

## **Reviews/Comptes rendus**

### **Logics of Dislocation: Models, Metaphors, and Meanings of Economic Space.**

Trevor J. Barnes, New York: Guilford Press, 1996, 292 pages.

Contemporary social analysis finds itself cloven between a traditional, neoclassical, largely empirical mainstream on the one hand and an increasingly assertive and influential political economy on the other. Economics as well as economic geography and regional science remain the last bastions of orthodoxy immune from the poststructuralist challenge. Few authors have been brave, or skilled, enough to attempt to forge intersections between these domains. Trevor Barnes is to be congratulated for offering an incisive and highly informative dissection of the former from the vantage point of the latter. His volume, derived in part from papers published previously, constitutes an important step forward in the construction of a social science unshackled by the legacy of the Enlightenment, which finds itself manifested in economic geography and regional science through the persistent remnants of positivism and "spatial science".

Barnes uses the awkward term "post-prefixed theory" to encapsulate the various, heterogeneous forms of contemporary social theory, describing four major tenets that run throughout most of them:

- the rejection of the idea of the inevitability of progress;
- a stress on the social construction of the human subject;
- the abolition of the assumption that there is a single, overriding order to the world waiting to be discovered; and,
- discarding the widespread belief that thought mimics or captures nature, such as, our theories successively approximate the true state of the world over time.

He then uses this perspective to bludgeon four topics in contemporary economic geography, including Marxism, critical realism, the localities issue, and the flexible production literature. Barnes also outlines several theories of value and their relation to the analysis of spatial

relations, including the labour theory of value and neoclassical notions of place utility, offering instead several versions drawn from postmodern economic theory. Second, he carefully and comprehensively dissects *homo economicus*, unravelling the assumptions that personify that thoroughly unsavoury and unrealistic character. What makes his case so powerful is that it rests not upon an external criticism, or an attack on one position based on the assumptions of another, but an internal criticism that accepts the aims and values of the theory being criticized (in this case, neoclassical economics or Marxian economics). He contends that "internal criticism is the only kind of argument that allows disputes to be permanently resolved" (p. 89).

More than a simple critique, Barnes offers an alternative, drawing upon various "post-prefixed" schools such as post-modernism, feminism, and postcolonial theory, all of which emphasize the relations between thought and power. Invoking the Edinburgh school of the sociology of knowledge, he shows how the mainstream logical deductive approach cannot logically deduce an *a priori* privileged status for deduction: social explanations are made, not found. Thus, explanation consists of narratives emanating from specific social and geographic contexts, and is inevitably tied to differing social interests. He then writes brief biographical counternarratives for four influential figures, William Warntz, Walter Isard, William Bunge, and Peter Haggett. He then moves on to a stimulating deconstruction of the gravity model from the perspective of influential poststructural philosopher Richard Rorty, illustrating how its naturalistic assumptions (social reality is like physical reality) lead it to disastrous analytical implications.

The last part of the book, and the most provocative, consists of three exemplars of what a postmodern economic geography could look like. Barnes argues that the works of three important non-neoclassical authors -- Piero Sraffa, Harold Innis, and Fred Lukermann -- reveal how economic theory can self-consciously contextualize itself. Sraffa's theory of value, for example, relies upon neither supply and demand nor the labour theory of value (both essentialist approaches that presume a "real" external world), but the specifics of local production/reproduction systems, such as: the ways in which social surplus is divided between profits and wages are locally unique; prices and the technical conditions of production are simultaneously determinant. Harold Innis developed more than his famous staples model of growth (itself a reflection of Canada's dependent status on the world economy). He also wrote extensively about communications, bias, and reflexivity. Lukermann, under whom Barnes studied, wrote several obscure papers on the changing geography of the U.S. flour and cement industries, which Barnes argues reveal an approach free from the frozen geometries of location theory, one that approaches "individual location decisions on the basis of a series of

ad hoc locational factors" (p. 236), such as, a discourse that never recognizes a final cause but only unique, contingent conjunctions of many causes. All these authors offer insights into local models, not the arrogant universal truths central to Enlightenment forms of economic explanation. All of these approaches leave room for non-essentialist approaches devoid of ultimate causes; all allow a space for an adequate theorization of human subjectivity; all explicitly recognize the politics of their own understanding; none assumes some teleological movement of progress; and all are sensitive to the circumstances of their own construction, that is, in a postmodern economic geography, knowledge and context are inseparable.

In short, this is one of the best summaries of human geography I have read in a while. The writing is clear and lucid, and the arguments compelling and provocative. I highly recommend it.

Barney Warf

Department of Geography

Florida State University

Contact the journal at: [dwserve@nb.sympatico.ca](mailto:dwserve@nb.sympatico.ca)