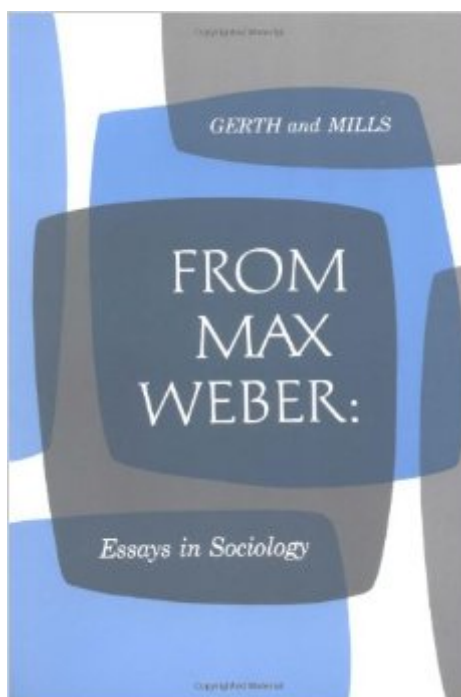


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From Max Weber: Essays In Sociology



Synopsis

An introduction to the work of the greatest German sociologist and a key figure in the development of present-day sociological thought.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What is most curious about the home page for this classic academic work is that it does not explain that this text is the fruit of one of the most singularly important academic translations in the 20th century, accomplished by the team of sociologists Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (who later became an immensely influential classic sociologist himself). First published after the Second World War, the text provided access at long last to a treasure trove of previously untranslated works by Weber for the American academic community, and thus transformed the nature of the way American social scientists understood modern social theory. It is no exaggeration to say that Weber's genius was his ability to successfully integrate the critical essence of the Marxian analysis of capitalist society with more functionally-oriented works such that even as stodgy and conservative a theorist as Talcott Parson soon found common analytical purpose with Weber's theoretical views! Before long all the academic community was enthralled by the scope and verve of Weber's complex vision of a social theory informed with a comprehensive view of social action, such that all social actions can be meaningfully located within the welter of the purposes, motives, and values of the interacting individuals themselves. This was indeed an intellectual revolution within social theory, and we can still find bibliophiles and academic devotees still poring over the nuances

and variations in themes in Weber's considerable body of works. After the publication of these essays, much more of his corpus of works was successfully translated and used in American university settings.

While Weber's *Essays in Sociology* has predominantly only been required reading within the field of sociology, this work equally informs other fields of intellectual study, such as political science, history, and social justice studies. Like Bourdieu, Weber argues that sociology is most clearly understood through interpretations of social stratifications and divisions. Weber defines sociology as "a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its cause and effect." Weber's interpretation of social action can be used as a framework to further analyze prestige and power. His analysis of power structures illustrates how the political understanding of social actions becomes meaningful not only for defining the role of the individual, but more importantly, for the effect an individual's action has in engaging and re-defining the political community. Weber's arguments draw on how power finds expression institutionally through state structures and the role social action has both on the individual and community in addressing power relations. Weber underscores that while various social actors relate to power structures differently, all power structures employ force to continue dependency as a means of control. This "dynamic of power" constructs a system of competition in which each political organization must to some degree let go of its isolationist and less dependent attitudes in order to gain more prestige and "further political expansion." Weber explains that political structures that alienate themselves run the risk of curbing their power gain.

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