

Reviews

The Power of Scale: A Global History Approach. By John H. Bodley (Armonk, M. E. Sharpe, 2003) 297 pp. \$69.95 cloth \$26.95 paper

Social-scientific paradigms rarely emerge in a full-blown theoretical gestalt. Glimpsed in tantalizing metaphors and enmeshed in opposing ideological clusters, they are constructed along the path of disciplinary research. Take the paradigm of globality, for example. The heady social-scientific outbursts of the 1990s about globalization and its phenomena have reached a plateau, and “globality” has arguably become the benchmark for the present. Yet its elaboration as a superparadigm for the humanities and social sciences remains a work in progress, advanced and formulated by scholars working global topics and concerns into their local disciplines.

Bodley contributes to this interdisciplinary endeavor as an anthropologist, tackling the uncertain prospects of global society in light of the quantum leaps of “social power, the ability of individuals to influence other people and events” (4). Bodley’s global history distinguishes between the “no-growth” tribal worlds of his discipline and the “power-seeking elite individuals” whose “post optimum societies” may have finally maneuvered humankind into an unsustainable situation socially as well as environmentally (81, 238).

The Power of Scale incorporates tribal worlds, thus going beyond traditional world history and its myopic focus on world civilizations (which tend to be few in number and inevitably crowned by its western variety). Bodley embraces the numerous ethnolinguistic groups that have enriched humankind with “tremendous cultural diversity created over the past 200,000 years of cultural development” (6). Extending the world-historical time frame by one order of magnitude (from about 10,000 years to at least 100,000 years) and enlarging the pool of historical subjects (to include tribal peoples) gives Bodley’s approach to global history unusual temporal depth and social reach. Furthermore, small tribal cultures assume key-historical importance, and “civilization” is qualified as an imperial plot aimed at “control over people and maintaining systems of inequality” (99).

The idea that “optimal distributions of power” are still possible today is inspired by the ethnographic literature about tribal peoples and Bodley’s personal experience among the Peruvian Ashaninka (3). The upshot of this disciplinary knowledge is “a model of successful small-scale corporate communities operating democratically in support of the humanization process” (258). In this ethnotheoretical-utopian context, the author envisions the global goal of “an optimum-scale society” that would be “more equitable, stable, and secure” for everybody (236, 262).

Two theoretical engines drive Bodley’s argumentation—the individualistic concept of “imperia” and the logarithmic mechanism of “scale” as “multiples of ten” (4, 55). Together, they form the “imperia and scale approach” (5). Imperia explain “the role of individuals in directing cultural development” and “scale theory” accounts for the many

order-of-magnitude increases that have occurred throughout human history.

Eschewing Marxism (137: “scale theory is concerned with personal imperia and individual human agents, and does not treat social classes as decision-making agents”), Bodley nonetheless shows that elites have managed time and again to concentrate privilege, wealth, and power in their hands. Based on the assumption that “growth is an elite-directed process that concentrates power in the form of ever-expanding imperia” (5), the author introduces “three distinct cultural worlds: tribal, imperial, and commercial” (6). Case studies about the “domestic imperia” of the Ashaninka, the “political imperia” of the Chakri dynasty in Thailand, and the “commercial imperia” of the United States exemplify the disproportionately growing power of imperia. Subsequently, Bodley details how individuals (like John Jacob Astor or Citicorp’s Walter B. Wriston) and powerful families (like the Grosvenors, Rothschilds, Bonapartes, and Rockefellers) have used historical growth opportunities for ever-increasing personal gain and influence.

Nevertheless, Bodley’s last chapter assumes the feasibility of “an optimal-scale commercial world,” in which “the power of scale would be democratically managed for the maximum human benefit” (235). In the best of all possible worlds, runaway economic growth would be restricted and all decisions made by the majority. According to the author, this feat could be achieved by combining “the advantages of small, domestic-scale societies with the benefits of industrial production and commerce” (236).

Advancing “the good life” for all people is an honorable pursuit, much too often suppressed for lesser and safer causes like advancing a particular specialty. *The Power of Scale* honors that noble quest squarely and imaginatively, demonstrates how numbers and scale have affected history, and emphasizes the point that scale is important for the unfinished map of globality. But at least two problems must be addressed: The individuals who reign unnecessarily supreme in Bodley’s history and the revolutions of technology that have changed global history and the power of scale more profoundly than Bodley allows.¹

To achieve Bodley’s goals, individuals would have to be defined in relation to society on one hand and nature on the other. Individuals alone are either too weak or too powerful. The necessary checks and

1 Kevin Reilly, the editor of the series Sources and Studies in World History, in which Bodley’s book was published, praised *The Power of Scale* in his foreword as “something that most historians despair of ever providing: a theory of change” (xii). Yet this problem should not be laid at the doorstep of history only. Throughout the social sciences and humanities, lack of knowledge about the history of technology, technoscience, and nature is hampering a competent transdisciplinary discourse about these parameters of change. It may be indicative, therefore, that Bodley refers to Copernicus and Galileo as “proving that the earth rotated around the sun” (22), although historians of science have tried hard to show how little compelling “proof” Copernicus and Galileo could muster during their lifetime (which, by the way, was 1564 to 1642 for Galileo, not 1520 to 1591).

balances against the tendency to maximize social power have to come from a social system that is empowered to adjudicate all power-of-scale excesses for the sake of the global good. Elevating global society to the level of historical significance would make sense from a sociological point of view and guarantee, at least theoretically, that individuals have counterparts in courts and other social institutions. In any event, finding the *summum bonum* for the whole globe requires more than one rightful party. A social system seems necessary to channel the historical power of over 6 billion individuals and their societies toward a sharable notion of globality.

The problem of how to account for the two most important leaps of global human power inevitably raises the question of technology. Both the Neolithic and Industrial Revolutions remain ambiguous in Bodley's periodization and account. Bodley does not attribute these revolutions to the machination of greedy power elites, but he is cursory about the remarkable fact that the carrying capacity of the planet increased twice, and each time by several orders of magnitude, due to these technological revolutions. To say, for example, that "the shift from ancient agrarian empires to the largest colonial empires (British empire, 500 million people by 1930) was an order-of-magnitude change that required extensive exploitation of a new energy source such as fossil fuels" (55) is not wrong but obscures the fact that neither the Neolithic nor the Industrial Revolution was "required." Yet they spawned enormous global consequences, including new degrees of social power for a chosen few and new levels of extraordinary power over nature for humankind. The question remains, How can one explain the nonlinear technological evolution of the human species without the fallacy of technological determinism?

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Trauma and the Memory of Politics. By Jenny Edkins (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003) 265 pp. \$65.00 cloth \$23.00 paper

Edkins has written a provocative book on how traumatic memory is mobilized through various strategies of recall, particularly memorial emplacement in national narratives of heroism, sacrifice, and redemption. Intense remembering too easily turns to intentional forgetting, however, when such toxic memories cannot be contained in traditional memorial forms. Too often, Edkins observes, these narratives "seem unable to get away from rhetorics of state or nation, and they fail to escape the racialisation upon which the genocides, enslavements and famines were themselves based" (171). She worries as well that trauma stories, the moral testimony of witnesses (survivors, for example), are virtually incommunicable, though they must be communicated. This communica-