

*Philosophy and Human Geography: An Introduction to Contemporary Approaches.* R.J. Johnston, London: Edward Arnold, 1983.

Reviewer: *Avinoam Meir*

This book is a companion to an earlier one by the same author, *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography Since 1945* (1983). In the earlier book, Johnston's aim was to examine the state of the art of human geography by tracing the process of change from an empiricist to a positivist philosophy, and the challenge to the latter from the humanistic and structuralist perspectives. The present book attempts to explicate the nature of these various philosophies in detail, and to evaluate the current philosophical pluralism in human geography in terms of their accommodation and possible integration.

The book begins with a short section on the nature of human geography within the social sciences in the very recent decades, examining the topical content of human geography, the philosophical elements it comprises today, the process by which it was carried to its present state, and its division into the various subfields. Although this book's express concern is with human geography, one wonders at the approach of separating human and physical geography, and relegating the latter's importance in human geography only to resource management and the like. Environmental determinists of the early 1900s tended to exclude cultural and social aspects from their explanatory schemes. Human geographers today, therefore, should recognize the fact that physical geography has been coming full circle. Furthermore, the ever-changing relative positions of physical and human geography are the consequence of dialectic processes within geography as a body of knowledge and wisdom. Such processes in the 1950s and 1960s assigned physical geography to inferiority within geography, but their very dynamics are now operating toward a rebalance. These issues are discussed only in passing.

The three main chapters deal with the positivist, humanistic, and structuralist approaches in human geography. Each chapter attempts to describe the epistemology (the theory of knowledge) and ontology (the theory of existence) of the relevant philosophy. The historical roots of each philosophy in the social sciences are identified, along with some elements of methodology and some of the problematics involved. Then the adoption of the philosophy in human geography is examined at the

philosophical level, followed by a discussion of its content and applications within subfields or the consequential emergence of new subfields. Each chapter ends with a series of questions about the validity and viability of the philosophy. As could be expected, the questions raised about humanistic and structuralist approaches are less critical than those concerned with the positivist approach. Positivism is under heavy attack, but it appears that neither structuralism (structure as process) nor humanism have become capable of providing all answers. Apparently, each is still at a stage of criticizing the epistemological and ontological bases of the other approaches.

This naturally leads into the last chapter, which is of greatest importance. If neither structuralism nor humanism can provide the philosophical unity and coherence for human geography alone, two options are left: separatism, which may lead to disintegration, or pluralism, which may lead to integration of the three philosophies so that they can complement one another. Skepticism about the possibility of integration of structuralism and humanism on the one hand and positivism on the other hand is evident throughout the book. The author, however, suggests a possible avenue of reconciliation by noting that one of the unresolved issues is that of scale in interpreting human behavior. Perhaps each philosophical approach would be appropriate at a different scale. Human geographers who are interested in particulars within the general pattern could use positivistic or structuralist approaches for the general pattern and humanist approaches for particulars, that is, for understanding relevant decisions made by the individual. "The purpose of integration is to illustrate how general processes produce different patterns of spatial organization because they encounter particular historical, cultural and environmental situations" (p. 133). Philosophical integration, as the author rightfully acknowledges, was not attempted seriously enough. One cannot escape the impression that such a statement reflects a latent desire of many concerned geographers. Although the issue is unresolved yet, it would be very beneficial to learn from the experience of other disciplines in social sciences in particular, and philosophy in general.

At a time of growing philosophical and topical pluralism in human geography in particular and geography in general, there is a danger of growing ideological confusion of our younger students. This book, while emphasizing the need to understand our philosophical roots, also presents the legitimacy of such a situation. Several such books have been published in recent years. For the inexperienced student, the present volume is by far the most appropriate, comprehensible introductory book concerned with complex philosophical issues.