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REVIEW

Magnus Hörnqvist, *Risk, Power and the State: After Foucault* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010), ISBN: 978-0415547680

This book has a theoretically bracing “Introduction” and “Conclusion” that sandwich four empirically rich chapters: case studies of Sweden’s employment service (chapter 1), prison system (chapters 2 and 3), and customs service (chapter 4). Don’t let that national focus mislead. Fewer than half of the almost 300 sources are Swedish, and those give us on-the-ground data; most citations are English-language social science and social theory, including 15 Foucault books and collections in translation. (*Risk, Power and the State: After Foucault* is written in English).

Given that Foucault precipitated “something of a Copernican revolution in the study of power,” (153) Hörnqvist aims high: to critically extend and supplement the Foucault tradition, (160) especially “the governmentality school.” (27) He wants to reveal a more complex concept of power through the “entwinement” of the exercises of productive and repressive powers in (state) organizations. If anchored in the legal paradigm, Hörnqvist thinks his ambition cannot be realized. Hence “risk” replaces the juridical model’s binary (permissible/impermissible) with a negotiated and contested continuum of heterogeneous factors. Intra- and inter-organizational communications about risk develop “strategies” that shape the exercise of power. And here is one of Hörnqvist’s most interesting themes. The entwinement of productive and repressive powers occurs not only at three levels but also between levels.

The architecture of the four case studies explains the latter point. Each has introductory and concluding summaries, but the core of each is identically titled sections: “setting the target,” “targeting,” “staying on target.” Initially, targets are non-members of the organizations: the unemployed, the incarcerated, international travelers. At the second level, members of the organization who exercise power, who fulfill the targeting, are themselves targeted by the organization to enhance efficiency. Finally, at the third level, extra-organizational agencies of the state, as well as non-state forces such as mass media, target the organization as such to keep it on target. (This level, understandably, gets only occasional and cursory treatment.)

How do entwined powers circulate between the unemployed and members of the employment service? At level 1, case managers exercise productive and repressive powers to more strongly motivate the unemployed to fulfill the conditions of receiving benefits. At level 2, since a “lack of motivation to control on the part of case managers was comparable with the lack of motivation to apply for available positions on the part of the unemployed,” (53) then case managers were “incorporated into a high-tech panopticon” (54) to more effectively fulfill the organization’s aims. At both levels, “[r]epressive power takes on features of productive power, and vice versa. Repressive power can produce specific acts and skills... And productive power can increase the motivation to work negatively through the threat of training.” (61) At level 3, audits of the employment service by external agencies assess it “in terms of rule compliance [repressive power] as well as performance [productive power]. The two aspects are not always kept separate in contemporary audit practice.” (62) Thus, entwined powers are exercised by level 3 upon level 2, by level 2’s organization upon its members, and by level 2 upon level 1.

A similar story, but longer and more complex, could be told about Swedish prisons (66 of the 162 pages concern prisons). Very briefly, in chapter 2 we find, for example, that when prisoners are trained to have more pro-social behaviors and attitudes with an eye to employment upon release, “the panopticon has turned on the prison guards” so that they will better “adhere to the [training] manual and not improvise.” (90) Chapter 3, the most developed, discusses “the dual interests of the prison service,” (109) its conflicting obligations to rehabilitate (productive power) and to maintain order (repressive power). Since the risks of reoffending and of misconduct “are, with few exceptions, not kept separate,” (118) then “indicators of risk are transformed into directives for decision-making... [and] what directs the power is the same, irrespective of whether it is being exercised” at level 1 or level 2. (128)

The case study of the (airport) customs service is the least successful in terms of Hörnqvist’s stated aims and methods. Indeed, the problems with this fourth chapter reflect inconsistencies and ambiguities of the previous three. Neither entwinement nor circulation of power between travelers and agents occur in customs interventions. More significantly, targets are not set at level 1: border inspectors have virtually unlimited discretion to “control” anyone at any time. (131f, 141) Furthermore, while inspectors’ efficiency is never audited the organization’s may be, but only indirectly. (147f)

These targeting failures expose flaws not only in Hörnqvist’s theory of the organized exercise of entwined powers, but also in the case-study architecture. We ought to have been more concerned when we learned that the employment service “operates without a precise conception of the target group.” (34) Although “employability became a target” (39) that was taken to mean “appropriate appearance,” (48) the result was that those “characteristics themselves [were] at best only marginally affected.” (49) For the prisons, “at the level of theory, the target area for interventions remains vague... [because] the concept of anti-sociality is never defined as such.” (73) In chapter 3, Hörnqvist concedes that targeting

the risks of prison disorder did not yield a strategy of “effective risk management.” (109ff) So there was no level-1 exercise of productive power, *a fortiori* no entwinement.

Part of Hörnqvist’s dissatisfaction with Foucauldian discussions of productive power is that they engage in “speculative arguments” (156) about how power creates subjects, citizens, discourses and so on. “If we want a more direct route to the effects of power, [Hörnqvist] suggest[s] a focus on behaviour rather than on what is supposed to underlie behaviour. On this reading, power produces actions in accordance with a set target.” (156) If targeting is problematic, the “focus on behaviour” is even more so. Since “[i]ndividual action plans could be said to primarily target the motivation of the unemployed,” (50; see also 41) then Hörnqvist’s object of inquiry is not behavior but what underlies it. Again, audits of prison rehabilitation strategies “do not cover the conduct of the target group outside the prison, and cannot say whether the interventions meet the target in terms of enduring behaviour modification.” (92) Hörnqvist notes this general problem in the “Introduction,” only to pass over it: his object of study is not behavior at levels 1 and 2 but rather documents that “are part of the process of exercising power.” (27)

For all his suggestive, theoretical remarks and fascinating, informative case studies, Hörnqvist does not construct “a more complex notion” of power. (154) Articulating the entwinement of repressive and productive powers undercuts the need for a new concept. Even Hörnqvist’s important claim that considerations of risk should move us to modify the Foucauldian model (which, he claims, relies on a legal paradigm) may not be that far-reaching as criticism. For analyses of strategies of power oriented by risk are similar to genealogies of practices of power however oriented. Key is the notion of practices. Hörnqvist claims that “Foucault has little to say about the transition” from the level of contested and unstable power relations to levels where those relations are regularly reproduced. (6) But citing Dreyfus and Rabinow,¹ Hörnqvist apparently misunderstands the concept of practices. Genealogies of practices already show both why the reproduction of social structures is not guaranteed and how “the actual reproduction of institutionalized power relations” proceeds. (7) If “Strategies are where action meets structure,” (17) practices are where action, structure, and strategy intersect. Hörnqvist’s supplements to the study of power give us plenty to think about, just not always in the ways he wants.

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¹ Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Second Edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).