

Weberian sociological theory

Max Weber is undoubtedly one of the most important sociologists of all time, and his writings have been extensively commented upon. Yet, as Randall Collins convincingly argues in this book, much of Weber's work has been misunderstood, and many of his most striking and sophisticated theories have been neglected, or even overlooked. By analyzing these hitherto little-studied aspects of Weber's writings, Professor Collins is able both to offer a new interpretation of Weberian sociology and to show how the more fruitful lines of the Weberian approach can be projected to an analysis of current world issues.

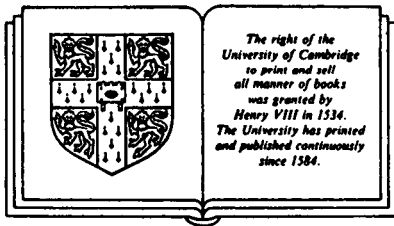
Professor Collins begins with Weber's theory of the rise of capitalism, examining it in the light of Weber's later writings on the subject and extending the Weberian line of reasoning to suggest a "Weberian revolution" in both medieval Europe and China. He also offers a new interpretation of Weber's theory of politics, showing it to be a "world-system" model; and he expands this into a theory of geopolitics, using as a particular illustration the prediction of the future decline of Russian world power. Another "buried treasure" in Weber's corpus that he brings to light is Weber's conflict theory of the family as sex and property, which Professor Collins applies to the historical question of the conditions that led to the initial rise of the status of women. He also makes other applications of the Weberian approach – for example, to produce a comparative theory of technological innovation, and theories of the conditions for heresy disputes in both religious and secular form, and of alienation as a secular political ideology.

This broad view of the corpus of Weber's work shows that Weberian sociology remains intellectually alive and that many of his theories still represent the frontier of our knowledge about large-scale social processes. It will interest teachers and students of sociology, political science, history, philosophy, and economics, as well as appealing to any reader concerned with such current affairs as world politics, feminism, and the role of technology.

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For Sam Kaplan

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Preface

This book represents an effort to demonstrate that Weberian sociology is intellectually alive, in at least as full a sense as Marxian sociology is alive today. By this I mean not only that Max Weber's works are a landmark in the history of our discipline but also that in many respects his ideas still mark the frontier of our knowledge. This is particularly true in the areas of macrosociology: politics, economics, large-scale stratification patterns, and above all in the megasociology of long-term historical change. At the same time, I am no believer in the excessive adulation of past theorists, no matter how heroic. The best way to demonstrate the vitality of Weber's theories is to show they are capable of projection beyond themselves. That is what this book attempts to do.

Weber was an extraordinarily multisided figure, and I do not claim to develop more than a few sides of his approach. I have acquired some appreciation for what Weber's various sides have included, or at least engendered, from my teachers of some years past Talcott Parsons and Reinhard Bendix. Various parts of this book have benefited from comments or other assistance by Samuel W. Kaplan, Vatro Murvar, Stephen Kalberg, Guenther Roth, Walter Goldfrank, Norbert Wiley, Whitney Pope, Al Bergesen, Immanuel Wallerstein, Wolfram Eberhard, Jack Goldstone, Paul DiMaggio, Ken Donow, Craig Calhoun, Robert L. Hamblin, Michael Hout, Arthur L. Stinchcombe, Rae Lesser Blumberg, Richard Gordon, Melvin Seeman, Roy d'Andrade, and Victor Zaslavsky. Whether they approve of what has resulted here is, of course, another matter.