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Max Weber's Politics of Civil Society

Civil society has made a surprising comeback in our time. Its detractors, however, have charged that, as both an analytical concept and a blueprint for political practice, civil society has already run its course, or its promise was based on a myopic euphoria to begin with. While acknowledging the problems in the contemporary theorizing of civil society, this book still argues for its usefulness by relocating the source of civil society from the question of a legal-institutional framework to that of public citizenship and civic education. And it does so by revisiting Max Weber.

In fact, this book is the first in-depth interpretation of Weber as a political theorist of civil society. On the one hand, Weber's ideas are considered from the perspective of modern political thought rather than from that of the modern social sciences; on the other, the book offers a liberal assessment of this complex political thinker without apologizing for his shortcomings. From this perspective, the book effectively foregrounds Weber's concern with public citizenship in a modern mass democracy and civil society as its cultivating ground. Weber's civil society, thus reconstructed, is neither a communitarian haven for mutual trust and solidarity nor a liberal-juridical sphere of deliberation and communication, but an arena for competition and struggle in which a certain ethical personality – what he called the “person of vocation (*Berufsmensch*)” – can be constantly fashioned and sustained. It is when we recognize this hitherto neglected vision of Weber's pluralistically organized civil society that his misgivings about the modern “iron cage” as well as his ethico-political project conceived of as its antidote can be properly accounted for. Despite some serious questions that Weber's politics of civil society raises, Sung Ho Kim argues, it still harbors an alternative vision of civil society, which is useful for the contemporary conceptualization and politics of civil society.

All in all, Kim has successfully resuscitated Max Weber as a political thinker for our time, in which civic virtues and civil society have once again become urgent issues.

Sung Ho Kim teaches modern political and social thought at Yonsei University in Seoul, Korea. Previously, he was a professor of political science at Williams College in Massachusetts and at the University of California in Riverside. His articles have appeared in, among other journals, *Political Theory*, *History of Political Thought*, and *Max Weber Studies*. This book is based on his doctoral dissertation, which won the 1998 Leo Strauss Award of the American Political Science Association.

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