

# Litteraturgranskningar

*Litteraturredaktör: Björn Östbring*

**Altermark, Niklas, 2016. *After Inclusion: Intellectual Disability as Biopolitics*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen.**

Review by Dan Goodley

In 2016 it could be argued that people with intellectual disabilities have never had it so good. The institutions have closed. Community living is ubiquitous. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons has enshrined in supranational discourse the human rights of people with intellectual disabilities. Where once we segregated people so-labelled in places on the edges of our communities we now welcome them into the fold. And a whole host of professionals engage in what has been called person-centred care: where we seek to enable people to become more autonomous and take control of their lives. Life has never been so good. Or so we thought. Altermark's book which captures his doctoral research provides a much needed reality check for those of us who are celebrating our humanitarian and civilised times. His work demands that we stop. Think. And think again about what we do to people with learning disabilities in the names of empowerment, education and rehabilitation.

This is a gripping piece of analytical work. Ground-breaking. Dripping with venom. Anger. The author is clearly pissed off. There is rage at what we are all doing to people with intellectual disabilities. There is also hope as well. Thank God. Or thank Foucault. Or thank Judith Butler. But I want to thank Altermark. This book provides a sobering analysis of the ways in which people with intellectual

disabilities are caught up in new processes of education, monitoring and governance in a time that he declares as *post-institutional*. This is a time after the horrors of institutionalisation and asylums. This is the contemporary time where people with learning disabilities are welcomed into the community to be free: but free only to govern themselves. This is a work that invites in a post-institutional analysis of the world. His work shows how people with intellectual disabilities – whose labelling, diagnosis and constitution already bare the marks of powerful discourses from spaces such as psychiatry, education and psychology – are now being subjected to new forms of biopower. This term – adopted from Michel Foucault, advanced by Judith Butler and now elaborated by Altermark – refers to the ways in which the body and mind is assessed, treated, educated and rehabilitated in the name of health of the wider society. Hence, just as disability becomes known through – for example, the psychiatric gaze and diagnostic manual – so we come to understand normality (disability's apparent opposite). People with learning disabilities are caught up in a strange paradox: being named as disabled and, wherever possible, being caught up in various methods and techniques through which they are expected to be (or become) normal. This tension is not just paradoxical: it is a form of double oppression. First, the person with intellectual disabilities is pathologised, next they are thrown into a psychological lions den to be mauled by the methods of normalisation. And Altermark goes further by suggesting and showing that these methods of normalisation contribute to an institutionalised violence against people with intellectual disabilities. He writes, 'the government

of intellectual disability became something else; a way of governing that relies on both crafting citizens and continually monitoring and correcting their conduct, sometimes by brute force, in case an appropriate citizen fails to materialise. Understanding this transformation of government means understanding how power operates after inclusion' (14). And as he presses further in his analysis he demonstrates how seemingly humane, liberal, benign processes associated with promoting self-empowerment, self-advocacy and self-determination are part of a new period of governance for people with intellectual disabilities. So these new forms are a problem and cause human troubles for people so-labelled. But what does this mean in practice? Altermark made me think of some examples from my context. I share with you five.

1. Parents with intellectual disabilities can keep hold of their children but only if they achieve a high standard of parenting that I know I would never have met – and I managed to keep my daughters
2. My friend Mark who attended the local 'special education college' where he was taught life skills for 17 years. He still refuses to make anyone a coffee.
3. My friend Jeremy who at the age of 52 had a new social worker and she insisted he try again to learn how to count money. He can't. Still cannot. But he holds down a job at the local newspaper and has done for 23 years.
4. The common narrative amongst some of educational and school psychology colleagues who have told me that 'play is therapeutic for disabled children'. Not play is fun. Or play is play. But play has a psycho-emotional and educational quality. So that's why disabled children should be encouraged to play. Not to play. But to get better. To be released from the chains of their disabilities.
5. People with learning disabilities are allowed to eat what they want in group homes just as long as they watch their sugar and caffeine intake. Meanwhile, the support workers pop off for a regular cigarette in the courtyard of the group home while residents with learning disabilities take part in the new fitness regime. I hate keep fit. I imagine many people with and without intellectual disabilities hate it too. But people with intellectual disabilities are not free to say no to a new fitness regime. They are free only to say 'yes I want to be fit'. This is a strange freedom: but it is the only freedom offered by biopower.

Altermark's critically – some might say pragmatic cynicism – outs him as a poststructuralist. And an incredibly accessible one. His writing screams 'read me'. He is a student of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler but his wide knowledge of the literature clearly demonstrates how in touch he is with post-structuralist work in critical disability studies and I thank him for that (see Goodley, 2014 for an overview). Sometimes this work is dismissed as having no application, of being quintessentially academic and vague. Altermark demonstrates, in contrast, that poststructuralist writing can be readable and applicable in the real lives of disabled people. This is a text that I will tell my students to read.

I wondered, at times, where the resistance was going to come from. The trouble with poststructuralism – or at least its application – is that it sometimes reads like we are caught up a hopeless discursive whirlpool, as we drown under a sea of ideas, regimes and practices. Would I put down this book knowing of the oppressive play of discourses upon the lives of people with learning disabilities, open the red wine, drink into oblivion and book flights to the nearest baron landscape to lead a life of depressed realisation? Thankfully I did not have to google flights. Thankfully my daughters' college fees funds remains in tact.

For what Altermark gives us here is a beautifully nuanced exposition of the ways in which people with learning disabilities and their allies can use what Hardt and Negri (2000) term the excesses of biopower to resist, to refuse and regroup. This makes this an affirmative piece of work and, I would agree with Altermark, a *crip* piece of analysis. So let me tease out some fine points of analysis in the text for the reader.

- *What we have here is an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary piece of writing.* I really enjoyed the ways in which the analysis moves across different disciplinary positions of critical psychology, education, philosophy, sociology and social policy. This is rare success: a piece of analysis that is happy in its nomadic approach to theory and disciplinary knowledge. Such movements allow Altermark to expose the fragility of intellectual disability as an object, subject and practice.
- *The humanist subject gets a battering* – this subject, which he is antithetical, is the rational, reasoned, white-man-living-in-towns-speaking-a-standard-language (Braidotti, 2013): the model citizen; rarely disabled, always unobtainable. Inclusive education and normalisation processes seek to induct people (with and without) learning disabilities into this category. Rather than radically changing how we might do education, examples of inclusive education rely implicitly on the idea that the learner is a rational humanist subject just waiting for some help along the way. But, as Altermark notes, this category is rarely critically analysed and always implicitly accepted. So all of us – unless we are David Beckham – fail to match up to the neoliberal imperative. This normative citizen is a simulacrum of what we would like all our citizens to be. This leads to another key headline of this work.
- *People with intellectual disabilities become key objects and subjects in our search for the perfect humanist citizen.* While the rest of us (without learning disabilities) might have some freedom to abstain from these normalizing practices (perhaps only some), people with learning disabilities are inculcated into a culture of normativity. If you have the label of intellectual disabilities you will struggle to be bohemian, smoke a joint, find your inner punk rocker. Because these kinds of subject position do not sit well with the rational, reasonable humanist subject destination that many a normalizing practice has in mind for its subjects. What an incredible tragedy and irony.
- *Intelligence and adaptive behaviour become known through the methods of science and are therefore always socially constructed.* As Altermark observes, this is a well-worn analysis in the literature but is great to read here in a time when many disability studies researchers are entering a new realist mode of theorising (Shakespeare, 2013).
- *A problem of social theories of disability is that they keep impairment as fundamentally natural and biology thus ignoring their sociological origins.* Altermark comes to such a conclusion because of his commitment to intellectual disability as a biopolitical construction (and his alliance with people who lie below the surface of the label of intellectual disabilities). I really welcome this because he re-sociologises disability and impairment and place intellectual disabilities at the foreground of the analysis (and potentially therefore the foreground of critical disability studies).
- *An exposition of liberal philosophers from Locke, to Kant to Hume that suggests their ideas of fairness, justice and liberty are predicated on a humanist celebration of human autonomy that will*

always exclude people with intellectual disabilities. This critique is extended to writers such as Nussbaum. So what we have here is a critique of what it means to be human – or at least what counts as a valued human – and the ways in which this human category undergirds Western societies and their legal systems. This anti-humanism is evident throughout the work and drives the critical pulse of the book.

- *A damning critique of humanism that underpins supranational policy on disability and more specifically intellectual disability.* There is a very clear sense that people with intellectual disabilities continuously disrupt and in many ways subvert the problematic assumptions underpinning these policies – including the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled persons – assumptions that hold one must be autonomous, independent and without support to truly enact one's rights.
- *A sobering critique of Swedish intellectual disability policy specifically its emphasis on the normalisation and activation of normal living patterns.* Patterns, of course, that no person without disabilities would be expected to desire. And the same is true in the UK.
- *This leads to another key highlight and that of transferability.* While no conceptual and qualitative piece of research can ever claim to be representative there are massive overlaps between what is happening in Sweden and elsewhere in the UK. This point is strengthened by this book's interest in supranational disability discourse.
- *An unfaltering critique of service and professional practices that masquerade under the banner of 'empowerment' but actually govern people with intellectual disabilities to behave in limited*

*humanistic ways whilst, simultaneously, controlling and preventing them from becoming humanist man.*

- *The idea that resistance occurs when inclusion and exclusion come together to rub together as moments of resistance.* Hence, just as a normalizing process is laid down but people with intellectual disabilities are unable to following this process, there very exclusion has the potential to create a number of resistant moments.
- *A critical reading and appropriation of feminist ethics of care literature and vulnerability to work out possible resistant tactics in the liminal spaces when independence borders dependence.*
- *One of my favourite parts – people with the label of intellectual disabled engaging in their own practices of deconstructing disability and normality: Michel would be proud.* There are some hilarious moments in this thesis where Altermark interview members of a self-advocacy group and they subject him to questions about his own normalcy or disability. This is fabulous stuff and fits perfectly with the book's wider aim of critiquing normality
- *An exposition of ethics with politics in relation to ante-natal testing for impairment – where the biopolitics of dis/ability works through governance with authority and politics.*

I have learnt loads from this work and I thank Altermark so very much. This is a book that should be read by anyone interest in the human condition. People with learning disabilities occupy a place in our socio-political landscape where we can view the problematics of our humanist tendencies. Just because we think we are being humanitarian need not equate with celebrating human diversity and difference.

## REFERENCES

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**Bjereld, Ulf, Eriksson, Karin & Hinnfors, Jonas, 2016. Förhandla eller DÖ. Decemberöverenskommelsen och svensk demokrati i förändring. Stockholm: Atlas Förlag.**

Anmälan av Ingvar Mattson

Decemberöverenskommelsens uppgång och fall var crescendo på de dramatiska förvecklingar som följde efter 2014 års riksdagsval. Förvecklingar som satte fokus på parlamentarismens och regeringbildningens svagheter i flerpoliga partisystem utan klara majoritetskonstellationer. Frågor ställdes om regeringsförmågan och riksdagens beslutsförmåga. Många började undra om vårt finanspolitiska ramverk skulle klara svåra lägen. Konstitutionella diskussioner väcktes till liv. Och partiernas strategier och problemlösningsförmåga sattes på prov.

Förhandla eller DÖ är en mångfacetterad skildring och analys av de händelser som kretsar kring decemberöverenskommelsen. Författarna själva säger sig vilja beskriva, förklara och se konsekvenserna av decemberöverenskommelsens uppgång och fall. "Genom boken vill vi ge ett bidrag till diskussionen om svensk demokrati i en tid där industrisamhället fasas ut, vänster-högerkonflikten inte präglar politiken på samma sätt som tidigare och förutsättningarna för blockpolitiken

förändras" (s. 8). "Det övergripande syftet [...] är att beskriva och förklara problemet med den försvagade regeringsmakt i svensk politik som Decemberöverenskommelsen är ett uttryck för, ett problem som har sin grund i samhällsförändringar och i det nya parlamentariska läget" (s. 32).

De löser uppgiften genom att växelvis och kombinerat anlägga statsvetenskapliga och journalistiska perspektiv och metoder. I en rolig vändning varnar författarna inledningsvis känsliga läsare för att stilbrott kan förekomma ☺. Källmaterialet består huvudsakligen av intervjuer och tidningsklipp.

Efter inledande preludier beskriver författarna i kapitel två läget inför valet 2014 med fokus på olika samhällsförändringar och Sverigedemokraternas framväxt som ett tredje block. Tre kapitel ägnas olika politiska händelser från valrörelsen supervalåret 2014 till decemberöverenskommelsens slut hösten 2015. Tre andra kapitel ägnas åt partierna i de tre olika politiska blocken, medan ytterligare ett annat kapitel fokuserar på de författningpolitiska aspekterna av överenskommelsen. Boken avslutas med ett kapitel som handlar om överenskommelsen ur demokratiska och maktpolitiska perspektiv med särskild tonvikt på frågan hur landet ska kunna regeras.

Boken har enligt min mening två huvudsakliga förtjänster. Den första är de initierade och rika beskrivningarna av händelseförlopp. De är välskrivna och fångar läsaren. Genom händelsebeskrivningarna får vi god förståelse för nyckelaktörernas bevekelsegrunder. De ger en god grund för att besvara de frågor som författarna ställer sig:

- Varför valde Sverigedemokraterna att rösta på allianspartiernas budget och därmed utlösa en regeringskris?
- Varför lyckades de rödgröna regeringspartierna och Alliansen inte lösa krisen på annat sätt än genom att Stefan Löfven aviserade ett extra val?