

Andrew Garber

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World Geography

Chapter 11-12 Writing Response

The cultural, economic, and political exports of Europe historically and to this day far outstrip what would be expected from an area of its size in both land mass and population. This is due to a number of factors, but prime among them are is the geography of the region that allowed it to supplant many areas that might have otherwise been more powerful, to become the birthplace of the modern world and a major center of culture and commerce to this day.

Europe is split into more small countries than anywhere else on earth - even its largest, Ukraine, France, or Sweden are comparable in size to average sized nations in many other parts of the world. The small size of these countries has not stopped their overperformance, however, as the physical geography of many of them make them able to fully utilize their geography for maximum development. For example, Ukraine - despite a Soviet heritage and an ongoing conflict with Russia - has been the bread basket of Europe for more than a century, and its flat, fertile plains have allowed it to become a major exporter of wheat and other grains. Similarly, the Netherlands, despite being one of the smallest countries in Europe, has become a major trade power due to its central location and access to the world's oceans. Germany, despite its fundamentally indefensible position in the center of Europe, has become a nation associated with industrial might due to a legacy of iron and coal mining and a strong manufacturing sector. The cultural and economic exports of Europe, German cars, French wine, Italian art, Ukrainian wheat, are fundamentally explained by the geography of the region.

In a strictly cultural sense, Europe has been a center of development for millennia - from the ancient Greeks to whom we owe innumerable architectural, philosophical, political, and artistic advances and the Romans who spread their culture across the continent, to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution - all cultural movements that originated in Europe and spread across the world. The cultural exports of Europe are too numerous to list, but the most important are the ones that have shaped the world we live in today. The Enlightenment, for example, was a movement that originated in Europe and spread across the world, and its ideas of democracy, freedom, and equality are the basis of the modern ethical and political systems of the world. The Industrial Revolution, while economic in nature had unimaginable societal consequences - if nothing else, the widescale adoption of cities as the center of economic life and the rise of the middle class. All of this can be explained by the geography of Europe - the city states of Greece led to a wide variety of extreme philosophical, political, and societal ideas that were then spread across the continent by the Romans, who owe a great debt to their geography with the fertile Italian Peninsula and central location of Rome. The later Italian city states who pioneered the Renaissance were able to do so due to their central location in the Mediterranean, which allowed them to trade with the rest of the world and spread their ideas as a result. The trading empires of the Dutch, British, French, and Venetians spread their enlightenment ideas across Europe and eventually the world. The Industrial revolution was only possible due to the locations of iron and coal deposits in the British Isles, Germany, and to a lesser degree France and Belgium.

In conclusion, the geography of Europe has allowed it to overpower its population or landmass sizes due to the excellent characteristics of human development made possible by this natural geography. From

Greece and Rome, the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and all the way to the Industrial Revolution, cultural and economic success in Europe has been made possible by the geography of the region.