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The pandemic within: Policy making for a better world

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

The pandemic within: Policy making for a better world
By Hendrik Wagenaar and Barbara Prainsack
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In *The pandemic within: Policy making for a better world*, authors Hendrik Wagenaar and Barbara Prainsack invite readers to think about the COVID-19 pandemic as an intrinsic element of our society in which we are all involved and implicated (as opposed to the common view as an external "enemy"). Both authors are well-known public policy analysts: Wagenaar's work includes areas such as Deliberative Policy Analysis and Interpretive Policy Studies; Prainsack's research is situated within diverse areas including Critical Theory, Political Sociology, and Public Health. This book is an attempt to re-establish moral vision in policy studies. It shows that policies do not necessarily deal with the underlying influences that led to the production of social issues. The book analyzes the deeply flawed social order which the pandemic uncovered. Based on Levitas' (2013) work, it uses utopian thinking (i.e., the imagining of an alternate social order) in a systematic approach to rethink better futures. The book focuses on the design of institutional and social practices that can lead to human flourishing. In this review, I show that the book thoroughly accomplishes its aim of presenting the foundation for its vision towards better policy making and futures.

The authors describe the problems exposed by the pandemic as a predicament, which, based on Connolly's (2011) concept, is a situation that we cannot totally control and from which we cannot escape. The book states that the reason for society's inability to fix current social issues is related to the concepts of complexity and hegemony. While complexity develops from the interaction between the components of a system, the book considers hegemony as captivity, that is, a cognitive condition wherein we cannot perceive things outside the boundaries of the current social order. The authors argue that the complexity of our system maintains our exploitative social order and prevents us from imagining an alternative. They propose developing a holistic vision by using utopian thinking as a method and starting point to transcend the neoliberal hegemony. The authors' main argument is that society needs change, and that the current crisis may open the possibility for transformative change that can be guided by utopian thinking.

Each chapter builds upon the book's vision with a detailed analysis of the elements and changes towards a more sustainable society. The pandemic exposed the relevance of strong public infrastructures including healthcare, education, housing, information, and transportation. In contrast to neoliberal discourses, the book reminds us that there are other approaches to deliver public services equitably. In Chapters 3 to 8, it discusses our social arrangements to argue in favour of change in seven areas: (a) public infrastructure; (b) housing; (c) concept of work; (d) introduction of a universal basic income; (e) government; (f) corporate responsibility; and (g) financial system. With a deep discussion of changes in all these social institutions and infrastructures, the authors suggest that, as institutions are based on human practices, they are subject to change, and that social change is therefore conceivable.

In Chapter 9, the authors use the metaphor of gardening to illustrate how indigenous ways of knowing might guide this transformation. Instead of an engineering perspective that focuses on applying knowledge to control the planet, they suggest a shift to a gardening paradigm in which we embrace our relationships with nature, humans, and non-humans. They argue that reimagining the Anthropocene involves acknowledging our entanglement with nature so that our relationship with the natural world can be regenerative. As indigenous ways of knowing are relational, the book's metaphor of gardening is an effort to bring relational thinking to policy making. Additionally, Chapters 9 and 10, which are the concluding chapters, reiterate that transformation in all the elements and

institutions discussed in the book are the foundation for the authors' vision of what they call an *Ecological Society*.

The book thoroughly achieves its purpose of presenting an in-depth analysis of institutional practices and presents feasible alternatives. By challenging the social order with utopian thinking, *The pandemic within* convincingly shows the need for change in policy making for a post-pandemic world. The book is a compelling must-read for readers engaged in areas such as public policy, sociology, education, and social work.

References

Connolly, W. E. (2011). *A world of becoming*. Duke University Press.

Levitas, R. (2013). *Utopia as method: The imaginary reconstitution of society*. Palgrave Macmillan.