Call for Papers

International Conference

Moral Economies: Work, Values and Economic Ethics

06 – 09 December 2017

Organisers: Chris Hann, Matthijs Krul, Sylvia Terpe, Lale Yalçın-Heckmann
ERC Research Group ‘Realising Eurasia’, MPI for Social Anthropology

Venue: Wittenberg at Stiftung Leucorea, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

Luther's notion of work as a vocation became the cornerstone of Max Weber’s concept of a work ethic. Rather than rehash the debate as to whether this (in Calvinist form) helped to launch modern capitalism, as Weber argued in “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”, at this conference we wish to investigate the moral dimensions of economic activities and the world of work in the present. Of course, this includes historical study of the ‘moral background’ (Gabriel Abend). Weber's concept of the economic ethic (“the practical impulses for [economic] action which are founded in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of religions”) attempts to capture the connection between strong moral backgrounds (religious or otherwise) and the empirical realities of economic behaviour. From a more political angle, E.P. Thompson's concept of the 'moral economy' captures how norms and mutual obligations constitute social groups and their attitudes to changing macroeconomic circumstances. On this point the social historian has much in common with the Durkheimian sociologist. On the 100th anniversary of Émile Durkheim's death, it is appropriate to set his “The Division of Labour in Society” alongside the contributions of Weber as tools to help us explore the field of moral economy and economic ethics. Durkheim's argument that different types of division of labour produce different forms of moral connection between individuals in the economic process, whether of solidarity or anomie, has both historical and contemporary significance.

We invite papers addressing questions such as these:

- Do particular forms of 'labour division' result from the background of particular (religious) ideas/worldviews - in specific forms of 'economic/work ethic'? (This question can be addressed at different levels: for whole societies on the macro-level, as well as for the division of labour between and inside business firms and private households on the meso- and micro-level.
- What are the meanings of economic ethic or moral economy today. How might we operationalize these concepts in research on work and the economy more generally?
- Do different political-economic regimes produce different types of moral economy, and how are these expressed in economic practice?
- Are there 'negative' moral economies – i.e. norms about the economy which are antisolidaristic, or which have negative consequences for certain persons or groups? Do some forms of the division of labour produce 'anomic' norms or even amoral backgrounds?

It is anticipated that most speakers will be invited by the organisers but there is room for some external contributors as well. For those selected, travel and accommodation costs will be covered by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. A publication is envisaged and paper drafts will be circulated several weeks ahead of the conference.

Interested participants should send a paper title and abstract of ca. 250 words to Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (yalcin@eth.mpg.de) by 31 January 2017.