

**Richard Swedberg.**

**The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts.**

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This book represents an important step to solving an important problem. Swedberg defines the audience in rather limited terms - the general reader, and the tired teacher who needs a quick refresher on *Economy and Society*. The extent to which the former, if the species still exists, will appreciate the scholarship that lies behind this volume is uncertain since it presupposes some familiarity with the overall scope of the Weberian project. But it is those who are teaching Weber who will find this an indispensable aid to presenting him in a way which meets the standards of scholarship his work demands. Given the extensive role Weber continues to play in sociology curricula, few of those teaching him can draw upon a specialised expertise; indeed, few will even have read *Economy and Society*. What makes this condition particularly serious is the tendency to eschew the primary sources in favour of surveys of canonical theorists written with little sensitivity to the distinctive challenge of finding a coherent theory within the vast corpus of Weber's writing. Swedberg's previous contributions to the even more extensive corpus of Weber Studies place him in a good position to set standards of presentation that more humble under-labourers can emulate.

The scope of the book is far more ambitious than the title suggests. The entries include not only concepts, but also all the books, together with a selection of background intellectual movements and thinkers, and aspects of Weber's life and writing style. The major entries contain a bibliographic guide to the secondary literature, including key works in French and German. Not only are the concepts and titles translated, but those whose first encounter with these terms is in German will find an entry referring them to the treatment in English.

Organising all this material has been done on a strictly alphabetical basis, and therein lie some major weaknesses. Since one concept is linked to another, a full treatment can involve quite an extensive tour of the book. Sometimes that tour takes the reader back to the point of departure without further enlightenment; sometimes the reader is taken into a different analytical plane. Since there is no presumption that the reader will take the complete tour, the same material is occasionally repeated. Alphabetisation makes for simplicity of organisation at the expense of clarity of the significance of the linkages. One way in which greater clarity can be accomplished with Weber is to present a particular analytical plane as a set of contrasting ideal types, of greater and lesser generality. Unfortunately, this is only done in two areas, religion and social action. Experience with the use of the volume should provide a guide to a fresh approach to organising the material so that the theoretical coherence, or lack thereof, becomes much more explicit.

Working with this book while teaching Weber has proved very rewarding, especially in pointing to fresh sources in the texts, but it has also revealed a few other limitations. They fall into four categories. The first derives from the particular importance of the historical context in appreciating Weber. The political background would be elucidated with entries for at least Wilhelm II, Reichstag, and the Social Democratic Party; the intellectual background with entries for Treitschke and Stefan

Georg. The significance of Nietzsche for fin-de-siècle Germany is not apparent, and the entries for Naumann and Troeltsch fail to convey the nature of the debates occurring within Protestantism. Weber's Germany is replete with political and intellectual contention and his work attempted to address the whole range of contemporary issues. The second kind of limitation is to be found in entries which fail to convey the scope of the argument that can be found in the original. For example, there is a very interesting discussion of journalism in "Politics as a Vocation," but there is no hint of it in the entry for the press. A third problem emerges from the extensive set of detailed references in Weber with which most current readers are unfamiliar but which they may expect such a dictionary to supply. Some obvious exclusions: Jains, Zoroastrianism, Eleusinian mysteries, Chlyst with his radjeny, Sufi, Dervish. The fourth is the odd scholarly lapse. World religion is defined in such a way as to include Judaism, a mistake which derives from reliance on a secondary source rather than the original.

Given the active nature of current Weber scholarship, Swedberg and his assistant will need to update this *Dictionary* on a regular basis. It is to be hoped that they can find a way of incorporating the experience of those who are using the current version to bring the project somewhat closer to the point where the routine presentation of Weber to contemporary undergraduates is worthy of the man himself.

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