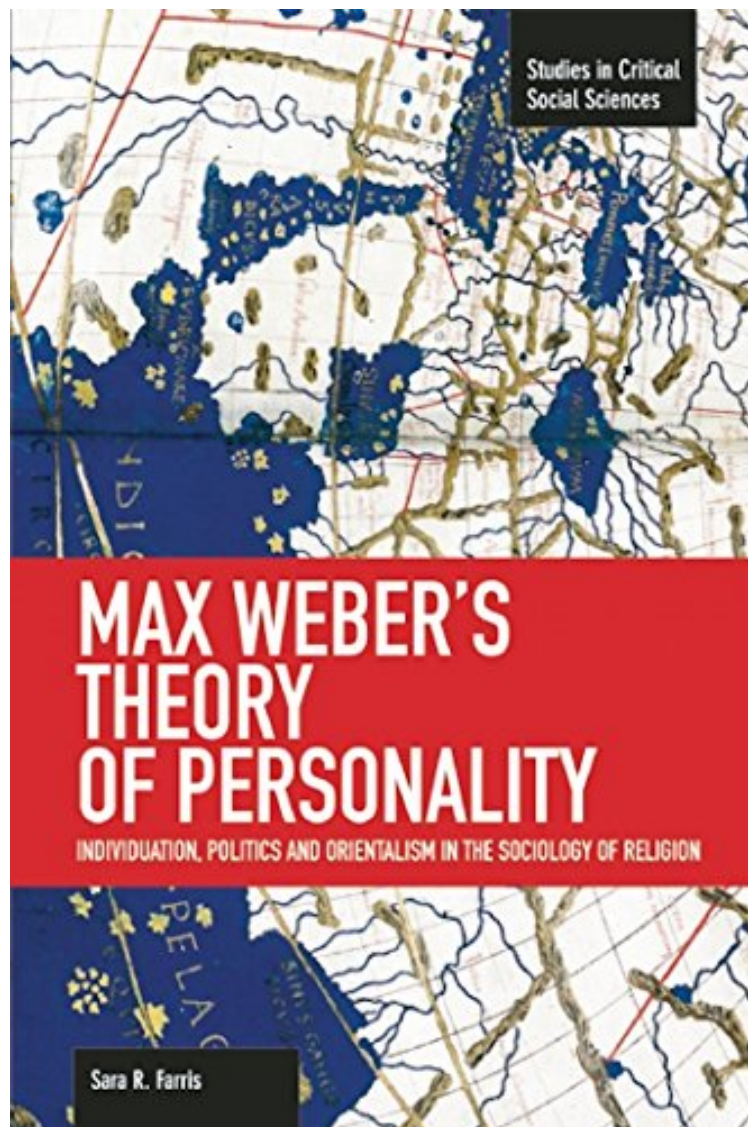


[Library ebook] Max Weber's Theory of Personality: Individuation, Politics and Orientalism in the Sociology of Religion (Studies in Critical Social Science)

Max Weber's Theory of Personality: Individuation, Politics and Orientalism in the Sociology of Religion (Studies in Critical Social Science)

Sara R. Farris

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Sara R. Farris : Max Weber's Theory of Personality: Individuation, Politics and Orientalism in the Sociology of Religion (Studies in Critical Social Science) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Max Weber's Theory of Personality: Individuation, Politics and Orientalism in the Sociology

of Religion (Studies in Critical Social Science):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Skeleton Key to Max Weber's Works By Wayne Lusvardi Sociologist Sara Farris, a lecturer at Goldsmith's at the University of London has provided a skeleton key to understanding sociologist Max Weber's wide ranging works, including his trilogy on the sociology of religion (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, The Religion of China, and The Religion of India). For those who have always wanted to read the corpus of Weber's works or for those who have read them and still don't quite understand the overall theme that drove Weber to write his books, Sara Farris offers a delightful unifying theme of personality. To most Americans the word "personality" will likely be misunderstood, for Weber did not mean it in solely the psychological sense of the term. Farris cites Weber's definition of personality: "a concept that finds its essence in the consistency of its intimate relationship to certain values and meaning in life....values and meanings [that] have their effect by being forged into purposes and thereby translated into rational teleological action" (i.e., the philosophical premise that causes, design and purpose exist in nature). For example, in Weber's classic book The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, he set out to explain the concept of the Puritan personality. We might better understand what Weber wrote about by substituting the word "social character" for that of "personality" (see Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions). To Weber, personality is forged by institutions not an id, an ego, and a superego or any other entirely inner conversation with oneself. The reason that Weber studies religions was, according to Farris, to study the role religion played in forging the interior structure of the self, the personality. Weber: "For what interested me CENTRALLY was not what nurtured the expanding capitalism, but the developing type of human being that was created out of the confluence of the religious and economic components." Weber viewed personality along a continuum from the "non-personality" of conformist Chinese to the highly individuated, rational, ethical Puritan personality. Weber compared three "ideal-types" of personalities: the Oriental non-personality, the highly individuated Occidental Personality, and the soul-less personality of the bureaucrat. The first part of the book discussing the philosophical background of Weber's works may bore many readers. But after that the book becomes a path breaking skeleton key that opens Weber's work up to both the academic and non-academic. Chapters include: Chapter 1 - From the Historical Individual to the Sociological Personality Chapter 2 - A Lexicon of Individuation: Bildung, Religion and Personality Chapter 3 - Puritan Personality and Political Leadership of Capital Chapter 4 - The Roots of Rationalisation: Ancient Judaism Chapter 5 - Paradoxes of Religious Individualism: On Weber's Sociology of India Chapter 6 - The Land of the Well-Adjusted Man: Weber's Sociology of China Chapter 7 - Politics and Orientalism of the Occidental Personality Weber believed in writing "value free" social science. Thus, it was difficult to discern if he had a political or ethical motive for his works. According to Farris, Weber set out to find which ideal-type of personality could act responsibly in Germany when it came to economic policy, especially immigration policy. This was Weber's task in his "Freiberg Address" (aka "The Nation State and Economic Policy"). Weber stated the aim of his Freiberg Address: "What I intend is firstly to illustrate, from just one example, the role played by physical and psychological racial differences between nationalities in the economic struggle for existence." The example Weber used would still be current today: the Protestant day laborers and the Catholic Polish peasants in the Eastern region of Elbe, Germany. Weber addressed the perceived threat posed by the increase in Polish immigrant laborers settling in eastern Prussia to open up international trade in cereal production. When low-cost Polish immigrant laborers were introduced, German laborers left and migrated toward urban centers even though there was no guarantee of better living conditions. Weber asked why did German workers appear to adopt irrational economic behavior of risking a lower standard of living? His opinion: "the reasons are not material." The grounds for such an "irrational" behavior was the Germans' aspirations for freedom and discontent with Junkerdom: a socially stratified rural world of only masters and servants. Weber considered German policies that furthered the Germans' abandonment of agriculture to be irresponsible. The German Prussian statesman who championed the policies of the Junkers was Otto Bismarck. Weber saw the Protestant Bourgeoisie as the only class that could act responsibly in this economic crisis. The bureaucrat lacked charisma and the personality characteristics to be responsible politicians. The vanity of the Academic Personality did not dispose them to be responsible leaders either, Weber thought. The perceived problem of the Protestants, however, was their political immaturity. To Weber, the only potential responsible actor was the charismatic political leader whose traits included passion, a vocational calling, and a responsibility ethic (not an ethic of absolute conviction and self righteousness). Farris makes a convincing case for her thesis that Weber's theory of personality is the "crucial axis" of both his "value free" sociology and his political values that informed his sociology of world religions. Weber's concern was about German "authoritarianism which fails completely except in the form of the church" (by which he meant not the Catholic church but the Protestant sect). The responsible leader could only be found in the autonomous individual who sprang from voluntary associations. Despite this book's high price I found it a valuable addition to my library and to my understanding of Max Weber's sociology and his own personality. I found Farris' book far superior to Reinhard Bendix's Max Weber: an Intellectual Portrait or Fritz Ringer's Max Weber: An Intellectual Biography, in understanding the central notion of personality that drove his work. I bought the book through , without which I would have never found it.

Max Weber's writings in *The Sociology of Religion* are today acknowledged as a classic of the social sciences. They are key texts for understanding Weber's central sociological concepts concerning Western and Eastern civilizations, and, according to this book, rely on a deeply flawed and essentially orientalist concept of personality.

"Sara R. Farriss' analysis of the different areas of Weber's research is very informative and substantial; her differentiated ideology-critique is convincing and inspiring. By focusing on Weber's concept of the Occidental personality and its counter-image of an Asiatic 'non-personality', she has found an excellent theoretical key to lay bare the Orientalist pattern underlying his comparative analysis of world religions. Whoever tries to work with Weber's sociological tools needs to be aware of the ideological baggage contained in his methodological approach. Jan Rehmann, author of *Max Weber, Modernisierung als passive Revolution* (Argument, 1998) and *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection* (Haymarket, 2014). Sara R. Farriss' path-breaking book is the first systematic attempt to understand Max Weber's central concept of personality. By means of powerful critical scrutiny, Farriss reveals the class-based, Eurocentric and Orientalist presuppositions of Weber's concept. Readers interested in Weber's sociology should not miss this outstanding piece of research. Michael Lwy, author of *La cage d'acier: Max Weber et le marxisme wébérien* (Stock, 2013).