

Abstracts

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“How to handle me”. The biographic relevance and prospects of advanced health care directives

In Germany the Advanced Health Care Directive (“Patientenverfügung”) gives citizens the option to define the acts medical staff may and must not take in an anticipated final treatment situation (living will). Based on a case study on the subject matter, this paper assesses which individual horizons of relevance the matter pertains to and what the potential consequences of this new option might be. To that end, the work recaptures some of the central arguments that dominated the discourse in the media. Thereby, efforts were made to pass the bill and it established inter-subjectively divisible imaginings of one’s (own) final medical treatment as the most devastating personal disaster. It appears to be a necessity to write a living will as quickly as possible since the final treatment scenario is being perceived as an ever-present threat; a risk. Based on the reconstruction of group discussions, this paper focuses on the specific *prospects* of the living will and its subjective meanings. In this context, it is possible to distinguish between four typical ways of addressing the subject matter of living wills: *radical fiction*, *bureaucratic assurance*, *reflective scepticism* and *sovereign refusal*. This indicates that the use of living wills reveals relatively little about the relevance and the degree of reflection on one’s own passing and death. Instead, it should be viewed as an indication of the need to assure oneself and the need to make one’s own decisions on a voluntary basis. Being compelled to imagine a dramatic (final) treatment situation one finds oneself in and one’s own death create a sense of security in the here and now.

Klaus Birkelbach and Heiner Meulemann

Church attendance from youth to late mid-life

This paper investigates the frequency of church attendance during the course of life. Firstly, we test the expectation of 1) a positive impact of a Christian socialization and good inter-generational relations in the family – socialization and generational hypothesis. 2) a positive impact of family attachments and occupational involvement, 3) a negative impact of occupational success – self-transcendence hypothesis, and 4) a positive impact of experiences of illness and death – crisis hypothesis. Secondly, Christian convictions are discussed. We also expect that the frequency of church attendance should increase monotonously (confirming ageing hypothesis). The sample consists of 1301 former German high school students, first interviewed in 1969 at the age of 16, and re-interviewed at the age of 30, 43, and 56. *Without control of Christian convictions* the socialization hypothesis is confirmed for some indicators; the self-transcendence hypothesis is confirmed only for family attachments and the crisis hypothesis is not confirmed at all. *With controls for Christian convictions* the remaining effects are reduced. *In both analyses*, the ageing hypothesis could not be confirmed.

Rolf Becker

Delinquency as social action. An extended model and empirical test

Following a structural-individualistic perspective, this paper attempts to model delinquency as cognitive social action. Subjective rational choice of criminal action depends on constraints, opportunities, and associations as well as on normative convictions and moralistic evaluations of criminal actions. Utilizing data from a social survey in Bern, the empirical findings support the general explanation of offenses such as shoplifting, fare-dodging, insurance fraud, and tax evasion.

Till Jansen and Werner Vogd

The Quest for “Empirical Metaphysics”. From Actor-Networks towards networks of self-conditioning reflexive relations?

Bruno Latour rightly suggests that sociology should “indulge in empirical metaphysics” in order to put the relation between philosophical, respectively metatheoretical argumentation and social practice back on its feet. But Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) as proposed by Latour lacks a meta-theoretical foundation to conceptualize multiple reflexive relations. Drawing upon Gotthard Günther’s work, we propose a perspective that tries to fill this conceptual gap. The proposed approach allows for empirical research that is sensible to phenomena of societal differentiation without confusing theoretical claims with social practices.