Hypocrisy Trap: The World Bank and the Poverty of Reform.

Catherine Weaver. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. 224 pp. \$60.00, cloth; \$22.95, paper.

The harshest meaning of the word hypocrisy is when someone pompously claims one thing but then sneakily does another, in the full knowledge that his or her speech and action are contradictory. But then our words and our deeds are often enough contradictory in less venal ways, so accusations of hypocrisy can sometimes be rebutted with claims about coercion, the greatest good of the greatest number, certain higher duties, and even amnesia or the passage of time. If these rebuttals don't work, either in terms of reducing cognitive dissonance or persuading others to let us off the hook, then guilt is the normal result, and perhaps even a change in what we say or what we do. So it might seem that if we wanted to change what the World Bank said and did, then accusing it of hypocrisy might be a reasonable strategy. "You say you are concerned to relieve poverty, but your policies end up piling debt on countries that can't afford it and enriching corrupt elites in the process." Then, once the World Bank sees the error of its ways, it will change its strategies. Or so a rationalist might think.

Catherine Weaver's admirable little book is continually skirting this sort of naiveté. The author is clearly a rationalist, and angry that an organization ostensibly tasked with relieving injustice could end up causing so much suffering, but her instincts are sufficiently sociological to understand that rationality is built differently in different places. For her, like Nils Brunsson (1989) in his seminal study, hypocrisy is to some extent systemic in organizations. Any complex institution is made of different departments with different functions, and many of these functions

will be partially ignorant of one another, or even in conflict over the core processes of the organization. So when the Marketing Department at my university makes some hyperbolic claim about how much we care about students, I notice that this doesn't stop senior management from raising tuition fees for overseas-taught postgraduates. Or if a supermarket claims to care about the environment but still sells fruit that has been air-freighted halfway around the world, I might wonder whether the purchasing department is driven by corporate social responsibility or by sales figures. The point, of course, is that institutions rarely have one clear function or interest and hence are usually rather schizoid in their approach to their world.

Weaver shows how the World Bank, from its beginnings in post-WWII reconstruction, has gradually moved toward a position in which it is almost impossible for it not to be accused of hypocrisy by someone. This is an institution that is necessarily entangled with the interests of 185 large and small states, as well as a host of profit-making global corporations. It is subject to the scrutiny of non-governmental organizations and the media and in competition with a host of other international organizations (public and private) that want to lend money to people for reasons of profit and politics. It is also seen by many in the global south as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy and a propagator of neoliberal and pro-business ideology. Weaver captures this mess as a problem of "resource dependency," a polite way of suggesting that the organization needs to please all of the people all of the time and can't. The bank needs to ensure that the member and donor states keep on giving money, that the elites and policy makers in borrower states don't go elsewhere for their money, and that reformist antipoverty campaigners hear enough about localism and governance to keep them on board. At the level of the great game, the contradictory geo-strategic interests of big states also need to be accommodated and sometimes,

as in the case of the U.S.A. (historically the most important state for the bank), this means that the needs of big business and Wall Street need to be met too.

All this activity is legitimized by a huge research and publication apparatus that largely stresses the importance of lowering taxation, rolling back the state, opening markets to competition, and so on. Weaver documents some of the ways in which the bank has been dominated by free market economists who can tell a story about the positive relation between development and globalization, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. Using case studies of evaluations of the environmental consequences of big projects, and of the fate of the good governance and anti-corruption initiatives, she shows how noble intentions and grand language either dissipate or become translated into practices that do not interfere with annual lending targets. Cutting down on bureaucracy and speeding up loan approval for clients does not encourage careful considerations of ecosystems, effects on indigenous peoples, or the bank accounts of corrupt local elites. Neither is the bank very good at recognizing its own shortcomings. Weaver tells the reader about senior bank people who have an understandable concern about what the world thinks of their organization and who then respond by massaging reports, sacking whistleblowers, and stifling dissent. Too much debate might get the bank into “politics,” and to maintain its resources, the bank needs to claim to be a-political but also not to work against the interests of any influential interest group. It’s hardly surprising that the bank’s lawyers often resort to the sophistry of international law to translate market-friendly and anti-state politics into a technocratic neutrality that tries to claim to be merely common sense backed by big bucks.

These are important issues, and Weaver does a pretty good job of telling the reader about them. She's better on structure and context than she is on organizational culture, which is understandable given her background in political science, but certainly manages to get across a convincing diagnosis of why the World Bank often says one thing and then does another. I think she wants the World Bank to work and thinks that it might be put on a path that makes it better at narrowing the gap between talk and action. But, as I suggested at the start, will accusing an organization of hypocrisy make it likely to change? I suppose my supermarket might start thinking about food miles if enough customers make a fuss, but I'm not sure that any public sector organizations can act in such uncomplicated ways. The way Weaver tells it, the structural and cultural features of the bank are rational responses to the problem of surviving in an environment that is making entirely contradictory demands. But the reason that the demands are contradictory is not something that can be solved by redesigning the organization's structure and changing its culture. The inequalities between people and states, the way that the U.S. and others use the bank as an instrument of national foreign policies, and the various contradictions between states and markets are questions that do not admit of technocratic answers. Putting it crudely, the connections between capitalism and starvation are the elephant in the room, and any analysis that stays at the level of the World Bank as an organization misses this fairly simple political (and ethical) question. In some sense, this book exposes the limits of organization theory if it is disconnected from political economy.

As Weaver notes, in 2007, the then-president of the bank, Paul Wolfowitz, was accused of arranging a job for his lover, as well as ensuring that quite a few well-heeled Republicans also got posts with generous compensation packages. At the same time, he claimed to be making

fighting corruption in borrower states his top priority. It was easy enough for those inside and outside the bank to shame him into resignation on the grounds of hypocrisy. But what if someone, though not Weaver, suggested that it is hypocritical for the rich industrialized nations to lend money to the global south in order to open their markets up to the latest version of the imperial system that created such divisions in the first place? Would such an accusation be likely to cause the World Bank to change, or even cease its operations? If your answer is no, then perhaps questioning the production of *organizational* hypocrisy is only the beginning of a rather more far-reaching investigation into the institutions of global capitalism. Weaver's book is a really good summary of the problem, but the long term answers to her problem are unlikely to lie within the World Bank itself, or perhaps even in the theories that she uses to understand it.

Martin Parker

School of Management

University of Leicester

United Kingdom

REFERENCE

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1989 The Organization of Hypocrisy. New York: John Wiley.