

# Review

**David M Smith, *Geography and Social Justice***

**Basil Blackwell (1994) ISBN 0-631-19025-2**

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Human ecological theory, so closely aligned with the social disorganisation perspective, fell into disfavour during the 1960s. Critiques of deviance studies, particularly from conflict and social interactionist advocates and their progeny in social realist, feminist and constructionist theories, largely displaced human ecological perspectives. During the past decade the theory has gradually been resurrected and integrated with contemporary theoretical critiques through the work of a dedicated cadre of English geographers, including David M Smith. In *Geography and Social Justice*, Smith summarises the current state of theoretical evolution in radical geography, combining notions of social justice and human ecology. He then demonstrates the applicability of spatial analysis by measuring and evaluating social justice in four case studies. Despite his intellectual history and credentials as an advocate of radical theory, Smith is commendably impartial when presenting theories and data which challenge that critical orientation.

The intellectual contribution of *Geography and Social Justice* rests in the first five chapters. Chapter One revisits the formulation of human ecology at the University of Chicago (Faris 1967). The intrinsic power and meaning of space for reflecting and affecting society are described. These intrinsic influences which were the foundations of human ecology had been incorporated from Marx (*The Grundrisse*, trans. McLellan 1971) a point rarely acknowledged by contemporary critical theorists. People do not live in a subjective abstraction. They live in real, physical conditions that profoundly determine opportunities for work, income, housing, health and the host of other qualities which collectively denote justice.

Smith is especially attentive to John Rawls' (1971) proposition that any solution to inequity should insure that the 'worst off' should never be made worse off, and to Michael Walzer's (1983) insistence that certain spheres of rights should be guaranteed. He examines the implications of these dicta by presenting theories ranging from libertarian to radical. He occasionally resorts to diagramming the theoretical implications by using economic graphics, what David McPheat refers to as 'spaghetti diagrams'. They contribute little to either the substantive investigations or the theoretical analyses, though some readers may relish the exercise.

The resurrection of human ecology closely parallels the emergence of left realism, which provided a moral and ethical rationale for interpreting inequity in modern societies through social scientific analyses. That inequity is distributed in space and that the dispersion of such injustice is perpetuated over generations makes human ecology a powerful theoretical and methodological tool for considering moral and ethical issues.

The following four chapters summarise recent developments in the philosophy of social justice. A variety of mainstream, reactive and equity-based social, economic and political philosophies are summarised. The reader is drawn into complex paradigms for considering what at first seem to be simple concepts of equality and inequality, and the greatest good for the greatest number. What constitutes justice and how to achieve it is complicated by ideas about what constitutes human nature. If, 'Tis only from the selfishness and confine'd

generosity of man, along with the scanty provision nature has made of his wants, that justice provides its origin' (Smith, p 24), then one set of solutions derives. If on the other hand, inequity is based upon the constructed avarice and control by an elite, then other solutions are appropriate.

The 1960s sought to establish equitable programs of social justice. The 1970s was a period of intellectual reflection about those programs. Meanwhile, enormous upheavals have wrenched most nations. Smith applies human ecological techniques to data from Atlanta, Moscow, South Africa, and Palestine to demonstrate changing geographic inequities in extremely different locales. His analyses, which are too extensive and specific to describe here, indicate that inequities have existed and often have increased during the past three decades. The data indicate that no doctrinaire political orientation, capitalist or socialist, libertarian or radical, achieves social justice. Moreover, the transitions away from even deplorably unjust systems, as in South Africa, may temporarily increase many empirical inequities. There is little for zealous activists of any particular persuasion of social justice to preen about in this book. The intrinsic power of rules, whether established by apartheid, capitalism or communism, creates inequity. One lesson seems to be that constant vigilance and attention to facts are essential when trying to equilibrate discriminatory societies.

*Geography and Social Justice* would be an excellent secondary text for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in social justice, methods or social problems. The theoretical sections lucidly summarise important and complex ideas which belong in the lexicon of well-prepared social scientists concerned with social justice. The case studies provide cogent examples of how to incorporate human ecological methods into analyses of social justice. The cases will be of special interest to specialists in the geographic areas examined as case studies. Smith is to be commended for combining a thorough theoretical summary of social justice issues while demonstrating the utility of a spatial and temporal methodology. Scholars in social justice would be well served to grasp his insistence on combining practical empiricism with socially conscious theory.

Pat Jobs

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## REFERENCES

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