



## The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity

By Anson Rabinbach

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**The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity** By Anson Rabinbach

Science once had an unshakable faith in its ability to bring the forces of nature—even human nature—under control. In this wide-ranging book Anson Rabinbach examines how developments in physics, biology, medicine, psychology, politics, and art employed the metaphor of the working body as a human motor.

From nineteenth-century theories of thermodynamics and political economy to the twentieth-century ideals of Taylorism and Fordism, Rabinbach demonstrates how the utopian obsession with energy and fatigue shaped social thought across the ideological spectrum.

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## **The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity** By Anson Rabinbach **Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Drawing analogies from the 19th-century discovery of the laws of thermodynamics, European social scientists envisioned the toiling worker's body as a "human motor," a living machine; maximizing work-force efficiency and eradicating the "disease" of fatigue seemed within reach. Psychologists and physiologists subjected the body's rhythms and movements to laboratory study. The psychiatric complaint of neurasthenia, or nervous exhaustion, was epidemic, and German scientists in the early 1900s sought a vaccine to cure fatigue. In a dense, rewarding study, Rabinbach ( *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism* ) shows how the "science of work," spreading beyond such areas as industrial management, physical education and accident prevention, pervaded the language of technocrats, Marxists and fascists who viewed the worker as a machine. He pinpoints a source of modern spiritual malaise: the transformation from a strictly work-centered society to one in which work has been abandoned as a source of self-fulfillment.

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### **Review**

"Rabinbach has performed a major feat of historical reconstruction. "The Human Motor is a skillful and theoretically informed synthesis of social and intellectual history."--Jackson Lears, "The New Republic

### **From the Inside Flap**

"Masterfully integrating Europe-wide debates in science, philosophy, technology, economics, and social policy, Rabinbach has provided us with a profoundly original understanding of the productivist obsessions from which we are still painfully freeing ourselves. . . . A splendid example of the mutual enrichment of intellectual and social history. It goes well beyond its central concern with the 'science of work' to illuminate everything it discusses, from Marxism to the social uses of photography, from cultural decadence to the impact of the First World War."—Martin Jay, University of California, Berkeley

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**Jackie Armstrong:**

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