



Social Theory Lecture Series

Einladung

zum Gastvortrag von

Assoz.-Prof. Matteo Bortolini

FISPPA Department, Universität Padua

Kill thy Father, Praise thy Father: On Robert Bellah and Talcott Parsons

Donnerstag, 21.06.2018, 13.30-15.00 Uhr

Besprechungszimmer Institut für Soziologie

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Assoz.-Prof. Matteo Bortolini

Matteo Bortolini (Ph.D. Bologna, 2000) is Associate professor in sociology at the University of Padova, where he teaches Sociological reasoning and Social Dynamics of Local Development. His scholarly interests range from the sociology of ideas and intellectuals to historical sociology of the Italian and American social sciences, the sociology of religion, and social and political theory. In the last few years he wrote a short institutional history of Italian sociology with Andrea Cossu (Palgrave, 2017). He is currently writing a full-fledged biography of the late sociologist and theologian Robert N. Bellah. His writings have been published, among other venues, in *Theory & Society*, *The American Sociologist*, *The European Legacy*, *Sociologica*, *Studi culturali*, *Politica e Società*, *Rassegna italiana di sociologia* and *European Journal of Social Theory*.

Programm

Begrüßung und Einleitung durch:

Dekan Univ.-Prof. Dr. Helmut Staubmann

Fakultät für Soziale und Politische Wissenschaften, Universität Innsbruck

Vortrag:

Kill thy Father, Praise thy Father: On Robert Bellah and Talcott Parsons

von

Assoz.-Prof. Matteo Bortolini

The late American sociologist, Robert N. Bellah (1927-2013), is well known not only for his work on civil society, Japanese culture, and evolution and religion, but also for having been one of Talcott Parsons' most beloved and respected students. This lecture reconstructs the development of the relationship between Parsons and Bellah through three stages: (1) Apprenticeship: As any scholar, Bellah was socialized to a particular version of "sociology" (structural-functionalism) within a particular institution (the Harvard Department of Social Relations) in a particular historical moment (the 1950s). (2) Detachment: In his mid-thirties Bellah found himself in what sociologist Randall Collins called "the gifted student dilemma," the need to break with his mentor in order to gain recognition for himself as a legitimate and original player in the field of cultural production. Avoiding a clear, violent break with Parsons, Bellah moved away from functionalism and tried to carve for himself an intellectual niche at the crossroads of sociology, religious studies, and American studies. (3) Reapproachment: Shortly after his most critical break with Parsons, originated by Bellah's book *The Broken Covenant*, Bellah found an occasion to show his old master that he could still play the game of functionalism. Upon Parsons' death in 1979, Bellah explicitly reclaimed the mantle of his mentor, running against the grain of the anti-Parsonianism of the 1970s and early 1980s. The lecture will show how relationships between teachers and (former) students are mediated by a vast array of elements which make almost impossible to anticipate the extent and the direction of breaks and rapprochements: intellectual and scientific styles; the scholar's self-image; the structure of disciplinary fields and subfields; the structure of opportunities that intellectuals are able to see and seize. Examples from the trajectories of other former Parsons students (Neil Smelser, Clifford Geertz) will be used comparatively to show the complexity of the process of intellectual emancipation.