

Summaries

Daniel B. Lee

Ritual and the Social Meaning and Meaninglessness of Religion

The members of an Old Order Mennonite community successfully enact the rituals of foot washing, baptism, expulsion, and reconciliation without a common understanding of what the rituals are supposed to signify or why they are meaningful. The symbols and rituals of Weaverland Mennonites seem to sustain unity in the group because they completely transcend the individual beliefs of members. Religion is socially meaningful as a source of social solidarity because it transcends the personal beliefs of individuals. To be socially meaningful, religious interaction does not have to personally mean anything to the actors. The »form« of a ritual is the only thing that is socially significant because it alone is fixed, objectified, and self-evident. It is significant even though each participant in the ritual may attach a different »content« to the form.

Jutta Hebel

Contours of a New Labour Society in the PR of China

Economic reforms and the transformation of the system in the People's Republic of China caused a profound change in the labour system. During the planned-economy phase, the urban working class was embedded in a life-long »socialistic normal working relationship« in which they were full-time employed and taken care of. The urban population was privileged at the expense of the rural population that had to depend on its local resources and yields. The people's communes, household registration and work units perpetuated the bipartition of the Chinese society. The article shows how the former labour regime was deinstitutionalized by, among other things, the decollectivization of the land, the restructuring of the state sector and the acceptance of a private property sector. The strong political and ideological over-structuring of the labour market is presently going through a process of modification, informalization and professionalization. Now that work has taken on the form of market-mediated gainful employment, it has changed its character and forms institutions, social ties, careers and job identification. Work has received an independent, status-defining and socially structuring validity which determines the contours of the new occupational society.

Hans-Dieter Evers, Solvay Gerke, Rebecca Schweißhelm

Knowledge as a Factor of Production: Southeast Asia's Transition towards a Knowledge Society

Knowledge has been identified as a new and important factor of production. The governments of some Southeast Asian countries, Singapore and Malaysia in particular, have created their own development strategy on the basis of this idea. The transition towards a knowledge society, i.e. bridging the »digital divide« between developing and industrial societies, has been attempted by heavy investment in ICT, the foundation of research institutes and universities and support for R&D (research and development) in the private sector. Available indicators, like access to the internet, the proportion of scientists and engineers et al indicate that so far only Singapore has been able to close the knowledge gap through heavy immigration of high level manpower. An innovative epistemic culture is only possible through the development of a local knowledge architecture.

Thomas Lemke

»The policing of genes« – Genetic discrimination and the pitfalls of critique

In the recent past a number of empirical studies provided evidence that the increasing genetic knowledge leads to new forms of exclusion, disadvantage and stigmatisation. As a consequence, many states have inaugurated special legislation to fight »genetic discrimination«.

This article focuses on some theoretical, normative and practical problems in the scientific and political debate on genetic discrimination. It puts forward the thesis that the existing antidiscrimination approach is based on the implicit idea that genes are the essence of (human) life. Since genes are held responsible for individual development and personal identity, genetic discrimination is granted a privileged legal status in comparison to other forms of discrimination. As a result the analytical and political concentration on processes of genetic discrimination may reinforce the »geneticization« of body, illness and deviance.

Elke Wagner und Bijan Fateh-Moghadam

Volunteerism as Procedure: Relating Living Organ Donation, Medical Practice, and the Law

The option of living organ donation requires a decision which seems to be simultaneously consistent and inconsistent with the expected performance practices of medicine. The therapeutic treatment of the organ recipient is necessarily connected to a non-therapeutic, even harmful operation for the organ donor. In this situation, decision makers can no longer presume the ultimate necessity of protecting the patient's best interest, as traditionally defined by the medical profession. Instead, health practitioners are forced to switch to recognizing the autonomy of the patient as a concept. Despite a thirty year old debate within the sociology of medicine criticizing medical paternalism, the autonomy principle seems to be a functional solution to the problem of living organ donation. However, this shift in paradigms has been accompanied by the emergence of new legal procedures, since the evaluation of autonomy is apparently outside the jurisdiction of the medical profession. Based on our empirical observations of the routine work of living-donor commissions, this article reconstructs how the different perspectives of medicine, psychology, and the law generate persons as volunteers. We describe how symmetrically structured concepts of personhood are produced through the asymmetrical attribution processes of the commissions. In addition, we will show how this procedure, from the perspective of potential organ donors, can involve tedious qualifications. We conclude that, with regard to the relationship between medicine and law, the commission's procedures for establishing the criteria of volunteerism result in tighter structural and operative couplings. This development subsequently produces unique, differentiated problems and reciprocal irritations in both the medical and legal systems.