



Max Weber: Politics And The Spirit Of Tragedy

By John Patrick Diggins

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Max Weber is a fresh look at the life and work of one of the greatest social and political thinkers of the modern era, and the first book to focus on Weber from an American perspective. Ever since World War II, Max Weber has been regarded as a monument to the most conservative and conventional orthodoxies of the social science establishment. Despite the fact that many of Weber's books, foremost among them, *Economy and Society* and *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, are classics and continue to be read, there has never been a single-volume treatment of Weber's life and thought in English. In reversing this critical neglect, John Patrick Diggins challenges Weber's iconic status and in the process uncovers another side of Weber: one influenced by Nietzsche, one whose deep belief in individualism bound him close to the Emersonian tradition in America, one with a Lincoln-like sense of history as tragedy, and one with a sober sense of the responsibilities of the state. Diggins brilliantly connects the critical moments of Weber's life—and in particular, his experience of America—to his most enduring ideas on power, capitalism, bureaucracy, and science. He argues that Weber's emphasis on such topics as rapaciousness, hypocrisy, and deception makes his work timelier than ever in helping to illuminate the dilemmas of modern American politics.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

John Patrick Diggins has been a professional historian of the retreat of the American left for many years, most recently in *The Promise of Pragmatism*. Now he turns his attention to the rather pessimistic European figure of Max Weber (1864-1920). Weber regarded capitalism as, at best, an "iron cage" of comfortable boredom that destroyed the spirit. The inspiration for his famous *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* came from his 1904 visit to the U.S., where he was impressed and appalled by the deep connection between the Puritan work ethic and business success. Diggins clearly shares much of Weber's viewpoint, and expertly conveys his ideas on religion and ideology, authority and freedom, politics and ethics, and other diverse topics including Judaism and eroticism.

Review

The attentive reader will find most of the main incidents of Weber's life here, and some interesting commentary ... The purpose ... is to get readers to take Weber's distaste for the brashness, vulgarity and general foolishness of modern democratic societies ... seriously. In that he is rather successful. -- *The New York Times Book Review*, Alan Ryan

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