

REVIEW OF THE BOOK:

Cheating: The Human Project and its Betrayal / by Fred Harrison

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Students of English history may remember the survey ordered in 1086 by William the Conqueror to determine the value of the kingdom's land and all castles, homes, barns, crops, livestock, mills and woodlands (excepting London, Winchester and parts of the north). The findings were detailed in two volumes eventually referred to as the *Doomesday* books. William needed revenue to govern the country, and he knew that those who held property were unlikely to honestly self-report the value of their holdings for purposes of taxation. Well, not much has changed since the eleventh century, as detailed by author Fred Harrison in his new book, *Cheating: The Human Project and its Betrayal*.

Harrison informs readers that we humans were in our distant past committed to sharing what nature provided, to working cooperatively for the good of the group. But eventually:

“Civilization was constructed on a fraud, perpetrated in antiquity, and we are still living that nightmare. That betrayal of the human project now threatens the continued existence of humankind.”

With these two sentences, he begins his presentation of the details of how it all happened, building on a long series of hard-hitting analyses that began in the early 1980s with publication of *The Power In The Land*. The big difference with this new book is his clear and unambiguous warning that we have run out of time. Not that we are running out of time. We are at the point of no return.

One more time, we are forced by the facts he presents to acknowledge that centuries of unjust law that both secures and protects the private appropriation of economic rents brought us to this point of economic, social and political collapse. Cooperative tribal societal structures were discarded and hierarchy generated “a statecraft designed to privilege one group of people – the owners of Rent-yielding assets.”

Again, in this new book, Harrison undertakes to educate the reader regarding the existence of economic rent as a share of the tangible wealth we humans produce that results from the fact that the same input of labor and capital goods yields different amounts of wealth based on the natural and societally-enhanced quality of the location

one controls. And, that is just the most obvious of conditions by which economic rent arises:

“Airlines that possess landing slots over airports reap Rents. Fossil fuels, fish landed on quaysides, minerals mined out of the land – they all generate Rents. Then there are the Rents created by the highways along ocean floors that host the copper cables we need for our computers. In urban locations, Rents flow from investments in hospitals and schools; and from the military defence of the realm.”

In chapter after chapter, Harrison drives home his warning. The culture of cheating “is the ultimate crime.” The consequences were mitigated by the existence of vast empty and nearly-empty landmasses to which the victims of cheating could go and enjoy (at least for a time) what nature provided without having to turn over a rent payment to some absentee rent-seeker. Today, all land everywhere is claimed, the laws of the land protecting those claims in support of rentier interests. Harrison has to hope that this book and its arguments find a critical mass of readership and acceptance rivalling the last great warning put to us on these issues, Henry George’s 1879 book, *Progress and Poverty*. Nothing less will save us from ourselves:

“We need to pivot away from the culture invented in antiquity. We are all the common product of the act of creation, in which our earliest ancestors consented to produce and pool the energy that made our species possible. That evolutionary blueprint, applied on a global basis to meet 21st century needs, would empower us to restart the project that enabled hominins to become human. *One World Rent is the binding glue.*”

I leave it to Fred Harrison to explain to you what he means by “One World Rent is the binding glue.” Order the book. Study it closely. Discuss it with friends and colleagues. There is no time to lose.
