

*John Pratt, Governing the Dangerous, The Federation Press, Annandale  
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The new book by John Pratt, *Governing the Dangerous*, makes an important contribution to a growing body of literature regarding the emergence of risk and its calculation as a rationality of government in modern western societies. This publication also fills a space in the 'governmentality' literature that has emerged out of the later work of Michel Foucault. Pratt begins by suggesting that:

This book is about dangerousness. It is a book about how it has been possible to think about this concept that is used to classify certain non capital offenders, sometimes suffering from mental abnormalities, who demonstrate a propensity to repeat their crimes and thereby put at risk the well being and security of others. It is thus a book about a particular kind of risk (1997:1).

It is also a book about how these offenders were to be governed by states that have increasingly relied on the calculation and assessment of risk. However, Pratt's notion of risk goes further than simply something that is calculated using a 'science of the state' (Foucault 1991). Rather, risk is calculated using various 'regimes of truth' in sites as diffuse as various sciences and the individual citizen. Indeed, Pratt talks about the discourse of dangerousness emerging alongside the development of the 'risk society'.

In chapter two 'Dangerousness: the birth of a concept', Pratt suggests that towards the end of the nineteenth century the notion of the dangerous classes, or 'criminal race', living within the boundaries of nationhood, gradually dissipates. Here archival literature is sourced from New Zealand, Australia, and Britain in order to argue the case. The threat to statehood shifts from the internal to the external. 'But it is at this very juncture that we now find the emergence of the threat posed by dangerous criminals' (Pratt 1997:16). These 'dangerous criminals' were no longer a threat to the state, rather, they were a threat to other individuals. In effect, Pratt argues that it was the processes of individuation, possible through the emerging technology of statistics, that allowed dangerous individuals to be identified. In particular the recidivist had been identified at the beginning as 'ungovernable' and the offence causing the most anxiety was property crime. Property crime was understood as being on the increase at this historical moment as were sex crimes. The latter, however, were still an 'unsuitable topic of conversation in polite society' (Pratt 1997:21). Although the recidivist had been identified as a risk they still led 'unknowable lives' which made their governance problematic. 'This period saw the birth of dangerousness as a penal concept, with all the qualities it still possesses today: dangerousness referred to those whose repeated criminality haunted the rest of the populace, a populace that was uncertain when they would next strike but also knowing that another strike was inevitable...' (Pratt 1997:34). The book suggests that the dangerous criminal was in this period beyond the bounds of modernity and its sanctions.

In chapter three the author moves on to explore new political rationalities that emerged in the early twentieth century as a means of combating dangerous individuals. In particular there is a new state intervention into the lives of its citizenry in the form of welfarism and the insurance and promise of universal safety that accompany it. Pratt argues that 'a new type of citizen emerges: it is no longer based on juridical status as it had been during the era

of nineteenth century liberalism; instead it would be based on dependency and reciprocity between individuals and the state and individuals and themselves' (Pratt 1997:38). However, Pratt demonstrates there was a dark side to this welfarism, for example new laws outlawing homosexuality. There was also increased regulation of individual lives more generally and new criminal understandings based on the emerging 'sciences' of eugenics and 'medico-psychiatry'. The new penology prompted changes in criminal law whereby punishment began to be focused as much on the offender as on the crime: a new economy of punishment. Offenders could be placed on a scale and punished according to their possibility of reform and the risk entailed in their return to freedom. Thus, the introduction of indeterminate prison sentences intended to protect the public.

Chapter four deals with the mid twentieth century when the unspeakable is finally given voice. With the help of the newly found validity of psychological knowledge the problem of the sex crime is identified. Dangerousness, Pratt argues now 'had assumed sexual overtones'. The psych-based methods of assessment began to erode the dominance of eugenics which had championed such novel approaches as the sterilisation of dangerous individuals. Pratt points out, however, that there was strong opposition to these new knowledges becoming a legitimate part of the criminal framework. At the heart of this resistance was the notion that it represented another form of determinism. But the psych-sciences proved their utility according to Pratt, with the identification of sex crimes against children. By the mid 1950s the habitual criminal had been joined by the sexual psychopath as dangerous individuals.

Chapter five deals with some shifts in conceptions of dangerousness. The property offender now becomes a petty criminal and only repeat sex offenders and violent offenders are seen as dangerous. These shifts are framed by the recognition that full employment, as a goal of the welfare state, had brought about a decline in the risk to individual citizens from dangerous individuals. The psych-knowledges provided the scope for individuals to be seen as 'inadequate' rather than dangerous and many offenders could be siphoned from the criminal justice system into the health system. The homosexual, for example, was no longer seen as a threat to the well being and reproductive capacity of the nation.

From chapter six Pratt plots the emergence of a new form of political rationality that will eventually displace welfarism: neo-liberalism. This begins with the state relinquishing its role as moral guardian and allowing individuals to govern themselves or to be 'governed at a distance'. Pratt traces these shifts in political rationalities through some individual cases and through historical legislative documentation where contesting discourses jostle for legal legitimacy. His archival research here is indeed impressive in its breadth. Towards the end of this chapter he argues '...if welfarism had been successful in some aspects of risk management and reduction, from around 1970 it was increasingly seen as creating new risks which it was then unable to resolve' (Pratt 1997:131). It is impossible for me to do justice to the author's sophisticated arguments in this short piece, particularly towards the end of chapter six where he looks at the re-emergence of dangerousness. Indeed chapter seven is almost entirely aimed at explaining at a more general level how changes in the way individuals understand their subjectivities, beginning in the mid twentieth century, enabled a conception of the body as requiring self protection. Here the dangerous individual re-emerges alongside the self governing individual.

In chapter eight the neo-liberal state attempts to come to terms with how the dangerous should now be governed. Pratt suggests that although the welfare state has been rolled back, and new technologies of personal risk management have emerged, the state still felt a responsibility to guarantee protection from the dangerous. In the penal realm 'offenders were recast as being responsible for their actions'. More generally, legislation was afoot ensuring

sentencing was determined by the state rather than the judiciary through new modes of actuarial justice.

In the final chapter Pratt begins:

At that juncture around the early 1990's, neo-liberalism had set in place a finely tuned dangerousness matrix: it was still committed to protecting the public, but over a much more narrowly defined area. Furthermore its commitment to protection existed at one end of a kind of continuum which represented the differing agencies and levels of protection that now existed to manage and control crime. This arrangement ensured that the state would provide protection from the dangerous, although even here a kind of partnership was being forged between the state and individual citizens charged with taking care of themselves... (1997:178).

Throughout the 1990s, however, Pratt identifies the discursive emergence of new forms of dangerous individuals such as those that are unable to govern themselves in accordance with neo-liberal rationalities and who fall outside the shrinking welfare net. At the same time, however, he identifies a recent widening of the criminal justice net allowing such 'offenders' to be imprisoned for longer periods. This is evidenced in legislation such as the 'three strikes' laws in the United States.

The book appears to neglect the influence of popular media on how dangerousness might be understood at any given historical moment. However, this is a minor concern and grappling with such issues may have taken away from the author's focus on more concrete mechanisms of governance. *Governing the Dangerous* is indeed a genealogy, a history of the present; for the author's motives lie in the present day problematic of governing dangerous individuals, and indeed what knowledges make these individuals 'dangerous'. The book is vital reading for criminologists, students, practitioners, sociologists, historians and penologists and for anybody interested in the mechanics of criminal justice systems. It is also an in-depth journey through the continuities and discontinuities of these systems. It traces many seemingly diverse threads of knowledge and brings them together in a work of great clarity. This is an important book that deserves your attention.

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