



THINKER
IN
BOXES

KARL EMIL MAXIMILIAN WEBER

Team: Prussian Aristocrats

Position: Mid on

Status: Medium rare

It is an interesting question where to highlight Max Weber (1864–1920) as a theorist in this book. My first instinct was to put him in the chapter on the bureaucracy (Chapter 8). The theories and ideas in Weber's *Economy and Society* are still central to the study of administrative government. With a rather significant portion of his work focused on capitalism and related politics, I could have also put Weber in the economics chapter (Chapter 4). Similarly, many of the arguments he puts forth in *Politics as a Vocation* address the central role of government, and Weber was the first to claim that the state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. This idea is so central to the foundations of modern government that I could have highlighted him in the anarchy chapter (Chapter 2), or the structures and institutions chapter (Chapter 5), or even the international politics chapter (Chapter 12). Finally, I could also have put good old Max in the conclusion since many people consider him to be the first true social scientist and pretty much all of the subdisciplines of political science can trace their roots to his expositions on methodology and research.

Plenty of academics and other researchers have highlighted Weber's contributions to these areas, so I decided to highlight his work in a slightly different way. In terms of cultural politics, Max Weber deserves far more credit, and far more attention, than he tends to receive. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*^a was the first, and is perhaps still the best, research ever to posit that culture could be a central determining factor in politics, society, and related economics. Weber's detailed and extensive historical analysis is probably the best model for anyone considering the study of culture and politics. Most important is the fact that his explanation focused on functional mechanisms through which specific cultural elements of Western Europe influenced productivity, tolerance of disagreement, and populist political participation. There was nothing vague or all-inclusive about Weber's application of culture as an explanatory variable, and for anyone thinking of exploring political culture, that is the best lesson anyone could teach.

^a Karl Emil Maximilian Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (1904–1905; repr., London: Routledge, 1992).