



The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life

Émile Durkheim

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David Émile Durkheim's classic analysis of religion offers a reasoned and sustained examination of faith, its origins and its nature, to the reader.

First appearing to the public in 1912, the poignant nature of the text and its incisive examination of religion and its pivotal nature in society resulted in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* becoming a classic of sociology. Durkheim's researches were lengthy and thorough, ranging across the examination of tribal groupings in the Americas and Australia.

For his part, Durkheim viewed religion as a generally positive thing for its promotion of community, social unity and friendships within a social structure. His personal preoccupation with societal trends, whereby science and technology were supplanting religion as a driving force in most Western societies, is expressed within this text which seeks to explore the value in the rituals and practices peculiar to religions.

The book begins by reaching for a definition of religion and the phenomena which connote religious faith. The various tenets which constitute a faith are examined in turn, with examples given. Later in the text, consideration is given to the foremost practices; Durkheim continually refers to the 'primitive cult', and posits that human veneration of objects and phenomena leads to totemism, which in turn forms the founding of a sophisticated belief system.

The author consistently attempts to discover common strains which religions possess, while purposely putting the supernatural and divine to one side for the sake of better focusing on the traits which comprise faith within small communities and in wider society. As a result of Durkheim's rigorous analysis, this text remains relevant and valuable for students and practitioners of sociology and psychology to this day.

This edition of the text contains the original and highly regarded translation to English by Joseph Ward Swain.

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