EXTRAORDINARY CITIES

Millennia of Moral Syndromes, World-Systems and City/State Relations

Peter J. Taylor, Northumbria University, UK

‘In this intellectually far-reaching, all-encompassing, thoroughly researched, methodologically rigorous archaeological account, Taylor sets out myriad arguments that support his notion that cities (all cities) are exceptional. He offers a city-centric analysis of macro-economic change and in so doing disabuses readers of the idea that the state, typically considered the driver of economic change, is in charge. Indeed, he points to the impotence of the state, were it not for the city. In so doing, he masterfully breaks the mold and departs from tradition. . . Taylor engages in an archaeological dig of mammoth proportions never before witnessed in the study of cities. An incredible work. . . Essential.’

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‘Peter J. Taylor has produced a sweeping, empirically grounded, defense of cities as fundamental building blocks of long-term, large scale social structures; a way of freeing social science from state-centric bias; and indeed, mankind’s hope. However, the single greatest strength of this complex, seductive, argument is the insistence on treating cities relationally, as process. Here the key to understanding the significance of cities is by studying them in terms of the dynamic networks they form and in their relations to states.’

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‘This is a “big” book by Peter Taylor. It tells of the extraordinary world-making powers of cities across the ages. It explains why a state-centric social science has constrained recognition of these powers over the last two centuries, and it outlines a new “indisciplinarity” to help us make sense of a human condition increasingly forged out of the urban. Anyone troubled by the social sciences as we know them, ought to read this book.’

– Ash Amin, Cambridge University, UK and author, Land of Strangers


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