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BOOK REVIEW

Poststructural Policy Analysis – A Guide to Practice – Carol Lee Bacchi and Susan Goodwin, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016

In this fairly short book, Carol Lee Bacchi and Susan Goodwin further develop Bacchi's novel approach to policy analysis, which they term "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR). WPR is an analytical strategy that puts in question the common view that the role of governments is to solve emergent problems that need to be addressed. Rather, it starts from the assumption that governmental practices, understood in a broad sense, 'produce problems' through specific problematizations in which governable subjects, objects and places emerge. The WPR approach heralds the importance of directing critical attention to 'productive' aspects of policy and makes them visible through a critical analysis (14).

In this book, the authors seek to provide a solid ground for the WPR framework within the poststructuralist perspective by connecting it with Foucault and his legacy, especially the governmentality tradition. WPR sets off from "problematizations," that is, the multitude of contingent ways in which problems are produced and represented in governmental policies and practices (p. 13), and it constitutes a critical way of theorizing (in-) formal policies from all kinds of organizations (p. 20). The book aims to reveal the underlying contingent knowledges, discourses, and assumptions that give each policy its specific shape, produce "targets," and generate different types of power relations. In addition, the WPR approach directs attention to the heterogeneous practices and knowledge regimes that produce hierarchical and inegalitarian forms of rule. This emphasis upon the plurality that underlies policy making makes it possible to investigate the contingencies associated with each policy and governance program, which opens them to challenge and change in a way that is not characteristic of the current rationalist and non-political notion of complexity and pluralism, which promotes best practices and benchmarking, often via collaborative networks (Brown 2015, 135).

Bacchi and Goodwin maintain that although "poststructuralism has been extremely influential across the humanities and social sciences," it occupies a "less well-articulated and more contested position" in the field of policy research and analysis. For this reason, their goal in this book is to "provide a succinct and accessible overview of what it means to analyze policy from a Foucault-influenced poststructural perspective" (p. 4). The emphasis upon heterogeneity and contingency that forms the basis of the WPR approach provides the foundation for a critical examination of a range of issues associated with policy, as well as policy itself. Rather than assuming that problems exist, merely waiting to be revealed and addressed, or that the components of policy possess independent essences of their own, WPR's poststructuralist orientation focuses on how policy "creates" such realities as organizations, institutions, the economy, and the nation-state, which are commonly treated as entities in a range of fields, particularly political science. The WPR approach regards both these "entities" and political subjects as emergent, "in process," and shaped by ongoing interactions with discourses and other practices, which can be revealed through the use of a genealogical methodology (p. 6-8).

The book contains eight chapters divided into two parts that address the theoretical ground of the WPR approach and its various applications. An introductory chapter sketches the broad parameters of poststructuralism, presents a brief synopsis of its Foucauldian version, and encourages a healthy skepticism towards policy and interventions, including the knowledges and discourses that support them. While the authors argue that such a stance is important for understanding what policy is and how it is practiced, they also emphasize the need for self-reflection by policy makers and critical engagement on the part of scholars. Chapter two articulates the poststructuralist foundation of WPR, with a focus on the productive aspects of problematizing and reproblematizing in policy making and analysis. Chapter three outlines certain key themes and concepts, including governmentality, genealogy, subjectification, discourse, and discursive practices. Bacchi and Goodwin state that they "take a critical distance from forms of discourse analysis that focus on patterns of speech, rhetoric and communication, such as critical discourse analysis and interpretive approaches" (p. 35). Following Foucault, they instead view discourses as "socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what is possible to think, write or speak about a given social object or practice" (p. 35). In this respect, "discourses bridge the symbolic-material division" insofar as they do not simply represent "the real," but are "part of its production" (p. 37).

Chapters 4-7 comprise the second section (p. 57-107), which addresses the "making and unmaking" of (4) problems, (5) subjects, (6) objects, and (7) places. The authors capture the specific role of the concept being examined, review how both they and others have employed WPR analysis, and illustrate the many applications of the WPR approach. However, they do not discuss the latter's potential limitations on either the empirical or theoretical levels. The conclusion (chapter 8), which consists of a short summary of the individual chapters, is followed by an appendix written by Carol Bacchi and Jennifer Bonham that discusses the methodology of poststructural interview analysis. Both the conclusion and the appendix would be stronger if the discussion and argumentation were further developed.

Although the book explicitly targets a wide audience – "all those influenced by the ways in which governing takes place; in other words, everyone!" (p. 3) – I doubt it can be easily read by many outside academia since it demands a level of familiarity with the theoretical underpinnings of the discussion. The book does succeed in providing an overview of the WPR approach, which it strongly promotes. It also contains an instructive guide for how both students and scholars can employ that approach in their own research (p. 20-26). The second part in particular presents an array of examples in various contexts from a broad range of countries of how scholars have utilized WPR to great effect in revealing the politics, knowledges, and discourses behind policies. That said, the book does not introduce a new analytical approach, but rather discusses an already existing one. The main effort is to further connect and align it with a (potentially) competing research tradition, that of governmentality studies. However, since governmentality studies may or may not rely on the WPR analytical framework the authors reveal an asymmetrical relationship between the two. The WPR approach has a clear focus on (public) policy whereas governmentality studies tend to include a wider set of empirical inferences and are often more practice oriented (Walters 2012). It is also unfortunate that the authors do not discuss the WPR approach in relation to other analytical frameworks. Instead the authors concentrate on showing the many applications of WPR provided by other scholars in relation to the making and unmaking of problems, subjects, objects and places. Surely there are competing yet compelling analytical frameworks and approaches that are equally

interested in the productive aspects of discourse and with power asymmetries. This is evident to frequent readers of Critical Discourse Studies.

Nevertheless, all scholars and students who engage in critical policy analysis and employ either a discourse or governmentality approach are well advised to read *Poststructural Policy Analysis* and engage with the WPR framework. It provides a compelling and concrete analytical framework for scholars to analyze and critically engage in 'problematizations' in the current era of depoliticized governance and the call for knowledge and evidence-based policy (Newman 2016)

Oscar Larsson, Ph.D

Uppsala University, Department of Government

Email: oscar.larsson@statsvet.uu.se

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