Maximilian Weber  
(1864-1920)  
German economist and social historian, known for his systematic approach to world history and the development of Western civilization.

Weber was born April 21, 1864, in Erfurt, and educated at the universities of Heidelberg, Berlin, and Göttingen. A jurist in Berlin (1893), he subsequently held professorships in economics at the universities of Freiburg (1894), Heidelberg (1897), and Munich (1919). He was editor of the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, the German sociological journal, for some years.

Challenged by the Marxist theory of economic determinism, Weber combined his interest in economics with sociology in an attempt to establish, through historical study, that historical causation was not influenced merely by economic considerations. In one of his best-known works, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1904-1905; trans. 1930), he tried to prove that ethical and religious ideas were strong influences on the development of capitalism. He expanded on this theme in The Religions of the East series (3 volumes, 1920-1921; trans. 1952-1958), in which he postulated that the prevailing religious and philosophical ideas in the Eastern world prevented the development of capitalism in ancient societies, despite the presence of favorable economic factors.