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Book Reviews

Inheritance in Contemporary America: The Social Dimensions of Giving across Generations. By Jacqueline L. Angel. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

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It is estimated that, in the United States, between \$600 and \$900 billion are currently transferred annually by means of bequests and gifts. This amounts to more than 5% of the U.S. GDP. Though the transfer of wealth *mortis causa* has been a subject of heated debate in the United States and European countries, postwar sociology has only paid scant attention to this social phenomenon. While it would be an exaggeration to speak today of inheritance as a “sociological lacuna,” the topic is still far from receiving attention commensurate with its social significance.

It is from this general background that one should take note of Jacqueline L. Angel's book, *Inheritance in Contemporary America*. Based on secondary analyses of surveys and statistical data as well as qualitative interviews in Central Texas, Angel approaches the topic from the perspectives of life course sociology, family sociology, and welfare state analysis. There are two main concerns in her book. The first one relates largely to the micro level of family relations. Angel investigates the *meaning* of the transfer of family wealth either through gifts or through bequests for those passing their wealth on and those receiving it. She is also interested in the *impact* of these transfers on the quality of family relations. The second main concern of the book is macro oriented. Angel analyzes how current demographic changes in the United States affect social security and the health care system and the way these changes will influence the transfer of private wealth between generations.

The book is organized in nine short chapters on some 150 pages. While this brevity is welcome, one wishes that some of the issues raised had been treated more comprehensively. The discussion of the origins of inheritance law in the United States (chap. 2) and the comparison of welfare states in the United States and three European countries remain in many ways scant (chap. 3). They also include some mistakes. However, these two chapters serve to educate readers unfamiliar with these debates, preparation for understanding the issues discussed in subsequent chapters. It is in chapters 4–6 that Angel presents her findings on the meaning of gifts and bequests in the family and their consequences for family relations. I see these chapters as the strongest portion of the book. Angel analyzes intergenerational transfers from the perspective of a moral economy, where she sees “family ideology” directing decisions on intergenerational transfers. An interesting aspect of her discussion is the observation of generational differences in attitudes toward money in general and intergenerational transfers in particular. One surprising finding is how strongly parents' judgment of the behavior of their children influences their de-

cisions on how to bequeath wealth. Angel's careful examination of the potential for family conflict entailed in bequests is an important part of her argument and is often overlooked in sociological treatments of the topic.

Chapters 7–9 focus on the consequences of social macrodevelopments for intergenerational wealth transfers. Angel starts with a presentation of the system of estate and inheritance taxation. The main focus of the chapters is, however, on current demographic changes and their consequences for social security and medical costs. These parts include extended discussions of the challenges faced by Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare caused by an aging population and increasing health care costs. The author does not provide a rationale for why one needs these comprehensive treatments in a book on inheritance; short summaries of the main findings would have sufficed. More problematic, however, is that the book remains unclear regarding the consequences following from the detected changes for the bequest of wealth. Clearly, Angel sees the capability of welfare state institutions to protect people from the risks of age and illness diminishing. In this situation “the family may provide the only reliable support available to future generations” (p. 132). At the same time families will be increasingly less able to fulfil this function. Family wealth is in danger of being used up before it can be transferred to the next generation due to increasing medical expenses of the older generation and obligations of the younger generation toward their aging parents and dependent children. This might very well be true, but what follows from this? Angel seems to suggest that inheritances should be better protected, for instance through long-term care insurance, so that the integrative social functions of bequests could be maintained. But one might also argue that exactly the opposite, namely the higher taxation of estates could serve to generate at least part of the revenues needed to cover rising costs for pensions, health care, and education, reducing the burden on the family through a better welfare state. This option is not contemplated by Angel although it is especially obvious, given her great emphasis on social inequality. Only a minority of Americans can expect an inheritance. For minorities and less educated people, inheritances do not play a role, and the family does not serve as a resource to cope with high college tuition, rising medical costs, and low social security pensions.

Inheritance in Contemporary America provides a good overview of some central questions regarding the role of gifts and bequests in the social fabric. It disappoints, however, with its inconsistencies in the argument and its indecisiveness between being an analytical study, a book for policy recommendations, or a self-help guide (“When should one begin the process of estate planning and when should the family members get involved?” p. 103). At times one would have also wished for the more systematic integration of quantitative data, for instance with regard to the point of different attitudes toward gift-giving and bequests in different generational cohorts. The author's decision to draw the sample for in-

interviews from church congregations in Central Texas seems peculiar. This might partially explain some of the strong moral overtones reported in the decisions entailed in the bequest of wealth.

Paying for Pleasure: Men Who Buy Sex. By Teela Sanders. Devon: Willan Publishing, 2008. Pp. 242.

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Over the course of the last decade, the global trend in prostitution policy has been to shift the focus of criminal justice interventions from the seller to the buyer, to focus on the “demand” side of the commercial sexual encounter. Because male sexual clients have become the target of an ever-broadening array of punitive social policies worldwide, a serious investigation of consumers’ motives that moves beyond politics and speculation constitutes a timely and important object of empirical inquiry.

The production of such a study is one of Teela Sanders’s main ambitions in *Paying for Pleasure*, although the book is only somewhat successful in this regard. While meaning to provide a sociologically nuanced counterweight to current antiprostitution discourses, in some ways her book ironically comes to mirror the polemical texts that she is rightly critical of. The view of the client that emerges from Sanders’s study is not that of the violent perpetrator or the proverbial dirty old man in a raincoat, but what is at times a similarly flat and uncomplicated figure: a gentle man who craves intimacy and who has been unfairly stigmatized by sexual conservatives, seeking to build benevolent community with his fellow sex purchasers.

Drawing on 50 in-depth interviews with men who contacted her after a radio appearance or in response to an online posting, Sanders’s sample is skewed toward white, heterosexual, middle-class clients who engage in off-street transactions. Unfortunately, Sanders does not sufficiently consider how the particularity of her sample might impact her conclusions about men’s motives in paying for sexual intimacy. For example, given that street-level (and even some brothel-based) prostitution encounters frequently last no more than 15 minutes (see e.g., Janet Lever and Deanne Dolnick, “Clients and Call Girls,” in *Sex for Sale* [Routledge 2000]), it is reasonable to wonder what forms of intimacy men are pursuing in these settings. Sanders does not address this question because her study is oriented around a more conventionally sympathetic segment of the sex-purchasing population.

The analytic approach that she brings to bear upon her study is also somewhat limited. Sanders’s main contribution is to provide a redemptive platform for the voice of (some) male sex purchasers (“Men are often not explored as subjects in their own right, as sexual beings with legitimate