

REVIEW

Personality and Dangerousness

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Personality and Dangerousness: Genealogies of Antisocial Personality Disorder, by David McCallum. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

David McCallum's elegant genealogy of antisocial personality disorder (APD) is an important new contribution to the international critical literature on mental disorder, criminality and the law. McCallum, Associate Professor in the Department of Social Inquiry and Community Studies at Victoria University in Melbourne, has produced an incisive and impeccably researched account of the ambivalent medico-legal encounter with 'personality disordered' people across nearly two centuries of forensic history. Inspired by the recent torrent of writings on governmentality, risk society, and law, and concentrating mainly on national, state, and territorial developments in Australia, McCallum asks how APD came to be, and to be 'made up.' He documents how the birth of APD (along with the "invention of personality"¹ more generally) occurred as one feature of the liberal state's broadly based administrative project aimed at manufacturing knowable and self-governing citizens.

For McCallum, as for the social theorists and philosophers whose collective ideas infuse his analysis (e.g. Michel Foucault, Robert Castel, Nikolas Rose, Ian Hacking, Pat O'Malley, and John Pratt), the frontier between personhood and governance—between the individual and the state—is the pivotal field of power relations in contemporary societies. McCallum views personality as a constructed category. He writes:

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¹ David McCallum, *Personality and Dangerousness: Genealogies of Antisocial Personality Disorder* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) at 74.

Its key attribute became synonymous with the workings of power under advanced forms of liberalism. It allowed for a technology of measurement which would bring the whole of the (normal) population into subjection on a grid of calculability, while at the same time providing a unit of subjectification through which individuals would be incited to measure and produce themselves—to become entrepreneurs of their own normal health personalities.²

In other words, the making of personality, in both its 'conventional' and 'pathological' forms, has been an indispensable tool of population control under conditions of late modernity. But just as it has so effectively advanced the regulatory projects of government, law and 'psy' authorities (among many others), the human personality has also proven to be an unruly, contradictory and endlessly elusive discursive artefact.

As McCallum adroitly chronicles through the seven economically written chapters of *Personality and Dangerousness*, APD has been, through its many incarnations from 19th to 21st centuries, an especially slippery commodity in the hands of legal and scientific experts. Whether couched in the discourse of moral imbecility, moral insanity, *manie sans délire*, conduct disorder, sociopathy, psychopathy, disordered personality or risk, this population of 'liminal' subjects has consistently resisted the categorizing efforts of both criminology and medicine. Even as diagnostic systems have become ever more discriminating (and, according to some, reliable) over the past hundred years, conflict continues to rage over APD's status "as a mental illness."³ Advocates and critics fiercely contest APD's (and, even more so, its companion construct psychopathy's) applicability to legal judgments about criminal responsibility and dangerousness. Recurrently, the expansionistic impetus of forensic psychiatry and psychology collides against juridical and cultural beliefs that such interstitial, 'madly bad,' 'marginally insane,' or 'simply evil' people are conscious of their crimes and should remain accountable, in whole or part, for the human damage they inflict. In the process, law and science—these mutually empowering yet inherently irreconcilable regulatory regimes—encounter the boundaries of their respective competencies around the determination of moral culpability and the domestication of risk.

In charting APD's erratic journey through time and space, *Personality and Dangerousness* shows how the idea of a morally defective human subspecies has relentlessly framed the interconnected histories of madness, mental 'deficiency,' the asylum, eugenics, mental hygiene, criminal law, and the ever-burgeoning professions of psychiatry and psychology. In the process, McCallum raises troubling questions about the motives and implications of current forensic policies calculated to categorize and control 'risky' people.

² *Ibid.* at 142.

³ *Ibid.* at 145.

Like Australia and other 'liberal democracies', in recent years Canada has witnessed a truly spectacular surge of theory, expertise, and legislation targeting the 'dangerous' patient-offender. These diverse methods and strategies have saturated the nation's regulatory systems. They traverse a broad swath of institutional and cultural practice, from the adoption of Hare's psychopathy checklist and assorted other 'risk assessment' instruments, to the ever-widening purview of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (now DSM-IV-TR), to dangerous offender and long-term offender provisions in the Canadian *Criminal Code*, to the 'gating' of 'high-risk' prisoners, to community treatment orders and related measures for controlling allegedly dangerous psychiatric patients under revamped provincial mental health legislation like Ontario's *Brian's Law*. Their many exponents declare that these 'new generation' measures signal a revolutionary advance in the state's (and science's) capacity to secure public safety by demarcating the boundaries of individual and social danger. But McCallum's genealogy elicits a very different interpretation. The author's historical deconstruction of APD invites the sceptical conclusion that these supposedly pioneering trends in risk management comprise little more than a new technical and discursive spin on the enduring western project of liberal governance – namely, the state's comprehensive effort "... to bring the whole population onto a gird of calculability."⁴ One is left to reflect on the political and moral implications of these historical convergences, and to ponder whether this 'new' risk paradigm, like its predecessors, is doomed to collapse under the weight of its countless contradictions.

Above and beyond its certain value as a history of legal and medical ideas, *Personality and Dangerousness* is also illuminating as a representative model of Foucauldian theory and methodology. In this aspect, it reveals both the capacities and failings of discourse-driven medico-legal historiographies of knowledge and power. On the one hand, McCallum conducts an edifying excursion through the authoritative texts, government records, legal doctrine, expert rhetoric, and official language systems that dominated these key moments in forensic history. On the other hand, the book emulates others of similar theoretical bent in consistently privileging language over practice, and text over voice. McCallum's robust deconstructions of APD discourse aside, we learn little about the human experiences and subversive mentalities of 'dangerous' and 'disordered' people themselves. A more probing engagement with the critically important new wave of patient-centred historiographies would have much enhanced the analysis in this respect. The book suffers, too, from the dearth of any concerted treatment of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, and of the intersectional role played by these and other hierarchies of social structure in shaping medico-legal understandings of personality and dangerousness. Fur-

⁴ *Ibid.* at 92–93.

ther, McCallum's general repudiation of 'social control' approaches to psychiatric and legal history, and his virtual abandonment of state theories in favour of Foucault-inspired governance analysis, constrain the work in important ways. For example, he surprisingly fails to consider, as others have done, that the recent renaissance of risk management over the 'personality disordered'—and, indeed, over the citizenry more generally—hinges on the pivotal transformation from liberalism to neo-liberalism that has characterized the Australian polity as much as it has the United States, Canada, and other jurisdictions since the 1980s.

On balance, however, *Personality and Dangerousness* more than overcomes these imperfections in delivering an evocative essay on the operations of government, law, science, and the self in the manufacture of 'dangerous' people, past and present. David McCallum's surgical critique of APD, psychopathy, risk assessment and medico-legal power will resonate for all those who struggle with these obdurate concepts, and the practices they invoke, across a range of legal, clinical, and academic contexts. By "... focus[ing] on the borderlines between jurisprudence and the 'psy' sciences,"⁵ *Personality and Dangerousness* succeeds in exposing the many fallacies and conflicts that pervade both these worlds: Finally, in situating his critique within the wider narratives of modern governance, McCallum's ultimate, unsettling message is that the regulatory forces that impinge upon 'disordered,' 'defective' and 'dangerous' personalities are, in intention and effect, directed at us all.