible and unmeasurable grace (Weber [1904] 2003, 172).

The examined concepts of *calling* and *grace* that underpin the Protestant work are introduced as the dominant features of Weber’s formulation of scholars and politicians. The linkage established through his consistent and coherent choice of words of religious origin could provide us with a penetrative point to understand Weber’s view of how disenchantment is enchanted. The decision to pursue academic or political life is an irresistible “inner calling” to answer (Weber [1917; 1919] 2020, 10; 114) and a “cause” to serve (Weber [1919] 2020, 96). Moreover, to be a scholar or politician, the *gift of grace* – individual charisma that enables their assertion of authority – is also a prerequisite (Weber [1917; 1919] 2020, 4; 47). The two enchanted characteristics remind us easily of the religious prophets, who answer the calling ordained by God to pursue his mission and “exerts his power simply by virtue of his personal gifts” (Weber [1921] 1978, 440). In the process of disenchantment, scholars and politicians take over the authority of knowledge and politics that belonged to religion with faith. Speaking first of knowledge, in the enchanted time, religious prophets, who disseminate knowledge from the divine, held the authority, while, in the disenchanted era, scholars, who pursue the truth by practice of science, become the new authority. As for politics, the religious prophets used to be the leaders of actions, whose role is replaced by politicians. Although the world is being disenchanted through intellectualization and bureaucratization, the enchanted qualities that characterize modern scholars and politicians remind us that knowledge and politics are still grounded in conviction.

Now, I propose to take a step back. The discussed conceptualization of work as an individual means toward a spiritual end could be helpful to read this paradoxical remnant of enchanted figures in a time of disenchantment. Work, the practice of labor in a calling with promises of grace, is to render the individual life meaningful. The significance of this meaning of life obtained through work is best epitomized in Weber's ([1917] 2020, 55) assertion that "every serious person who lives for something also lives from it, psychologically." It could be inferred that the necessity for people to live with meaning is the primary resistance that Weber is concerned about disenchantment (Grosby 2013, 303-04). In other words, there remain spiritual forces after disenchantment because people cannot live without meaning in their lives. For Weber ([1917] 2020, 18), the disenchanting of the world refers to the knowability of the world, which means we could actively find out the knowledge or belief if we wanted to. Although academic knowledge frees people from myth, it concurrently takes away the *meaning* of the world as science "uproots and destroys the belief that the world has *any such thing* as a 'meaning'" (Weber [1917] 2020, 22-4). This is because science, though assisting human beings to better control life with knowledge and techniques, fails to provide its own justification and, therefore, fails to provide meaning to life (Weber [1917] 2020, 24). The forcing out of mysterious forces from our lives undermines the foundation for religious belief, blocking the once easily obtainable access to the meaning of life. As a result, the once personally meaningful way of life under the Protestant ethic becomes "impersonal, meaningless, and simply coercive," which led people to seek "serious and authentic" experiences by interpreting their social relationships in "a religious, mystical, or cosmic" manner (Weber [1917] 2020, 40).

### 3. Individual Means to Meaningful Ends in the Time of Disenchantment

Anticipating the crisis of meaning, Weber discusses the existence of prophetic scholars and politicians, a unification of religious prophets and modern scholars/politicians that he firmly objects to despite the aspects of enchantment they share. Weber opposes posing scholars as prophets in the lecture rooms for three reasons. Basically, scholarship has become "a specialized work, done by professional experts in the service of self-understanding and increased knowledge of objective facts" instead of holy objects and revelations dispensed by prophets (Weber [1917] 2020, 37). The formation of the scholar as a work is primarily a refusal to "accord explanatory power to ultimately unknowable forces" (Reitter and Wellmon 2020, xiii). Furthermore, knowledge should be constrained to its own domain without interfering with politics and morals. That is to say, scholars, unlike prophets, should not answer the moral question about the choice of faith and offer ethical guidelines for daily life. As students are passive acquirers under the scholar's position of authority in the classroom, it is very irresponsible for prophetic scholars to proclaim their personal political and ethical preferences, turning

the lecture podium into a political rostrum. If professors want to propagate their views like prophets do, they should speak in the street where the audience can talk back. In the classroom, scholars ought to hold the ethical duty of self-restraint, which Weber deems an obligation (Grosby 2013, 302; Reitter and Wellmon 2020, xii). Last but not most critically, though hard to accept, the confirmed fact is that the prophet, no matter how desperately yearned for, simply “does not exist and will never come in full force in his meaning” because the prophet’s answer directly from gods no longer provides an adequate meaning to life in the disenchanted time (Weber [1917] 2020, 37). Consequently, Weber thinks it is time for individuals to decide for themselves rather than sacrifice their intellect to believe in the prophetic scholars who merely reenchant knowledge. In Weber’s idealization, scholars are only responsible for clarifying the meaning of different practical stances and helping students “reckon with the ultimate meaning of his own actions” (Weber [1917] 2020, 36). They should leave the students to make the final choice of which stance or conduct they would take, with autonomy. Only through independent decisions and staying true to themselves will individuals arrive necessarily and logically at their own meaningful consequences.

Matters for politicians are more complicated since politician as a work wields power by force, in other words, compulsion and fundamental violence (Weber [1919] 2020, 46). Weber underlines responsibility in politicians’ exercise of power over others and the inevitable and radical ethical burden that comes along with fulfilling one’s work in differentiating modern politicians and religious prophets. To do so, he proposed the ethics of personal conviction and responsibility, two aspects that have been touched upon in the case of scholars, too. The ethic of personal conviction dominates the messianic prophets who do what is right and leave the rest in God’s hands. For them, means justifies end without any responsibility for the consequences. Even if the followers are motivated by real leaders, the prophet of revolution, they must be psychologically blank and spiritually proletarianized in the interests of “discipline,” similar to the situation of prophetic scholars (Weber [1919] 2020, 111). So, it is not enough for politicians to follow merely the ethics of personal conviction. Instead, they have to follow both ethics of personal conviction and responsibility. *Videlicet*, like scholars’ self-restraint, politicians should be responsible for what they will become under the pressure of the ethical paradoxes and exert their power by force with real responsibility for the consequences of their actions and for the followers (Weber [1919] 2020, 105–113).

It could be tentatively concluded that although the disenchantment of the world is still somewhat enchanted, Weber thinks the prophetic beings could no longer offer people the necessary meaning of life they hunger for. In such a context, he offers a strategic direction by recycling and adapting the Protestant work, focusing on acquiring meaning through worldly activities. For Weber, individuals could be responsible for their own actions and, subsequently, their own meanings themselves. That is to say, they could obtain the meaning of life in a disenchanted world by making autonomous decisions based on a thorough understanding of the meaning of their own actions and bearing the responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

#### 4. Gibran's Prophet and the Unity of All Religions

Generally speaking, *The Prophet* proceeds by a list of questions asked by different people and answered by the prophet Almustafa. Excluding the prelude and the epilogue, each chapter, 28 in total, features a theme that covers the life course of a human being. The messages Almustafa delivers to the people of Orphalese, in a way, are Gibran's own reflections of the world that he wanted to send to his contemporaries, which I will come back with biographical and literary details, in a special historical period – the time of the First World War (1914–1918) when he started writing *The Prophet* in the late 1910s (J. Gibran and K. Gibran [1991] 1998, 309–324). Through an inter-textual analysis of *The Prophet* alongside its creation background, I intend to show the close relationship between the new discourses and movements on religion as “a universally applicable category” (Messamore 2018, v) at that time in America and Gibran's conceptualization of religion and prophet. Moreover, I examine how the meaning of life can be achieved in Gibran's peculiar formulation, whose emphasis on work shares a great similarity with Weber's approach.

Speaking first of Gibran's writing of *The Prophet*, which I suggest could offer insights into Gibran's own views on life and religion because the protagonist Almustafa is highly probably a literary avatar of himself. As young as fifteen, Gibran was recognized by people around him as a prophet (Bushrui and Jenkins 1998, 3). For instance, Josephine Preston Peabody, his long-time friend, constantly associated him with and called him directly “prophet” in conversations, letters, and diaries (J. Gibran and K. Gibran [1991] 1998, 78; 99; 102; 109). Apart from personal life, the striking affinity between Almustafa and Gibran also attests to the speculation. Almustafa has been in exile for twelve years, exactly the same time as Gibran, who was in “exile” in America from Lebanon at the time of *The Prophet*'s publication. Further, some of Almustafa's words were adapted directly from Gibran's own talks. For instance, Almustafa answers the enquiry of religion with the line, “Have I spoken this day of aught else?” (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 73), nearly identical to a private conversation between him and his friend. Gibran was once asked, “Tell us about God,” after reading his draft of the poetry in a small gathering, and answered, “Of Him I have been speaking in everything” (J. Gibran and K. Gibran [1991] 1998, 315).

The enduring and prominent appeal of *The Prophet*, to a great extent, bears witness to Gibran's acute observation of people's continuous yet altered demand for meaning in modern times. He sensed an upsurging search for lacking substance and authority among Americans in the early nineteenth century (Bushrui and Jenkins 1998, 4) and turned to art to acknowledge and fulfill people's desire for “a kind of spiritual life that renders the material world meaningful” (Bushrui and Jenkins 1998, 1). Two facets, regarding his work and its reception, are worth pointing out. Firstly, Gibran stated straightly that he intended to write less a work of poetry but more a work of Bible, one to express thoughts about how to build a better human society in “prophetic form” (J. Gibran and K. Gibran [1991] 1998, 312–5; Jayyusi [1991] 1998, under

“Foreword”).<sup>4</sup> And as Irwin puts, readers of *The Prophet* do not look for poetry but a substitute for religion (Irwin 1998, para. 7), which used to offer them the meaning of life (Buck 2010, 120). Nevertheless, people at that time were looking for a different kind of religion. A neo-treatment of religion catching on in that period, which believes that religion has a true essence and can transcend apparent sectarian boundaries (Messamore 2018, v), is fundamental to understanding Gibran’s theorization of religion in *The Prophet* – “The Unity of All Religions.”

Albeit different in approach, like Weber, Gibran also emphasizes self-restrained authority and self-dependent individuals in his universalized understanding of religion. “Old” understandings of religion are identified exclusively with one religion, such as Christianity and Islam. As a result, a multiplicity of religions causes polytheism of values, ending up in irresolvable conflict, as Weber pointed out in examining the religious prophets and prophetic scholars and politicians. Under this background, Weber proposes the obligation to exercise self-restraint for scholars and politicians and the autonomous decision-making of personal standing and genuine responsibility-taking of personal actions for individuals. Gibran, on the other hand, deals with the polytheistic status differently. He, stressing the universal spirituality that finds its expression in all sorts of religious manifestations, attempted to distill the essence, “quintessential spirituality” in Buck’s term (2010, 127), of all religions into a universal religion. Though still using enchanted terms, Almustafa radically differs from prophets of old religions in the universal messages he delivers. He, instead of a sole believer of one religion, has faith in various spirits, as exemplified by the following lines:

Through the hands of such as these God speaks, and from behind their eyes He smiles upon the earth. (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 19)

And I cannot teach you the prayer of the seas and the forests and the mountains. (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 65)

Despite the persistence of religion, Almustafa is not a prophet of old religions. His wielding of authority, instead, is similar to Weber’s idea of scholars and politicians. Almustafa refuses to address and lead people through compulsion. He does not persuade people into believing and doing what he believes. On the contrary, he only shares his knowledge and let individuals think and come to their own choices and actions. Such a manner is not only implied in his choice of language but also expressed in the “Teaching” chapter when he says, “If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you into the threshold of your own mind” (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 53). Moreover, individuals could only reach their own truth on their own, as shown in the last sentence: “And even as each one of you stands alone in

<sup>4</sup> Gibran’s original word is that “I’m not trying to write poetry in these. I’m trying to express thoughts...and the thought be the thing that registers” (J. Gibran and K. Gibran [1991] 1998, 315)

God's knowledge, so must each one of you be alone in his knowledge of God and in his understanding of the earth" (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 54).

Therefore, precisely as Buck (2010, 119–120) argues, Almustafa's discourses may best be featured as "spiritual meditations," different in essence from the "prophetic or revelatory utterances" of prophets of old religions. Gibran's prophet is not a revival of the religious past but a construct of modern times, which ceases to be the sole and coercive authority. The source of authority and the means to meaning further sets Almustafa apart from the religious prophets Weber criticized, which I will expand on in the next section.

### 5. Course to Meaning: To Work with Love

Work with love is suggested as the way to acquire the indispensable meaning of life in *The Prophet*, which shares a common emphasis on the performance of worldly activities for the spiritual purpose with Weber's conceptualization of Protestant work. Such an idea is based primarily on Gibran's distinctive conceptualization of religion. To be more specific, religion derives not high up but within the secular life, which could be inferred from Almustafa's plain statements in the chapter on religion, like "Is not religion all deeds and all reflection" (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 73). Defining "your daily life" as "your temple and your religion" (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 74), Almustafa goes the extra mile with the rhetorical question "Who can separate his faith from his actions, or his belief from his occupations?" (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 73). According to the next line, "Who can spread his hours before him, saying, 'This is for God and this is for myself; This for my soul and this other for my body,'" the term "occupation," which appears only once throughout the poetry, refers not to a person's work but signifies similar meaning to "action" – the things individuals spend time doing. Nevertheless, the message is clear: Gibran believes that the religious faith is integrated with individual commitment and dedication and that the spiritual life is integrated with the material world. The examined lines suggest that Gibran also proposes a close relationship between people's religious conviction and their secular performance, a relationship pivotal to Weber's formulation of Protestant work. Hence, a careful examination of religious faith and individual conduct in *The Prophet* could help us better grasp how Gibran conceptualizes worldly activities and how it relates to and differs from that of Weber.

The chapter on Work offers a more detailed explanation of how the fulfillment of worldly activities serves as a fundamental way to spiritual ends. The opening line, "You work that you may keep peace with the earth and the soul of earth" asserts a direct connection between the spiritual attainment and the practice of work. The justification of the practice of work is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than by the next line that "when you work you fulfill a part of earth's furthest dream, assigned to you when dream was born." Gibran's theorization of work is analogous to Weber's account of work in the sense that both regard it as an "obligation imposed on individual by his or

her position in the world” (Weber [1904] 2003, 60) and the practice of it is spontaneously justified with meaning. This conceptualization of work as a course towards the meaning of the world is affirmed in multiple lines, as instantiated by: And in keeping yourself with labour you are in truth loving life. And to love life through labour is to be intimate with life’s inmost secret (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 55).

Yet, as suggested in the lines, work is more than the sole practice of labour. Another element, “love,” the first topic Almustafa addresses in *The Prophet*, is equally underlined. What does love mean? According to the first two verses of the chapter on Love, people should follow love once beckoned and endure the good and bad things that love brings. In doing so, people will be assigned “to his(love’s) sacred fire” and “may become sacred bread for God’s sacred feast,” which suggests that by committing themselves to love, people could transform their worldly experiences into a way to increase the grace of God and brings their secular life meaning. Though still using Christian terms like sacred feast, in Gibran’s design, God could not directly give his believers salvation. Salvation is obtained by input of love within individual selves, as indicated by subsequent verses such as “all these things shall love do unto you that you may know the secrets of your heart, and in that knowledge become a fragment of Life’s heart” (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 9) and “When you love you should not say, ‘God is in my heart,’ but rather, ‘I am in the heart of God’” (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 9). The relationship between love and individual is best embodied in two lines from the last verse: And think not you can direct the course of love, for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course. Love has no other desire but to fulfill itself (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 10). Love is defined as an irresistible mission for one to fulfill in life. So, “to love life through labour” is to be called to individual work, the fulfillment of which guarantees meaning. In this sense, if work is the objective means to the meaning of the world, then love is the subjective prerequisite for rendering the fulfillment of worldly obligations meaningful. In a way, work provides the objective proof of the subjective spirit. In Almustafa’s words, work is love made visible (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 26).

In the latter part of the chapter, “urge” and “knowledge” are added to the discussion of “work” and “love” in the context of a somber life, constituting a more comprehensive argument:

You have been told also that life is darkness, and in your weariness you echo what was said by the weary.

And I say that life is indeed darkness ‘save when there is urge,

And all urge is blind save when there is knowledge,

And all knowledge is vain save when there is work,

And all work is empty save when there is love.

And when you work with love you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God.  
(K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 25)

As examined in the previous paragraphs, Gibran notes modern people's epidemic desire for meaning and recognizes the legitimacy of such demands in the above lines, but Almustafa offers no panaceas. It is evident that Gibran's prophet is incapable of granting meaning to his followers by himself. Instead, Almustafa teaches people to gain knowledge, work and love. Like Weber's argument, Gibran also thinks knowledge, despite its dispelling of myth, cannot provide people with meaning. Such an idea is also expressed in the "Reason and Passion" chapter. Reason, an important part of knowledge, could even be "a force confining" if "ruling alone" (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 46). So, knowledge needs to be applied to work. Through *working with love*, individuals can fulfill their individualistic pursuit of the divine and obtain the ultimate meaning of life.

The idea of "working with love" expounded in the latter verse stresses a strong sense of responsibility in addition to the inner calling to answer that love brings:

And what is it to work with love?

It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart, even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth.

It is to build a house with affection, even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.

It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy, even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit.

It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit,

And to know that all the blessed dead are standing about you and watching. (K. Gibran 2022, 25–26)

The phrases such as "with threads drawn from your heart," "with affection," "with tenderness," "with joy," and "with a breath of your own spirit" point out the personal dedication and commitment that needs to be put into individual work, and more importantly, that work itself is a spiritual end, invested with personal conviction. Besides, the adverbial clauses of condition like "even as if your beloved were to wear," "as if your beloved were to dwell," "even as if your beloved were to eat," and the end line "And to know that all the blessed dead are standing about you and watching" reminds that only labour in calling is not enough because "passion, unattended, is a flame that burns to its own destruction" (K. Gibran [1923] 2022, 46). Individuals must also labour with responsibility for their own actions and for others.

Given what has been examined so far, many parts of Gibran's formulation of work resemble Weber's conceptualization of Protestant work: both are considered a given duty that one is called to do, and the practice of it could provide the people with the meaning of life that they pursue after. In order to obtain the meaning of life in contemporary times, Gibran further puts forward the requirement to work with love, focusing on the investment of personal conviction and responsibility, which corresponds to Weber's proposed ethics of personal conviction and responsibility.

## 6. Conclusion

From Weber's critique of religious prophets to Gibran's invention of a universalized prophet, it is plain that the two great thinkers of modern times from two distinct realms, academia and art, reach coincidentally and unsurprisingly a consensus that facing the crisis of meaning in the disenchanted world, people should determine and practice the meaning of life autonomously and responsibly through their own decisions and actions, where work might offer such an alternative approach. They believe that the search for a new spring of meaning in modern time should be directed inwardly at human beings and individual selves rather than outwardly at divine powers or external authorities.

This message sent from the last century might still be inspiring to the people of contemporary times in dealing with the ongoing disenchanted modernity. Grosby (2013, 302–308) has witnessed a growth in “young and impressionable students who increasingly expect to be entertained” by prophetic professors in universities and the process of “bureaucratization and an ever-intrusive State.” In this context, Weber and Gibran's approach might have been more current than ever. Nevertheless, we must remain vigilant about the prophetization of Weber and Gibran themselves. Weber, for instance, worshiped as “philosopher” by Jaspers (1988, 36), “does not appear as too different from the ‘prophet [who] exerts his power simply by virtue of his personal gifts. ... the core of his mission is doctrine’ (Weber [1921] 1978, 440)” although Jaspers did not use the exact term, as Motta (2011, 158) points out. However, the hegemonic authority and blind following are precisely what Weber and Gibran object to. As Buck (2010, 126) commented on the significance of Gibran for the twenty-first century, it is the paradigm, not the person, that truly matters.

## References

- Al-Khazraji, Nidaa Hussain Fahmi, Mardziah Hayati Abdullah and Bee Eng Wong. 2013. “Universal Themes and Messages in Gibran's *The Prophet*.” *Arab World English Journal* 1 (1): 211–225. <https://awej.org/images/AllIssues/Specialissues/Literature1/17.pdf>.
- Bushrui, Suheil and Joe Jenkins. 1998. *Kahlil Gibran, Man and Poet: A New Biography*. Oxford: One World Publications.
- Buck, Christopher. 2010. “Kahlil Gibran.” In *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies. Supplement XX: Mary Antin to Phillis Wheatley*, ed. Jay Parini and Lisa Kumar, 113–129. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Gibran, Jean, and Kahlil Gibran. [1991] 1998. *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World*. New York: Interlink Publishing Group.
- Gibran, Kahlil. [1923] 2022. *The Prophet*. Las Vegas: Reader's Library Classics.
- Grosby, Steven. 2013. “Max Weber, Religion, and the Disenchantment of the World.” *Culture and Society* 50: 301–10. doi: 10.1007/s12115-013-9664-y.

- Irwin, Robert. 1998. "I Am a False Alarm." *London Review of Books* 20 (17). <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v20/n17/robert-irwin/i-am-a-false-alarm>.
- Jaspers, Karl. [1920] 1988. "Max Weber. Eine Gedenkrede." In *Gesammelte Schriften*, 32–48. Munich: Serie Piper.
- Jayyusi, Salma Khadra. [1991] 1998. "Foreword." In *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World*. New York: Interlink Publishing Group.
- Kalem, Glen. 2018. "The Prophet, translated." *The Kahlil Gibran Collective*. Accessed June 15, 2024. <https://www.kahlilgibran.com/29-the-prophet-translated-2.html>.
- Messamore, Everett. 2018. "Spiritualism and the Language of Universal Religion in Nineteenth-century America." Doctoral Dissertation, Ruprecht Karl University of Heidelberg.
- Motta, Roberto. 2011. "Max Weber's Vocation: Some Remarks Concerning the Disenchantment of the Disenchanter." *Social Compass* 58 (2): 153–161. doi: 10.1177/0037768611402614.
- Reitter, Paul and Chad Wellmon. [1917, 1919] 2020. "Introduction." In *Charisma and Disenchantment The Vocation Lectures*, ed. Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, vii–xxvii. New York: New York Review of Books.
- Tawney, Richard Henry. [1904] 2003. "Foreword." In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, 1–11. New York: Dover Publications.
- Waterfield, Robin. 1998. *Prophet: The Life and Times of Kahlil Gibran*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Weber, Max. [1921] 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weber, Max. [1904] 2003. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons. New York: Dover Publications.
- Weber, Max. [1917, 1919] 2020. *Charisma and Disenchantment The Vocation Lectures*, ed. Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, trans. Damion Searls. New York: New York Review Books.