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Max Weber and Thomas Mann: Calling and the Shaping of the Self

Harvey Goldman

University of California Press (1988)

Abstract

Though they worked in very different disciplines, Max Weber and Thomas Mann were engaged from early in their careers in a remarkably similar enterprise converging on questions of personal identity and national self-understanding, and built upon conceptions drawn from a common intellectual and national heritage. Harvey Goldman's ambitious new book is about a part of that enterprise, the foundation of their understanding of the relation of self and work as set out in Weber's essays on religion and Mann's pre-World War I writings. Weber and Mann sought to revitalize a set of ideas of character and action—calling and personality—to guide their own lives and intellectual creation, as well as politics and the life of the nation. In their hands these ideas also became explanatory tools for understanding the crisis of their class and of Germany. By organizing the interpretation of Weber and Mann around the conceptual nexus of calling and personality, the author reveals a number of issues and problems that have been overlooked, providing an altogether new approach to Weber's famous explanation of the capitalist spirit and recovering a vital modern debate around the idea and meaning of the person. In the convergence of so many themes in their writings, Weber and Mann exemplify the self-understanding of their age and cast a special light on problems of self, identity, and social life. This work contains fascinating material for students of intellectual history and modern political theory. Anyone concerned generally with twentieth-century European history, politics, philosophy, and literature will welcome this rich, vigorously written book.

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