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In this course we will closely read classic works in social theory or selections from classic works in social theory. The authors whose works we will cover include: Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx. We will meet every Wednesday between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. The course objective is to develop a deeper understanding of the approaches to sociological theory by the three authors whose works we will consider this term and will be achieved through lectures, readings and class discussion.

Durkheim and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

The Division of Labour in Society was Durkheim's first major work (1893). The result of his early thinking it represents more than its title suggests for, as Durkheim argued, he is concerned with the evolution of the forms of solidarity or social glue that maintains the unity, integrity, coherence and stability in different social formations. As a social evolutionist, he describes "primitive" societies as those in which the power of the collective conscience predominates, individuals are stamped with the collective type and the dominant character of this kind of society is that of social and individual homogeneity. However, with the growth of the division of labour, the power of the collective conscience is weakened and individual differences are promoted. But whatever the expression that individuality attains in society, individualism itself is something that belongs to society. On the other hand, in his last major work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim seeks to understand the nature of religion, including the so-called complex religions known to modern Europe by examining the 'elementary forms' of religious life, which he purports to find among the indigenous peoples of Australia and elsewhere. Using the anthropological evidence available to him in the late 19th and early 20th centuries Durkheim examined the fundamental kinship structures as well as the earliest religious beliefs and rites among indigenous populations which were inextricably linked by Durkheim in the Totemism which characterized both kinship and religion in so-called primitive societies. It was in the *Elementary Forms* in which Durkheim articulated his theory of collective representations as well as his famous equation of God = Society. One of the major themes of the *Elementary Forms* concerns the relation between the material and the social. According to Durkheim, the social is the source of the sacred which appears as an immaterial or intangible force in totemic societies before it becomes personified or personalized in 'later' religious expressions in more advanced social development. Baldly stated, we find in religion the appearance of the social substance and power in the form of the things that have been stamped as sacred. Marx had already taken up the thought in the fetishism of commodities in chapter one of *Capital* and in his notes in what became known as volume three, chapter 48, in his notion of the reification of social relations and the personification of capital and land.

Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Max Weber was one of the first generation of sociologists in 19th century Germany. Like Durkheim, his contemporary in France, Weber had an abiding interest in religion for at least two reasons. Raised in predominantly Catholic Southern Germany by a devoted Protestant mother and aunt, his father had little interest in religion but pursued a career in politics. Weber wrote a number of studies on many of the world's great religions but he is most remembered among sociologists in North America for his work on the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Weber work on this topic has been contrasted with Marxist approaches according to which religious ideas and practices are but expressions of material or economic forces. We will have an opportunity to contrast Weber's work with a short section written by Marx in his magnum opus *Capital*.

Karl Marx: Selected Readings

Karl Marx has been one of the most controversial figures in the history of sociology, both in Europe and North America. A subversive figure in North American sociology up until the 1960s, various forms of Marxism were embraced by younger generations of sociologists from the mid-sixties to the nineties. Increasingly, the influence of Marxism and the writings of Marx (not at all the same thing) have waned among younger generations of graduate students. Ironically, the writings of Marx were never at the center of interest but rather attention was focused on various secondary interpretations of Marx. In this section of the course, we will focus on selected writings of Marx. I believe that it would be most efficacious to focus on Marx's critique of political economy incorporating his earlier and later writings.

From his earliest writings Marx had been interested in studies in political economy including the works of James Mill, Adam Smith, among others, often filtered through his close reading of the works of Hegel and Feuerbach. From these earlier writings I would select the chapter on Alienated Labour from his Paris Manuscripts (unpublished in his lifetime) – the so-called Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. But I would not suggest that we read this first, but last. I would like us to first read, chapter 1 of Capital I and chapter 48 of Capital III.

My contention will be that Marx pursued these themes throughout the course of his life moving from a more philosophical and abstract position to an increasingly empirical and concrete orientation. His critique of political economy was based on his emphasis on historical specificity, the lens through which he read and criticized Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

Readings:

K. Marx, Capital I, chapter I

K. Marx, Capital I, chapter 24, section 7, part 3.

K. Marx, Capital III, chapter 48

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