

Conference in english

A social scientist in the land of scientific promise

par

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Promises are a means of bringing the future into the present. Nowhere is this insight by Hannah Arendt more applicable than in the sciences. Research is a process which is inherently uncertain, as the outcome is not known in advance. It is, however, full of promises, although it is not known which of the imagined possible, probable or preferred futures will be realized.

Expectations on the part of society and promises on the part of science are sometimes brought together in the form of a metaphorical 'contract' between them. At present, there is a trend to formalize scientific promises through impact assessment, performance indicators and similar measurements. Another trend goes in the opposite direction of opening up science towards citizens.

Against this background, I will briefly present three case studies from the life sciences: assisted reproductive technologies, stem cell research and personalized, precision medicine. I will explore the uncertainty of promises and the cunning of uncertainty at work.