

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

RICHARD V. ERICSON and AARON DOYLE (eds.), *Risk and Morality*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003, 461 pp.

One of the more lively areas of recent debate in social theory is that addressing the phenomenon of risk and the role it plays in contemporary social life and in the constitution of subjectivities. A number of theorists have argued that practices of risk management are increasingly divorced from morality, however the contributors to this book reject this view. Risk is seen as inherently moral, for the very selection of a risk involves a moral determination of 'good' and 'bad'. Risk objects are therefore moral objects. This book suggests that, despite the veneer of scientific authority and the seemingly neutral quantitative discourse of risk, risk assessment does not identify a single course of action but a series of possibilities which require moral judgement for action.

This book, the outcome of a conference held at the University of British Columbia in May 2001, examines the ways in which risk discourse and practice relate to both moral principles and ethical conduct. The book brings together a wide range of scholarship from the disciplines of philosophy, accounting, sociology, law, political science, criminology, and geography. It offers useful theoretical perspectives with which to think about risk and unpacks the moralities embedded in a variety of risk discourses, from the insurance industry to the treatment of problem drinking. Despite its origins as a conference collection, this book possesses a cohesiveness often lacking in such edited works. Contributing to this focus are the well developed introductions to each section that highlight the contribution each paper makes and draws out their interrelations and differences.

The book is organized according to four major sections. The first section offers different approaches to theorizing risk and morality. Ian Hacking draws on the work of Mary Douglas to explore how groups choose the class of events that come to be understood as risky and how these "risk portfolios" vary over space and time. In the "Rise of Risk," David Garland provides a useful examination of why "everyone seems to be talking about risk" (49) and an overview of the various meanings of "risk." The section concludes with John Adams' essay distinguishing three types of risk. He further provides a typology of risk takers and a conceptual model of the process of risk management. The second section examines risk at different levels of society from the State (as a mode of holding politicians accountable), to the corporate (as a mode of internalizing social goals

through the concept of corporate responsibility), and the individual (suggesting that contrary to neoliberal discourse the rise of risk entails greater social regulation). The third section takes the insurance industry as a case study and unpacks the complex ways in which risk classification, assessment, and management embed moral principles and direct the conduct of both insurers and their clients. The final section considers how risk discourse governs human desires in the areas of extreme sport, addiction, and problem drinking.

Although four major approaches to the study of risk have been identified (technico-scientific, cultural symbolic, the risk society, and governmentality), the contributors to this book are predominantly influenced by a governmentality perspective. The insurance industry receives extensive attention, which is perhaps not surprising due to the fact that it is a major social institution of risk distribution and moral regulation. However, this focus comes at the expense of other areas where risk discourse and its embedded moralities have considerable impact on our lives. Though two articles deal with health risk, the moralities embedded here certainly warrant further exploration. Methodologically, this collection is biased toward documentary research. There is little investigation of the ways in which people conceptualize and experience risk. This tends to foster the notion of a universal risk subject and does not elucidate the way social factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, and class influence risk discourse, nor does it help one understand risk at the level of everyday life. Despite these limitations, this collection of papers offers an excellent snap shot of some cutting edge research on risk and morality. It is especially pertinent for those scholars interested in risk as a technology of governance.

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