

Summaries

RUUD STOKVIS

Fitness

National ambitions and personal needs

In this article I try to give an explanation for the strong increase of participation in sport and other fitness activities. In the first part of the article I argue that this increase has nothing to do with the 'sport for all' policies of national governments. In the second part I offer my own explanation and some supporting empirical data. The most important conditions for the increase in sport and other fitness activities are an abundance of food and the absence of any need for physical effort. The resulting tendency towards the fattening of the population of affluent societies is partly restricted by the emergence of a social norm that sanctions slenderness. I argue that it is to conform with this norm that in recent years most people have become active in sport and fitness. This norm is based on a mix of ideas about health, aesthetics and the morality of self-control. I try to prove that these last two aspects are of more consequence than the wish to be healthy.

THIERRY KOCHUYT EN ANTON DERKS

Bitter as the brackish morning

The resentment of social inferiors

Current social discontent has reasons, not always known unto reason. In this analysis, resentment is interpreted as a social feeling mediating between social inferiors and other social strata. After having made clear the macrosocial context of this phenomenon, statistical data are used to elaborate on the connections of resentment. Narrative elements are brought into the story to elucidate theoretical questions on the external and internal structure of relationships of resentment. Several institutions on the meso level contribute to the confirmation of (seemingly rational) discontent.

ERIC VERMEULEN

Picking up or laying aside

Deciding about the life of children born extremely prematurely

Decisions whether to start or to forgo life-prolonging treatment for children born extremely premature are structured like infanticide, but the present practice differs from infanticide in the past. The decisions to prolong or end the life of prematurely born children are taken on the neonatal intensive care units in academic hospitals. Technology plays a vital role in this decision-making. Further, the legal context for these decisions differs from what was the context in the past. Parents however, play a central role, as they did in accounts of infanticide.

The practice of two neonatal wards was studied by 'participant observation'. The medical policy of the two wards differs on a crucial matter. One ward starts life-prolonging treatment for all new-borns, the other sets a limit to the minimal gestational age at which treatment is started. The two neonatal practices are compared with what is known about the practice of infanticide.

SJAAK VAN DER GEEST

Cold and warmth in the city

On privacy and the pretence of indifference in public space

This essay discusses a recent Dutch study on urban warmth by Thaddeus Müller and reports on a fieldwork exercise carried out by anthropology students. These observations by students of human behaviour in public places (streets, trains, stations, libraries, restaurants, etc.) show a very different picture of the city than the one described in Müller's study: people develop inventive strategies to keep others at a distance and protect their private space. The author concludes, however, that the contrast between the warmth of Müller's book and the cold of the students' observations is less dramatic than appears, mainly for two reasons. First, the findings of the two studies are very much an artefact of the different research goals. Secondly, there is considerable 'human interest' hidden behind the social indifference that people demonstrate in public space.