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Book Review

Vincenzo Ruggiero (2015) *Power and Crime*. London and New York: Routledge.

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In the very first sentence of his introduction to this book Vincenzo Ruggiero questions whether his book is appropriately included in Routledge's 'New Directions in Critical Criminology' series, insofar as he asserts that consideration of the relationship between power and crime is hardly a new enterprise. And large swaths of what follows are devoted to demonstrating that insights into this relationship can be distilled from a long history of philosophical and social/behavioral inquiry. Even within the field of criminology such inquiry is not entirely new. The publication year, 2015, happens to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the publication of Edwin Sutherland's (1940) first article on white collar crime. Early in this book Ruggiero credits Sutherland with producing the seminal point of departure for the criminological study of crimes of the powerful. The publication year also marks the 40th anniversary of the publication of Frank Pearce's (1975) *Crimes of the Powerful*, which in the more recent era introduced the specific criminological concept central to the analysis put forth in the present work. But the works of both Sutherland and Pearce, along with that of a relatively small number of criminologists, were exceptions to a basic pattern of all-too-little attention to the crimes of the powerful, relative to the enduring criminological privileging of attention to crimes of the powerless. On the other side of this one can claim that we are now witnessing a significant upsurge of critical criminological scholarship on crimes of the powerful, exemplified by the publication of Gregg Barak's (2015) edited anthology, *The Routledge International Handbook of the Crimes of the Powerful* and Dawn Rothe and David Kauzlarich's (2016) *Crimes of the Powerful: An Introduction*. The special contribution that Ruggiero makes to this criminological enterprise is to identify propositions and insights relevant to a richer understanding of crimes of the powerful that have surfaced in the course of thousands of years of intellectual inquiry, beginning with the classical Greeks.

In one sense, this book is 'old fashioned' insofar as it is a reflection of a breath-taking level of erudition that seems to me to be ever less common in scholarly inquiry, perhaps especially that to be found in contemporary criminology and criminal justice. The erosion of traditional, classical approaches to education may be the key explanatory factor here. Ruggiero adopts as a core claim that the analysis of power and crime – and, specifically, the crimes of the powerful (or power crimes) – must draw upon a broad range of disciplines, and that criminologists need to disavow parochial approaches to this complex topic suggesting that it is uniquely within the purview of criminologists.

In the eight chapters that follow the introductory chapter which provides a rationale for his book and an overview of its contents, Ruggiero offers a fundamental intellectual framework for criminologists exploring the relationship between power and crime. The author is far removed from the most common approach of contemporary scholars, including criminologists: that of the specialist. Ruggiero is committed to elucidating the enduring relevance of looking at 'the big picture'. The present book has to be understood as part of an on-going, immensely ambitious project of the author in this regard, most recently exemplified by his *The Crimes of the Economy* book (Ruggiero 2013). In that book Ruggiero took on the history of economic thought, with the objective of demonstrating the relevance of understanding that history as a foundation for making sense of many different manifestations of crime in contemporary society. In historical terms he sought to demonstrate the complicity of much classical economic thought in the promotion of a political economy with immensely harmful consequences for large swaths of the human population, a thesis which obviously intersects with that of the powerful as perpetrators on many different levels of crime and suffering.

In both that book and in the present one the impression is that the author is, first and foremost, working out for himself an understanding of hugely consequential historical phenomena. Unlike many authors, he is less concerned with producing a book that is naturally appealing to and of practical use to readers. Both books have idiosyncratic dimensions, and arguments are pursued discursively rather than in a strictly linear fashion. We live in a world where there is a broadly diffused appetite for simple, straightforward explanations for intrinsically disturbing and threatening phenomena, whether it is the erosion of the industrial economy or the spread of fundamentalist terrorism. We see this reflected in the unfolding, extraordinary and surreal 2016 American presidential campaign, on-going as of this writing. But Ruggiero insistently explores the endless complexities of the relationship between power and crime, and perversely avoids offering up one-dimensional bromides and propositions.

The scope of what is addressed in the nine relatively brief chapters in this book is so broad and ambitious that no serious engagement with the ideas put forth is possible within the framework of a relatively brief book review. Only a selective sampling of some themes and insights is set forth here. Among those whose thoughts are cited in this book and interwoven throughout the text we find: classical Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle, Thrasymus, and Xenophon; Machiavelli, Hobbes, Montaigne, Pascal, Rousseau, Spinoza, Kant, Hume, Smith, Hegel, Mill, and Nietzsche from a long tradition of European philosophers and political theorists; Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Pareto, Simmel, Veblen, Merton, Mills, and Foucault among seminal contributors to sociological analysis; and Kelsen, Schmitt, and Neumann among jurisprudential philosophers.

Conflicting views on the core issues on power and crime extend far back in time. Following some attention to the enduring issues surrounding the definition of crime, Ruggiero offers up a 'criminological classification' of 'power crime' in relation to crimes across the 'legal-illegal continuum'. Diverse manifestations of crimes of the powerful are addressed. Drawing upon his earlier study of crimes of the economy, Ruggiero explores how economic variables intersect with the crimes of the powerful, and the greater freedom and resources facilitating these crimes.

Throughout this book Ruggiero addresses the ambiguities of crimes of the powerful and how the powerful succeed in rationalizing their harmful conduct, in part by co-opting core themes of traditional philosophy. Indeed, he seeks to demonstrate the 'blindness' of many revered philosophers (for example, Hegel) to the crimes of the powerful. But a long tradition of religious and secular ideology is complicit in rationalizing power crimes. Ruggiero also explores the role of law in advancing the crimes of the powerful, or 'law as fraud'. The powerful largely avoid being labeled criminals, or being held accountable for their crimes.

Ruggiero agrees with Sutherland that one must transcend legal categories to comprehend power crimes. Sutherland's emphasis on crime as learned behavior as well as many alternative explanations for engagement in crime are considered in relation to such crime, with some attention to the limitations of conventional criminological theories in this realm. A final chapter seeks to demonstrate the potent insights on crimes of the powerful that can be drawn from the work of the great nineteenth century novelist Balzac, for whom a core thesis was the pervasively corrupting influence of money in bourgeois society in the wake of the French Revolution. Ruggiero concludes his book with a summary consideration of the numerous points of intersection between 'power' and 'crime', and the 'performative acts' of the powerful that manifest themselves in hugely harmful activities.

Readers seeking a linked set of propositions accounting for the relationship of power to crime will probably be frustrated by their engagement with this book. Ruggiero offers up an almost bewildering mix of theoretical and intellectual insights, moving across a vast space of time and place. The reader who is prepared to make the commitment to work through this mélange of observations and propositions ideally finds a point of departure for both a more in-depth inquiry and for pursuing a more focused project in relation to power and crime. Ultimately, this short book offers an 'embarrassment of riches' for those readers seeking a more profound understanding of the endlessly complex intertwining of power with crime.

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