
Justice spatiale, pensée critique et normativité en sciences sociales

Marianne Morange | Aurélie Quentin

Translation : John Crisp

“Hey, bad guys, didn’t anybody ever tell you that it’s wrong to do bad stuff?”
SamSam, little cosmic cartoon hero¹

The concept of justice, which has its roots in moral and political philosophy, was appropriated by the social sciences with the renewal of critical theory in the 1990s. This movement was prompted by the rise of major political uncertainties (the post-socialist transition, the fall of apartheid, global climate change, etc.) which reinforced currents such as the feminist movements, postcolonial and antiracist critique, and political ecology. In geography, this shift was described by some as an “ethical” or “moral” turn (Sayer and Storper, 1997; Smith, 1997), a formula that shows the complexity of the links between the critical approach, the moral perspective and analytical normativity.

Indeed, to use the notion of justice – a term that refers to a certain moral economy – is generally a way to mark a discourse politically, to situate it as a form of critical speech. It usually contains a normative dimension, which is to say that the authors who use it base their critique on a value judgement regarding the situations observed.² In addition, by contrast with other notions that are also normative and endowed with strong critical potential (inequalities, violence, suffering, exclusion, traumatism, marginalisation, domination...), the notion of justice relates to the formulation of a desirable social, political and economic order, as well as to the practical realisation of that order. It implies thinking about the introduction of political and social modes of regulation designed to rectify injustices. To quote Michael Storper and Andrew Sayer (1997, p. 1), it seeks to state “how things ought to be different”: not just what should be different, but how it should be different. When used in this way, the notion of justice can have a prescriptive dimension. To speak of justice in the social sciences therefore signals a marked epistemological choice, since it entails a rejection of the twofold illusion of axiological neutrality and of scientific objectivity (Calbérac and Morange, 2012).

The spread of this notion challenges the knowledge barrier between normative humanities (moral and political philosophy) and social sciences. Historically, moral or political philosophy has had a prescriptive dimension and maintained a certain detachment from empirical realities. Its analyses are not founded – by priority or by necessity – on the observation of real situations. It proceeds by theoretical abstraction (e.g. John Rawls’s veil of ignorance which extracts the individual from his social environment). Nonetheless, a number of philosophers working on justice (in particular Young and Honneth) have opened up to the social sciences in order to reformulate the idea of justice on the basis of lived and concrete experiences of injustice. For their part, the social sciences are traditionally interested in social realities whose complexity cannot be reduced by logical, and often a-sociological, reasoning. Rooted in a tradition of empirical research, their subject is concrete situations and they seek to analyse and objectify

1. Based on Serge Bloch’s children’s books.

2. This is the definition of normativity that we will adopt here, although there are others.

injustices, sometimes by measuring them, without necessarily looking to formulate a programme to correct or overcome these injustices by political or social means. Nonetheless, by taking up the notion of justice and opening up to philosophy, they have ventured onto the territory of normativity. However, the dialogue between the two remains difficult, and the conditions of its possibility are often implicit, if not ignored.

In addition, in the social sciences, the effort to reveal injustices or to reflect on their correction has been a complex process that has foundered, in particular, on the multiplicity of the theoretical conceptions of justice produced by philosophy. This difficulty is particularly apparent in works that deal with spatial justice. The multiplicity of conceptions of justice posed an immediate problem for those who tackled it, notably in geography (see issue 665-666 of *Annales de géographie*, published in 2009). In the English-speaking world, geographers began to look at these issues in the 1990s. This was a period that saw the emergence of a theoretical debate on the relations between geography and ethics, which led to a confrontation between the Marxist legacy and the contributions of post-modernism. There was a twofold question in this debate: whether this combination is possible, and whether it is desirable – is it possible to speak of justice in geography, and in what circumstances? What does this dialogue permit or prevent within the framework of critical thought (Proctor, 1998)?

It seems to us that these questions, although increasingly discussed³, have not yet received all the attention they deserve. Indeed, when the notion of spatial justice is employed, the normative assumptions of the critique that it seeks to initiate and the normative foundations of the speaker's critical position are not always recognised, which can weaken the analysis. Moreover, recent reflections on theories of justice are an invitation to consider the terms of the dialogue between philosophy and the social sciences, by examining not only what philosophy can contribute to geographical thinking about justice, but also what social sciences can contribute to an empirically grounded philosophical theory of justice. This article seeks to explore some of the difficulties associated with the expression of normative thinking in social sciences through an examination – inevitably partial – of the debates on spatial justice.

We understand spatial justice as the ensemble of relations between spatial dynamics and justice. The emergence of this notion is linked with the "spatial turn" in the social sciences and the trend towards the "spatialisation" of social problems. It has been applied in varied domains: urban development and spatial planning, developmental studies, environmental studies, critical urban studies. This last discipline has played a central role in thinking about spatial justice and stands at the heart of the difficulty of the dialogue between social sciences and moral and political philosophy. Indeed, it is in urban geography, around the figure of David Harvey, and on the basis of his Marxist analysis of the links between the city and capitalism, that there emerged a tradition of critical thought that employs the notion of justice. This explains the predominance, in our article, of references to English language geography and a particular attention to works on the urban sphere, our field of specialisation.

The first part of the article recalls the key trajectories in the notion of spatial justice, since its emergence via the debate on territorial justice advanced by David Harvey in his Marxist

3. See for example Number 74 of the journal *Géographie et Culture* coordinated by Cynthia Gorra-Ghobin, and in the English-speaking world in particular the symposium published in the journal *Antipode* in 2009 ("Critique and Normative Reasoning"), coordinated by Elizabeth Olson and Andrew Sayer; see the Royal Geographic Society's "Geographies of Injustice Working Group" in 2010; or else the conference on "The Grammars of Urban Injustice" held at Durham University in May 2011, which resulted in the publication of a special issue of the journal *Antipode* in 2014 (46-4).

approach to the urban, through to the contributions of postmodern conceptions of justice, in particular those put forward by Iris Marion Young. It thus elucidates the nature of the encounter between philosophical debates on justice and the assertion of a critical theory of space in geography, from the 1970s to the 2000s. The second part analyses the critical positions of the authors who have adopted the notion of spatial justice in geography, within the framework of empirical research, especially since the 2000s. The difficulty they all encounter in meeting the twofold theoretical and empirical imperative that characterises these discussions, suggests the need for a serious rethink of the methods used to connect social sciences and philosophy in debates on justice. This is an issue around which there has been a recent revival of debate, as is shown in the third part, which weighs up two opposing normative stances that have locked horns in geography. Neopositivist and universalising approaches have re-emphasised the need for critical geographers to make explicit the normative philosophical position that permits them both to think and speak about justice. Conversely, certain geographers have more recently proposed that justice should be thought about in terms of the lived experience of injustice. Finally, Axel Honneth's theory of recognition constitutes a major source of inspiration for attempts to overcome this opposition, by reconciling the need for critical normativity with attention to social practices relating to justice.

The origins of the critical ambitions of justice in geography

The conditions under which the notion of spatial justice in geography emerged and spread, the role of pioneering figures in this debate (Dejean, 2013), its practical and theoretical movements (Gervais-Lambony and Dufaux 2009; Didier and Quentin, forthcoming), together with the contextual effects that influenced its variants (Brennetot, 2011), have been documented. In contrast, the critical trajectories of the notion have received less scholarly attention (except by Soja, 2010). Yet, from its emergence in the writings of David Harvey, who seized upon it to formulate a Marxist analysis of the city, to its opening up to the contributions of postmodernism via the work of Edward Soja, the critical project contained in the notion of justice has evolved. Nevertheless, the normative foundations of this critique remain implicit, hidden between the lines of a condemnation of capitalism.

The project for a Marxist reading of the city

The theme of justice emerged in geography thanks to David Harvey's book *Social Justice and the City*, published in 1973. In this work, Harvey seeks to distance himself from liberal positions and to move towards a socialist formulation of justice. John Rawls had just published his *A Theory of Justice* (1971), the impact of which was immense. Rather than abandoning justice to liberals and being content with a radical rejection of the notion on the orthodox scientific socialist grounds that that it was a bourgeois concept, David Harvey chose to recapture this political terrain by approaching justice from a Marxist analytical perspective. This book was a pivotal moment for him, in which he distanced himself from spatial analysis in geography and from the liberal conception of distribution that characterise it. In this shift, the notion of territorial justice⁴, central to the work, becomes ambivalent. It refers simultaneously to issues of distribution, of interest to liberals, and to the idea of an "urbanisation of injustice" based on a Marxist reading

4. Notion proposed by a Welsh social planner named Bleddyn Davies in a 1968 work entitled *Social Needs and Resources in Local Services*, which David Harvey draws on but significantly expands.

(Santana Rivas, 2012). The book is constructed around an opposition between these two approaches and performs a transition towards the second of them.

Social Justice and the City thus initiates a fundamental break with the theoretical formulations of justice that prevail in political philosophy. In it, David Harvey argues that, as a political and social construct, a product of class relations, justice cannot be treated as a fixed, timeless concept, arising out of a disembodied philosophy (he uses the adjective "eternal", borrowed from Marx and Engels), or from a set of economic laws. In consequence, the ambition of formulating a universal model of justice needs to be abandoned. In addition, he demonstrates the limitations of a liberal and distributive conception of justice that is interested only in the spatial forms of distribution (just or unjust), without considering the processes that produce them. The city provides a terrain for the analysis of these processes, in the form of issues such as real estate, speculation, local taxation...

According to him, justice needs to be seen as the geo-historical product of power relations. The Marxist ethic "deals with how concepts of social justice and morality relate to and stem from human practice rather than with arguments about eternal truths to be attached to these concepts" (p. 15). His work thus constitutes "a move from a predisposition to regard social justice as a matter of eternal justice and morality to regard it as something contingent upon the social processes operating in society as a whole" (Harvey, 1973: 15). In order to do this, David Harvey reintroduces the issue of relations of production into the debate. It is because it is one of the aspects of the change in relations of production that justice can be and needs to be brought back into the political domain, that it is a revolutionary battlefield and therefore should be incorporated into the political project of the working class.

Harvey's aim is to renew the epistemological framework of critical thought (one long passage is dedicated to the question of scientific revolutions and paradigm shifts as advanced by Kuhn). This critical thought is contrasted with liberal approaches inspired by spatial analysis models (location theory), which do not challenge the foundations of the productive model but seek to optimise efficiency in the distribution of what has been produced (linking with the debates on equity, a term that liberals prefer to the word justice). Harvey draws on the theme of the ghetto (central in critical thought on urban issues in North America), to discuss the difference between a liberal project of spatial rebalancing intended to attenuate ghetto effects and a revolutionary socialist political project that with the goal of eradicating the ghetto, perceived as an urban form produced by capitalism.

Harvey's project opened up an immense and fertile field of research on inequalities, injustices, moral geographies. It inspired innumerable studies on control and spatial exclusion (Ogborn and Philo, 1994; Sibley, 1995; Mitchell, 2003), moral landscapes and the moral ordering of public spaces (in the Victorian city but also in contemporary Paris – Fleury and Froment-Meurice, 2014), the militarisation of space, the expansion of residential and commercial enclaves, the proliferation of walls that fragment urban space (Davis, 1992), the erosion of public spaces, the marketisation of space. These geographers do not speak explicitly of justice but, for example, of "punitive urbanism" or "revanchism" (Smith, 1996, on the subject of gentrification). Nonetheless, they form part of a research tradition that was fed by a critique of the links between the production of space and capitalism and that explores the spatial dimension of injustices, as well as the role of space and spatial dynamics in their production. In France, the works of Alain Reynaud (1981), are a notable exception. They employ the notion of justice to speak about reducing inequalities between "socio-spatial classes" both within cities and between regions. In short, through David Harvey's seminal work, the grand return of normative political philosophy

begun by John Rawls fed into a Marxist understanding of the urban that reinstated the notion of justice by placing greater emphasis on the processes whereby injustices and the social and spatial orders were (re)produced than on the distribution of resources or revenues in a capitalist social order.

Written against the backdrop of the mounting crisis in post-fordist accumulation and of lively "new" social movements, this approach to justice was reworked 20 years later by David Harvey himself, in order to take into account certain findings of postmodernism relating to diversity, recognition and political procedures⁵. Iris Marion Young's work was a major influence in this turn. She proposed shifting the analysis away from questions of distribution and equity to look at the multiple processes of injustice production and reproduction that affect social groups. The major contribution of her work was to place the emphasis on social plurality and heterogeneity and on the labile and plural nature of group identities. The city is at the centre of her thinking (Jane Jacobs was a big influence), conceived as a place where tolerance can be learned and difference cultivated. Iris Marion Young's way of spatialising her analyses and making them concrete, despite a form of sociological naivety, appeals greatly to geographers. She speaks directly to those who are concerned with the importance of social ties and social and community dynamics in the production of justice, and not only with the fair distribution of resources between individuals characteristic of the liberal approach.

The influence of Iris Marion Young's work was such that even David Harvey sought to incorporate some aspects of it into his own thinking (1992). Drawing on the cases of the conflicts over the appropriation of Tompkins Square Park in New York and the controversy around a freeway project in Baltimore in the early 1970s, he discusses the difficulty of constructing a militant consensus around a conception of justice that is neither particularist nor narrow, but capable of more general critical application. He acknowledges the issues of domination and oppression identified by Young and therefore questions of difference, identity and recognition, in reflecting the importance of the sense of injustice in social struggles and the motivating power of the notion of justice, provided that the temptation to universalise is avoided. His aim was not to adopt a postmodern stance but to examine urban struggles in the postmodern city and moment through a Marxist analytical lens.

This encounter with the work of Iris Marion Young and postmodernism around a shared distancing from issues of distribution was temporary. It did not divert David Harvey from his Marxist critical project. On the contrary, he gradually lost interest in the issue of distribution and territorial justice, which had been at the heart of his early work, in favour of a Marxist critique of the urbanisation of capitalism and reflections on emancipation, disalienation and the right to the city. Perhaps he took the view that the notion of distributive justice, appealing both to liberalism and to Keynesianism, cannot overcome the opposition between capitalism and reformist socialism? Perhaps he saw it as presenting a risk that left-wing critique might ultimately join forces with right-wing critique and involuntarily contribute to the dismantlement of the welfare state, and therefore to a rise in injustices and inequalities? In the end, the consequence was that critical urban studies turned away from the notion of justice in favour of a Marxist critique of the urbanisation of capitalism.

Spatial justice and postmodernism

5. On the subject of this theoretical incorporation, see also his essay: *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989.

It was Edward Soja (2000, 2010)⁶ who returned to the field of justice and put the notion back at the centre of debate in geography (more specifically in urban planning), by linking Henri Lefèbvre's spatial dialectic with certain contributions from postmodern critical theory. In this movement, and in his writing, justice became resolutely spatial. Edward Soja's work forms part of the "spatial turn" based on the threefold dialectic of the social, the spatial and temporal. It has had a major influence on the connection of space and justice and on the development of a "critical spatial perspective" or a "spatial theory of justice" that Soja wanted to see (2010, p. 67). The first priority for him was to bring these three dimensions back onto an equal footing. In addition, he wanted to move away from Rawlsian universalism, inherited from the Enlightenment, which, in his view, through its liberal egalitarianism and its abstraction, despatialises the issues of justice, law and citizenship: in John Rawls, concrete social and spatial reality is of little importance in the sense that the power relations (class conflicts) responsible for the production of inequalities are ignored in favour of abstract reflection on the law (in the broad sense), as a general principle of social regulation through better distribution of resources/revenues.

Edward Soja's project should be seen in the context of the formation of the Los Angeles school and ideas about the postfordist transformation of models of production and of the urban economy within the framework of globalisation. These developments engendered what Steven Flusty (1994 [1963]) called an "erosion of spatial justice": increasingly unjust spatial forms (sprawl, fragmentation, etc.), spatial differentiations that have negative social "consequences" with regard to justice. This analysis of the spatial foundation of injustices linked with capitalism enabled Edward Soja to pursue a Lefebvrian programme in which the right to the city is a struggle for spatial justice. It also recognised that injustices are founded not only on social class but also on gender, race, ethnic identities, etc., which demand new forms of struggle. The objective was to construct coalitions of social movements, whose spatial or territorial (urban) interests would overlap with classist organisations and would encourage convergence in struggle. The starting point of the book is concrete, spatially situated struggles: notably the history of the Los Angeles *Bus Riders Union*.

Spatial justice thus becomes a political programme. It concerns a quest (as indicated by the title of his book, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, published in 2010). It is not just a call to action, but a way of thinking about injustices both concretely and theoretically, of linking critique and political praxis, for the purpose of social transformation. Edward Soja in fact argues that conceiving injustices in spatial terms makes it easier to imagine concrete alternatives. Thus, space as a tool of domination can be inverted and become a resource for action. In this respect, Edward Soja's work had a huge influence on reducing the gap between professional, political and scientific practices. He helped to open up a discursive space and to formulate eloquent grammars of injustice and justice with great evocative power for political and militant action.

Finally, in Edward Soja, the notion of justice – less descriptive than the notion of inequalities – requires an opening up to other critical perspectives and notably the procedural dimension, to forms of political decision-making and negotiation, rather than being restricted to measurement (of inequalities, of accessibility...). It raises issues of participation, deliberation, legitimisation, and therefore of democracy and political models. It repoliticises, for example, the notion of governance, often otherwise reduced to "sets of actors" and analysed from a non-critical

6. See, in this issue, the articles by Sophie Didier and Quentin Mercuro on Edward Soja respectively in the themed feature and in the section *JSSJ a lu*.

perspective that ignores the power relations that structure and run through them. In the procedural issue, it raises the question of the effects of recognition or marginalisation. Ultimately, Edward Soja draws on the Lefebvrian spatial dialectic (the relations between perceived, conceived and lived space – Soja refers to first, second and third spaces) to think about justice from a spatial perspective that some geographers have seen as a way to reconcile distributive and procedural approaches and issues of recognition and identity (Gervais-Lambony, 2017).

In the end, from the 1970s to the 2000s, the critical project contained in the notion of justice changed. David Harvey had picked up this philosophical concept in order to develop a Marxist understanding of the urban, applying it to a critique of capitalism that did not directly raise the question of its normative foundations (he postulated that capitalism is by nature unjust). With the gradual opening up to postmodern approaches in the 1990s, the theoretical bases of critical thought changed and the notion of justice was spatialised in the writings of Edward Soja, but the value judgements on which the critique of capitalism were based did not become more explicit. The neo-Marxist inspiration that runs through the work of Edward Soja, although undoubtedly distant and very different from David Harvey's inspiration, explains why he too did not explicitly define the criteria used to define justice or injustice. There was felt to be no need for critical assessment to explicitly reveal its normative foundations since it was implicitly based on a condemnation of capitalism.

Edward Soja's postmodernism prompted him to retain the notion of justice in order to think about the convergence of struggles in spatial terms, whereas David Harvey had bypassed it in favour of a Marxist critique of the urban founded on the notion of the right to the city. In fact, this evolution in the theoretical debates on spatial justice in geography more generally reflects the development of the debates on justice in philosophy. From Rawls to Young, a transition took place from an approach via redistribution to an approach via recognition, which represented a shift from a class-based reading to one based on the idea of adherence to multiple identities. This turn is very visible for example in urban planning. As Ruth Fincher and Kurt Iveson have written (2012, p. 234): "In the shift to a focus on developing inclusionary processes for articulating urban futures, responding to critiques of redistributive norms that tended to homogenise urban citizens into class-based groups, it could be said that clear normative views of what constitutes justice have been set aside in favour of letting inclusionary processes work this out." In this shift, there is a transition from the preoccupation with the fair redistribution of resources to the equitable exercise of the right to "speech" for all.

However, in the absence of a consensus between speakers, it is difficult to reach agreement on norms of justice. That is why it is perhaps easier for social science researchers to concentrate on the analysis of injustices and the methods of their production. This is the subject of a large part of the literature on spatial justice, as is shown in the second part of this article. For that same reason, as we will see in the third section, this difficulty has prompted political philosophy to turn to the experience of injustice in its quest for the foundations of a new normative theory of justice.

Empirical uses of the notion of justice: critical positions

Since the end of the 1990s, some of the disciplines of geography and urban studies that belong to the critical tradition initiated by David Harvey and pursued by Edward Soja, have taken hold

of the debates on justice and used it as a prism through which to view certain subjects. Most of the work in this vein uses the notion of justice in a fairly free and intuitive way. As Nicholas Blomley (2007) points out, analyses that explicitly state the bases of their value judgements are few and far between. The notion of justice allows them to identify with a field of critical thought, especially as the status attributed to the concept of justice in the critical apparatus is variable: in some cases it is objectified and contributes to an overarching critique, sometimes accompanied by proposals for measures to correct injustices; in other cases, it is handled from a perspective that claims to be non-normative in that it is interested in feelings and discourses of injustice and justice, and does not lead on to a programme of action.

Distributive and territorial approaches to justice: spatial planning

One of the main contributions of the notion of spatial justice in geography was to prompt new analytical perspectives on spatial and territorial planning, as well as on urban policies. It was used in the English-speaking world by planners within the framework of debates on the "Just City" (Fainstein, 1991; Marcuse *et al.*, 2009). These evaluative approaches draw upon different kinds of criteria to compare cities with each other and to try to define good urban government.

Some of these debates on planning focus more specifically on issues of distribution from a quantitative perspective. This work returns to the tradition of modelling and exploration of the laws governing the spatial distribution of resources, populations and activities, while giving it a normative turn. It prompted reflection on the social effects of these distributions in terms of accessibility, equality and fairness, and in terms of democracy, as well as on the quest for the distributive optimum. Indeed, the notion of spatial justice can be used to analyse the effects of territorial policies pursued for corrective or reparative purposes, at several scales: local or regional planning and economic development, but also policies for the City. Here, the notion of spatial justice is handled within the framework of an overarching and prescriptive critique, linked with a distributive conception of justice inspired by the writings of John Rawls.

These works are rooted in a rich tradition of research on the social division and spatial distribution of services, jobs and resources... which does not necessarily employ the notion of spatial justice. In the global North, these ideas developed from the 1960s-1970s with economic growth and the rise of public spatial interventionism for corrective purposes. In connection with a kind of spatial Keynesianism, there was talk of "welfare justice" (Smith, 1977), a debate taken up in France in particular by Paul Claval and Antoine Bailly (1978). In a postfordist and neoliberal context of rising social and spatial inequalities and an imperative of economic efficiency, the notion of justice inspired debates on "spatial mismatch", and policies in favour of mobilities or "regional equity" (employing terms such as new regionalism, equity regionalism or progressive regionalism). The debate revolved around the tension between spatial concentration and dispersal. More recently, French social geography has also entered the fray by employing the notion of justice to assess territorial policies (see for example Sechet *et al.*, 2013). In the global South, these issues are approached through the paradigm of development and through the question of regional inequalities between centre and periphery (see for example Fournier, 2011 on Venezuela).

In these approaches, the aim is to revisit the question of socio-spatial inequalities, as well as certain central concepts in social geography (inequality, accessibility, scales of government...). The notion of justice can be used to assess the extent to which policies of spatial redistribution, equity and territorial cohesion are founded on rationality, by examining their economic effectiveness. These works therefore owe more to standard economic theories (public choice

theory) than to moral philosophy. Justice here is understood as equity (and not equality) and measured in terms of the socio-economic effects of policies of spatial readjustment, of redistribution between regional, local and national territories, or else the scale choices that are made in the construction of fiscal and political territories⁷. The aim is to explore how the geography of “opportunities”, especially economic opportunities, can be transformed through action on spatial structures (the spatial distribution of population, i.e. the theme of segregation and the ghetto). This justice is more territorial than spatial, since the notion of territory relates both to a living space and a perimeter of public action.

Today, these approaches are increasingly based on quantitative analyses, backed up by IT tools such as geographic information systems (in health geography, for example, Sherif Amer’s 2007 thesis on Dar es Salaam, which looks at spatial distribution policies in public and private health provision), or on attempts to measure spatial justice quantitatively, for example a spatial justice index that tracks variations in access to urban services in the Iranian city of Yasuj, which is used to calculate a district by district “level” of spatial justice (Dadashpoor and Rostami, 2011).

Finally, while these approaches adopt a perspective that might be Rawlsian (though without necessarily citing him), they do not pursue this theoretical discussion to its conclusion. Indeed, their prescriptive ambition leads them to judge the beneficial or negative character of certain territorial structures (concentration, dispersal, sprinkling...) by relating them to normative notions (accessibility, equality, poverty of access...), without always explaining why equal access to a service, for example, is desirable. Greater local accessibility can be associated with socio-spatial exclusion; increased mobility can be “empowering” or an alienating subjection (on the difficulty of interpreting such processes in terms of spatial justice, see for example Christophe Gibout [2012] on *zones urbaines sensibles* – urban priority zones – in Calais and Poitiers). Their primary aim is to contribute to political decisions on issues such as whether to close or open health facilities, based on territorial performance assessments founded in criteria such as accessibility (measured, for example, in distance-time) and actual use of facilities. Spatial justice is defined as the pursuit of territorial managerial efficiency and wider access to healthcare, for the purpose of optimising public expenditure. As a result, works of these kinds rarely discuss the political processes that produced these structures (Chapple and Goetz, 2011) or that govern the choice between different options. Instead, they try to separate political choice from technical expertise, as two distinct domains, embedded in different registers. In these distributive approaches, therefore, we see the quest for a spatial order that is fair and objective, but not founded in normativity.

Instrumental uses of the notion of spatial justice

In parallel with these planning-related approaches, many studies make instrumental use of the notion of spatial justice, in other words use it without defining it very precisely. The notion of spatial justice thus appears in works that look very broadly at the spatial strategies of domination, the manifestations and spatial production of injustices, territorially based discriminations, spatial stigmatisation and exclusion. These approaches do not directly discuss what a philosophically founded just order would be. They usually approach the idea of spatial justice negatively or indirectly, through an analysis of socio-spatial injustices and identity-based spatial assignments. In other cases, the theoretical foundation exists but is implicit, left hanging, present between the lines in the analysis of injustices. The aim is to reveal and condemn social

7. See in this issue the article by Bernard Bret.

and spatial mechanisms of domination, of exploitation or of oppression, not to offer a programme of social and spatial transformation. Their approach is therefore markedly less prescriptive. Its aim is not to advance just policy. One can describe this as an instrumental use of the notion of justice, designed to give the argument a political charge.

The notion of spatial justice is also sometimes used for its capacity to resonate in certain contexts. This is true in South Africa, where it was employed by Claire Bénit (2005) to analyse public policies intended to correct urban apartheid in Johannesburg. In this case, the concept is utilised for its capacity to make the connection between space and injustices. It is used to tackle questions of metropolisation, of tax adjustment or segregation, by emphasising their political nature and calling for public action. Part of the contemporary literature that employs the notion of spatial justice in Latin America does so also because it resonates with the “indigenous question”, through issues of land dispossession, and with issues of socio-environmental discrimination and urban integration (Salamanca and Astudillo Pizarro, 2016; Musset, 2009; Realini, 2017).

This stance and these instrumental uses of the notion of justice are extensively represented in our journal, perhaps because of the open nature of its editorial position, which asserts that: “This journal aims to foster debate and therefore favors no theory or school of thought: it merely posits that the concept of justice has its place in social science and helps to make sense of places and territorialized social facts. There are several definitions of justice”. True, the description or analysis of spatial injustices that results from what some consider to be a form of “sub-theorisation” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2010: 1) can blunt the critical impact of analysis by underplaying the dialectical dimension of the production of space: “Despite its critical potential, the concept [of spatial justice] has been reduced by the majority of the relevant literature into another version of social, distributive or regional justice. On the contrary, if the peculiar characteristics of space are to be taken into account, a concept of justice will have to be rethought on a much more fundamental level than that.” Nonetheless, given the urgency of certain issues, we hope that – through this notion – some editions of the journal have helped to shake up received ideas and to raise certain questions, and that they have found their place in the public space of democratic debate.

This tendency can be explained in two ways. First, paradoxically, Edward Soja’s immense influence in the debates on justice has perhaps resulted in discussions on theories of justice being left in the background. By dint of discussing the status of space in the production of injustices, of its primary, secondary, central or peripheral nature (Iveson, 2011; Soja, 2011), the need to specify what is meant by justice may sometimes be forgotten. The spatial turn has perhaps led to the debate on justice being partially eclipsed and has prompted more and more geographers to evade the question of their normative assumptions. Second, because of the difficulty of maintaining the link between theories of justice and empiricism, something of a division between empirical studies and theoretical considerations tends to emerge. The authors who condemn the theoretical deficit on the matter or call for a more robust theorisation are themselves unwilling to venture onto perilous empirical terrain (see for example Pirie, 1983; Hay, 1995, Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2010). The works of David Smith, which constitute the most complete attempt to build a programme of geography that considers questions of justice, clearly reflect this difficulty. On the basis of a discussion of the diversity of the definitions of justice, of the theoretical and ideological assumptions on which they rest, and of the sometimes contradictory nature of the social contracts used to legitimise them (Smith, 1994, 2000), he develops case studies that demonstrate the eminently geographical dimension of injustices.

These cases are chosen among the great political causes of the time: racial inequalities in the American South, the post-socialist transition in Eastern Europe, land reform in postapartheid South Africa, and subsequently Israeli colonisation of Palestinian territories. In this way, the initial intention of founding a geography of justice morphs into a programme of “moral geographies” (the title of the book he co-authored in 2004 with Roger Lee) where the question of justice is diluted across a large number of debates (economic inequalities, rights and citizenship, well-being, the emotional relation to space), and where geographical concepts (territory, scale, place...) are rethought in terms of justice, without any further real geographical interest in theories of justice.

Justice lived, perceived, represented

In response to these difficulties, a final category of approaches moves away from the quest for the ideal socio-spatial order and the condemnation of injustices, in order to look at the conceptions of justice that underlie the rationalities of government and social representations. It adopts an internal perspective on justice, away from a focus on the question of public action and the social contract. These works look at the construction of social values, at social and political representations of justice, and at the possibility of making statements about justice and injustice. We find here the distinction between justice understood as an object of study (a feeling of injustice, a political discourse, a rationality of government is observed without judging), or as an analyser of social realities on which a value judgement is made.

Linking with what sociologists call “empirical” approaches to justice which, “instead of seeking to know what is ‘essentially’ just, [seek to] explore what the actors (whether individual, collective or institutional) ‘consider’ to be just in given circumstances” (Jacquemain, 2004, p. 66), geographers have tried to understand justice from this perspective. This is the case for some of the work originating in the JUGURTA programme⁸, part of which seeks to identify the conceptions of justice that underlie urban policies (Quentin, Guinard, Mercuriol, 2014) and to analyse the discourses and representations of justice and injustice on which they are based, as well as the way in which these standards circulate and are adopted locally (Philifert, Ginisty, Morange, 2014). Other approaches in this category examine how the registers of justice and injustice are employed by inhabitants, whether as individuals or part of social movements, to claim their right of access to urban resources. Karine Ginisty’s thesis (2014, 2018) on access to urban services in Maputo, for example, looks at the possibility of expressing a sense of injustice (or justice) in an authoritarian context, questioning the link sometimes too automatically made between inequalities, a sense of injustice and political expression in public space. The work of the Choros group takes the same perspective. It examines the links between perceptions of justice and “inhabiting”⁹. Similarly, Philippe Gervais-Lambony (2017) seeks to interpret apartheid and the postapartheid political project in South Africa through the complexity of the different representations of justice and of the registers of legitimisation and the scalar perspectives that collide in public debates and in the opposition between different actors.

These approaches differ from normative approaches to justice in the sense that they do not try to “say what is just”. Their critical impact resides in their exposure of the mechanisms used to

8. Spatial justice, governance and territorialisation in the cities of the Global South (programme funded by France’s National Research Agency, 2008-2012, headed by Philippe Gervais-Lambony).

9. See in this issue the interview with Jacques Lévy, Jean-Nicolas Fauchille and Ana Póvoas conducted by Bernard Bret and Pascale Philifert (“public space” section).

legitimise the social order and of the modes of production of inequalities, or else of the forms of oppression linked with the impossibility of expressing a sense of injustice in certain circumstances. In this respect, they are more broadly aligned with the social sciences that use the notion of justice as an analytical tool to think about the way societies (social groups, states, individuals...) talk about justice, and the way in which these discourses are sometimes used to camouflage or legitimise power relations (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991). This literature, sensitive to the complexity of social situations, shuns the use of the notion of justice for prescriptive ends. For example, it tries to relate several theoretical frameworks of justice to a given real-world situation and to combine them together, in order to better understand the meaning of the injustices produced by apartheid (Gervais-Lambony, 2017). Finally, it is perhaps in this domain, which is more concerned with interpretation than prescription, that the social sciences are most convincing? In the analysis of power relations, of social relations, of the political and practical implications of ethical statements... in short, when they distance themselves from a form of normativity founded on philosophical theories of justice?

Nonetheless, this critical project, in so far as it seeks to reflect on the political and social conditions that allow the formulation of an idea of justice or to interpret social and spatial reality in terms of spatial justice, remains normative. Indeed, its interest is broadly focused on social groups that it perceives as dominated, whether or not they express a sense of injustice, because it condemns – more or less explicitly – a social order that it considers to be unjust (e.g. apartheid). Moreover, this position restricts the social sciences to a non-prescriptive critique, something like an unveiling role, which does not admit the possibility of thinking beyond the present social and political order, and in a sense condemns them to fail in their goal. This refusal to abandon a prescriptive objective has therefore prompted some geographers to renew the debate on the forms and possibilities of dialogue between philosophy and geography.

Do normative assumptions need to be explicitly stated in order to speak about justice?

Recently, the opening up of philosophy to the humanities and social sciences has given the debates on justice a grounded dimension and a certain depth. Sensitive to the lessons of sociology, of psychology, even of psychoanalysis, certain philosophers – in particular Iris Marion Young (1990), Nancy Fraser (2005) and Amartya Sen (2010)¹⁰, or else Axel Honneth (2006) – speaking from very diverse disciplinary and theoretical standpoints, accepted the intrusion of the rough materiality of social and spatial realities into the debates on justice. In the last fifteen years or so, therefore, the question of normativity has once again arisen in geography, and it is now possible to see the outlines of an opposition between two approaches. On the one hand, neo-positive and universalising conceptions of justice which affirm that the social sciences must explicitly state their normative postulates; and on the other hand, pragmatic approaches to justice which propose thinking about it in terms of the concrete and lived experience of injustice. A critical third way is emerging around the Marxist theory of recognition, developed by Axel Honneth, which sees itself as both normative and pragmatic.

10. See the text by Frédéric Dufaux, Philippe Gervais-Lambony and Claire Hancock focusing on Iris Marion Young, the text by Philippe Gervais-Lambony, Claire Hancock and Sophie Moreau on Nancy Fraser and finally the text by Bernard Bret and Frédéric Landy about Amartya Sen in the "JSSJ reviews" section of this issue.

The imperious necessity for an explicit normative position...

Must an *a priori* and explicit normative basis for critique be adopted for it to be permissible to talk about justice in geography? This is a question that Michael Storper and Andrew Sayer (1997) answer in the affirmative, pronouncing themselves in favour of "ethics unbound": they call on researchers to clearly and explicitly state the foundations of their value judgements. According to them, this is the indispensable condition for scientifically acceptable normative thought, since the requirements of justice are imperative. This sense of urgency can be found, for example, in David Smith's programme. According to Michael Storper and Andrew Sayer it is essential to remain normative and morally unacceptable not to be. The aim is to recover the right for critical thought in the social sciences to assert its normativity, after what they consider to be a decade of retreat, arising on the one hand from Marxism's refusal to found its economic and political critique in reason. Indeed, in their view, the refusal to engage in the debate on justice had weakened the relevance and the critical influence of its attacks against capitalism. On the other hand, the call by Michael Storper and Andrew Sayer constitutes a charge levelled against the relativistic tendency of a first-generation postmodernism.

Admittedly, in the postmodern moment, competing political and social value systems rub up against each other (we live in "a complex society with competing value systems") and issues of class, race and gender are interwoven. This complicates the question of value judgement: by acknowledging these frictions, postmodern approaches have exposed normative analyses to the suspicion of ethnocentrism or androcentrism, and have sometimes resulted in all forms of normative thinking being equated with a normalisation of social practices. In addition, from a postmodern position, where nobody can judge another person's discourse, since the latter contains its own internal justification, there are "no common grounds for argument". The result of all this is a critical dead-end (critique becomes impossible), or a critique without sufficient justification (based on an unquestioned moral consensus).

In the latter case, critique is legitimised by a political and social consensus. The analysis relies on adhesion to a set of values that became dominant at a given moment, in certain places, which the researcher's work helps to reinforce, in a performative and sometimes explicit way. This is the case, for example of work on the injustices done to minorities, to so-called indigenous groups, issues that prevailed following major political and ideological struggles in the postcolonial moment. It is possible to speak of critical norms in the sense that, in a given academic and political milieu, no one disputes that these processes are a problem, nor that the power relations that they reflect should be condemned. The urgency of the political issues and their identification with the domain of dominant critical thought in a sense legitimise the value judgement applied to the situations condemned. Refusing to adhere to this critical consensus (for example, claiming that gender inequalities are fair) would immediately expose the speaker of such a normative "counter-truth" to political suspicion. Michael Storper and Andrew Sayer employ the term "unmonitored peer pressure" to describe this process whereby the researcher (or the citizen) opposes certain social orders by social emulation, because that is what people like them do (what is expected in their milieu).

For Michael Storper and Andrew Sayer, it is better for there to be a contradictory engagement over values that are mutually incompatible, rather than a neutralisation of the debate on the grounds that values are incommensurable, or unquestioning adhesion to a shared critical common sense. According to them, values can be examined through reason. They are not based on contingent, variable and relativistic choices that cannot be evaluated, unless one adopts a total relativism that can lead to very reactionary positions: being "liberals at home and

conservatives abroad”, an old problem familiar to ethnologists and anthropologists. In a liberal version of postmodern approaches, one paradoxically arrives at a highly universalising conception of the world, founded on an Anglo-American liberalism that values individualism, freedom, multiple identities... From this perspective, postmodernism constitutes a new form of dogmatism.

At this price critique becomes possible, but the price in reality is quite high, since it entails admitting the other’s critique as a condition for the acceptance of our own critical speech, and sincerely trying to understand the other’s point of view. The alternative, therefore, is not between choosing axiological neutrality on the grounds of scientificity and choosing ideological commitment because of the scandal of suffering. It lies between value judgement that is insufficiently founded in reason and sincere critical engagement in work on the meaning of our statements and our ethical assumptions. This explicitness forces researchers to reflect more deeply on our own prejudices and normative positions, which we naturalise through the process of incorporating them, by routines and conventions, into our ordinary acts, our day-to-day practices of evaluation, of judgement, of selection and of legitimisation.

In the sixth issue of this journal, for example, we invited researchers to make explicit the links between neo-liberalisation and injustices in order to overcome a number of pitfalls in the neo-Marxist analysis, caused by this lack of explicitness (Morange and Fol, 2014) (see also Ferguson, 2010). At the extreme, going against the standard view, one might wonder why gentrification or segregation are unjust (Lehman-Frisch, 2009). Jacques Brun (1994) thus warns us against insufficiently founded value judgements on socio-spatial segregation, a concept that in his view should preferably be managed in a descriptive and “neutral” way. Similarly, the notion of environmental justice often leads to a short circuit in which spatial differences and injustice are equated, instead of consideration of a fair spatial distribution of environmental damage and risks (Walker, 2009), which is essential in assessing the legitimacy of environmental struggles with ambiguous effects, such as the mobilisation of the poor in Los Angeles in favour of buses and against trains (Fol and Pfielger, 2010).

This is the type of explicitness that Bernard Bret notably wishes to achieve in his work on regional inequalities in Brazil (2015). Drawing on the philosophy of John Rawls, and undertaking a rarely attempted effort to connect the theoretical and the empirical, he explores the fairest ways of redistributing growth and wealth. He uses Rawls to try to go beyond the dichotomy between theories of unequal spatial development and the liberal faith in growth. “The aim is to achieve consistency between two claims, the first of which sees development as growth in justice, and the second that describes development as necessarily unequal” (Bret, 2009, p. 22). Drawing on John Rawls here is a way to found a normative analysis in reason and to overcome the dualism between normative statements (value) and descriptive statements (facts). The aim is to restore the legitimacy of the social sciences to engage with the former and not only the latter. The objective of this stance, clearly neo-positivist and universalist, inspired by the Enlightenment, is to found the principles of a just social and spatial order in reason. The aim is to characterise situations rationally, by contrast with “intuitions” of injustice, which are understandable and worthy of respect, but not founded in reason, “which can attract sympathy, but which leave untouched the question of the legitimacy of their position.”

In the spirit of Michael Storper and Andrew Sayer, this position clearly rejects the relativism of values at the same time as it seeks to go beyond an emotional, subjective, or even imitative (an adhesion to the shared values of a time and place) response to injustices. Nevertheless, by prioritising the analysis of the objective sought (fair distribution), it pays less attention to the

political procedures, to the concrete methods involved in the selection and development of public policies. Yet as Karen Chappel and Edward Goetz (2011: 467) write about the Rawls inspired policies of equity regionalism in the United States: *"it is hard to argue that these policies, particularly dispersal, are constructed without stakeholders knowing how they will benefit."* They argue rather for a definition of justice in terms of capabilities, inspired by Sen, who had criticised Rawls in part on the same grounds. Sen's works, among others, inspired pragmatic approaches to justice in geography, in particular the works of Clive Barnett (2011a, 2011b, 2014), who responds directly to Michael Storper and Andrew Sayer, contributing to the current controversy on normativity in geography.

... or the possibility of conceiving justice from the experience of injustice?

Clive Barnett in fact expresses himself in favour of a grounded normativity. He draws on a wide range of philosophical approaches open to the social sciences which each, in their own way and in their field, have sought to found their discussion of the notion of justice in social realities, drawing in particular on the experience of injustice. In these approaches, normative judgement needs to originate in an assessment of reality. Iris Marion Young is very explicit on this subject (1990) when she writes of the need for a new impetus in political philosophy and attacks the limitations of an abstract and universal theory of justice. Openness to the social sciences makes it possible to conceive of "concrete" political utopias, to reconcile a normative perspective with the possibility of the advent of justice. Shifting the debates on justice onto the terrain of the historical, social and spatial construction of social relations requires one to think not only about what an ideal just order would be, but also about the conditions for its production and realisation, precisely the stumbling block for abstract philosophical theories of justice. This offers a way to break with thinking that is politically or sociologically naive and to abandon the analytical artifices of logical thinking that is constructed around ideal referents, such as the pre-social individual (in the state of nature or behind a veil of ignorance). There are only political subjects, products of social, economic and political relations.

Clive Barnett (2011a, 2011b, 2014) thus advocates the advent of a normative social theory that renounces globalising and universalising ambitions on the subject of justice. Emphasising the difficulty of building a political and social consensus around a concept that is intuitively very attractive but conceptually disputed (Merrifield and Swyngedouw, 1997), he argues that it is not necessary to state the normative point of view from which one is speaking in order to produce critical speech and that it is not ethics that needs to be "unbound", but the notion of justice. He suggests a more open and free use of the idea of justice, which assigns primary importance to our practices of "ethical learning", to our intuitions, to "non-transcendental" justice. In fact, he rejects the separation between the formation of moral values and social and political practices, drawing on a practical definition of reason (*phronesis*): opposing the excessive trust placed in public or instrumental reason, and the separation – firmly established by classic moral philosophy – between reason and action, he stresses that reasoning is inherent in action. Separating the two (on the principle of "think before you act") in reality entails a retrospective reconstruction of our reasons for acting.

On this basis, Clive Barnett argues that normative thinking does not need to be based on a solidly preestablished theory and that, on the contrary, we need to start from reality in order to question it, expose its mechanisms and open up the field of possibilities. In line with Amartya Sen's approach (2010), he argues that the idea of justice is constructed by weighing up concrete situations, situated in space and in time, a necessary condition for the capacity to reformulate

alternatives. According to him, how justice is defined is immanent in the conditions and arenas of political contestation. Given the diversity of feelings of injustice, it is therefore essential to start from “widely shared” intuitive perceptions of situations of injustice rather than from a closed and abstract theory.

These discussions have inspired a number of debates on justice, in geography and in urban studies. First of all, within the framework of debates on the just city, some authors (Campbell, 2006; Williams, 2017) have focused on the search for “actually existing justice” in urban realities. In their view, given the impossibility of theoretically defining the just city, critical thought has been reduced to the condemnation of injustices, a desperate state of affairs. In response to this critical pessimism, these authors prefer to highlight experiences that generate a certain degree of optimism. For example, they analyse experiments in collaboration around issues of food self-sufficiency (Purcell and Born, 2017). This need for hope can be found in numerous works on the right to the city which examine urban struggles with the aim of identifying forms of resistance and agency, and alternatives to neoliberalism: “Finally, if we re-design geographies of justice in the city a bit, so that search for ways justice-thinking is actually occurring and being implemented in many times and places, rather than focusing almost exclusively on documenting instances of injustice, evidence about the hope residing in cities will be compiled to sit usefully alongside the many examples of despair” (Fincher and Iveson, 2012, p. 240).

These attempts to apply Clive Barnett’s pragmatic suggestion to empirical situations do not, however, settle the problem of normativity. This is pointed out by Ruth Fincher and Kurt Iveson (2012) who stress that all social struggles depend in reality, at least in part, on a particular conception of justice. This is true of the movements for environmental justice which emerged partly from an encounter between theoretical discussions on distributive justice and racial issues. It is also true of numerous movements for the right to the city, which draw on Marxist theories of value (*ibid.*). It is clear, moreover, that these authors’ interest in such political movements are linked with their empathy with them and that they would find it hard to recognise the emergence of “just” values in, for example, a racist or supremacist movement. Through the idea of shared intuition, we find ourselves back with the argument of social and moral consensus. Even the most comprehensive studies which, following Edward Soja, examine the “grammars” of justice and injustice employed by social movements (e.g. see Iveson, 2014), in other words which look at the discourses and “bottom-up” production of an idea of justice, are in reality grounded in a neo-Marxist critique of neoliberalism. That is the condition for avoiding the trap of relativism in these approaches.

In parallel, the quest for justice in social reality has contributed to a so-called geography of “care”. These approaches arise from the observation, inspired by certain feminist theories, that many of our invisible day-to-day actions and practices, of the things that ultimately link us to others, are not founded on selfish and individual desire, nor on exploitation, but are motivated by care for others. This would therefore make it possible for just practices to be founded in this “care for others”, rather than in abstract norms of justice that may ultimately lead to cases of exclusion. For example, the rights associated with the welfare state are restricted to certain groups, such as employees, married couples... These analyses question and make explicit the ethical and moral content of our day-to-day actions as a source of our conception of justice. They draw on a conception of justice founded in the idea of rights and in the principle of political combat for the extension of rights towards *ethical and moral* objectives sometimes explicitly formulated in reference to a Christian morality (Cloeke, 2002). This position distances us

from questions of justice and normativity as considered here, since it is founded on a socially situated moral norm that is accepted as it stands, or because it claims to be universal.

A normativity grounded in social practice: Axel Honneth's theory of recognition

Recently, the work of Axel Honneth (2006) has provided one of the most ambitious attempts to found a new critical theory, one with the capacity to justify its normative foundations¹¹, and therefore to avoid the double pitfall of relativism and social consensus, yet without relying on theories of justice. It seeks to overcome the critical blocks created by the early theorists of the Frankfurt School – a lineage to which Axel Honneth belongs – in particular Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas. According to Axel Honneth, the economic reductionism and the “sociological deficit” of these authors led Marxist thought into a political impasse, since it proved incapable of conceiving emancipation. To overcome this block and revitalise the Marxist critical perspective, Axel Honneth proposes a return to social philosophy, the philosophy that since Rousseau has interested itself not in the right social contract but in the principles of the good life and self-fulfilment.

Envisaging the social world as a sphere of struggles and confrontations, he seeks to explore how political and social subjects, through their communicational capacity, enter into conflict around divergent values. In this, he draws on Habermas, but distances himself from him by stressing the productivity of conflict in the broad sense, and not the rules of agreement and of successful communication. For Axel Honneth, it is through this conflictuality that normative orientations are constructed. It is through this that the experience of injustice can find a conscious translation, expressed by a demand for recognition, and culminate in a movement of emancipation. It was sociology that put Axel Honneth on the track of the importance of the intuitive experience of injustice (the experience of indifference, understood in terms of unsatisfied expectations and expressed through a moral vocabulary) in the formation of normative convictions that can ultimately feed into a collective demand for change. The aim, therefore, is to found the normativity of critical theory in the examination of real social practice, in order to grasp in a single movement the terms of domination and the practical conditions of its overcoming. In this movement, the normative foundations of critical scrutiny are shifted. The dependency on abstract definitions of justice offered by theories of justice are abandoned, along with the dependency – as found in classic Marxist theory – on the historical role of the proletariat in bringing an end to exploitation. We move to a theory of recognition that envisages the feeling of injustice as the driving force of a new, less visible and more diffuse, form of class struggle.

Nonetheless, even if the reliance on theories of justice is abandoned, a normative principle is needed to evaluate demands for recognition and distinguish legitimate demands from those that are not, as well as from “fake recognition”. Axel Honneth situates this norm in the concrete analysis of social situations, since his critique focuses on the contemporary capitalist social order, the opposite of a universalising and timeless conception of justice. He suggests tracking the gaps between promises of self-fulfilment and the reality of alienating experience, what he calls “distortions” of recognition, produced by contemporary capitalism. He argues that capitalism, by a sort of “paradoxical” effect, promises a form of recognition but in reality breaks the link between the subject and the community and thereby alienates and limits him, restricting the possibilities of self-fulfilment (these analyses are very salient with regard to everything

11. For a very enlightening presentation of this project, see Olivier Voirol's introduction to the texts of Axel Honneth which he brought together and partially translated into French for La Découverte in 2006.

associated with the productive sphere and the world of work). It imposes false ways of acting and thinking, engendering social “pathologies”. The purpose of critique is to reveal these processes, as well as the way in which they make themselves invisible. Its aim is to provide a foundation in reason for a Marxist critique that proceeds by unveiling reality and enables us to modify our axiological convictions, a critique founded on an examination of the “pathologies of the social”, through the attentive scrutiny of day-to-day practices, and which assesses them in relation to a norm that is concrete, not abstract: the practical possibility of achieving a “good life” and demands for it that are formulated in terms of the moral experience of injustice. In our view, this direction of analysis opens onto the highly stimulating question of the ambiguity of the processes of political subjectivisation, which can equally – and sometimes simultaneously – lead to a potentially productive feeling of injustice, and to alienating forms of subjection.

Conclusion

The introduction of the notion of justice into the social sciences corresponds to a desire to reassert and acknowledge the need for normative thinking. It is valuable for researchers and in particular for geographers wishing to break with a tradition of pursuing scientificity in the belief that it represents axiological neutrality. The notion of justice thus plays a role in a certain repoliticisation of the debates. Situated at the historical and theoretical interface between positivist, Marxist and postmodern approaches, it can be used to examine issues relating to both identities, values and points of view, and structures of domination, exploitation or distribution. It is therefore an invitation to a dialogue between different critical fields. Moreover, in its procedural dimension, it encourages the analysis of the mechanisms whereby injustices are produced and reproduced. Finally, in relation to a tradition of research on the spatial production of inequalities that handles critical notions that can potentially be “neutralised” (such as segregation or inequalities), the notion of justice, provided that it is taken seriously, can be a difficult but rigorous normative critical tool. Probably less precise than the aforementioned notions, it presents the advantage, compared with them, of forcing the analyst to acknowledge the foundations of his or her normativity, to “de-naturalise” injustice.

Nevertheless, on this latter point, the challenge remains, because the notion of justice is often employed to express indignation about situations that the political or social consensus of a given place or moment defines as unjust. It is this transparency which, even if deeply shared and even if denunciation is urgent, needs to be scrutinised for the critique to be strong and salient. If not, other injustices are likely to remain invisible and no one form of value judgement is more valid than any other. We have seen that even the approaches that are most pragmatic, empirical, grounded and close to social and political realities are in fact founded in values, whether explicitly formulated or not. Finally, through these discussions, we can clearly see that the challenge for the social sciences is not so much to take a position in the theoretical debates on justice by choosing a camp, as to make explicit the normative foundations of their critical dimension, whatever their choice of theoretical position. This is something that has been very clearly revealed by the connections made in recent decades between political and moral philosophy and the social sciences around questions of justice, and this is the direction in which reflection needs to continue.

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