indeed racial questions were commonplace in geography texts around the turn of the century and in some cases long after that. Others saw in it a doctrine with strategic potential. Halford Mackinder, for example, outlined a theory of world political power that crucially depended on the control of a particular piece of territorial space in the Old World. Friedrich Ratzel in Germany erected an organic theory of the state on his notion of *Lebensraum*, urging that the character and destiny of a *Volk* was umbilically tied to a definite area or *Raum*. In the United States the Ratzelian viewpoint was propagated by Ellen Semple who used it to chart the necessitarian course of American history, while Ellsworth Huntington turned to climate as the great mainspring of civilization. In all of these, as in the stop-and-go determinism of Griffith Taylor, the constitutive links between geographical theory and social outlook are clearly displayed. This is not to say, of course, that geographical determinism as a precept was *just* social ideology writ large. But it *is* to recognize that there is a *social* history of geographical ideas as well as a purely *cognitive* one.

## The Regionalizing Ritual

Even while environmental determinism in one form or another was spreading like wildfire among professionalizing geographers, there were those who insisted on the capacity of human culture to transform its natural milieu rather than remaining in nature's deterministic grip. In Britain H. J. Fleure emphasized the importance of human agency in modifying environment and thus turned away from the conventional concentration on natural regions towards the significance of transitional zones of culture contact down through history. Moreover, even those like A. J. Herbertson, in whose geography the concept of natural region occupied a strategic place, nevertheless recognized the subtle interplay of environment, heredity and consciousness in producing the geographical patterns of human diversity across the face of the globe. For both the idealist strain in Lamarckian evolution – an evolutionary model stressing the significance of life-force and will – was of crucial importance.

Another strain of environmentalist critique was forthcoming from a different, though related, conceptual source around the turn of the century, namely the vibrant tradition of French cultural geography associated with Vidal de la Blache. For Vidal and the Vidalians environment was to be seen, not as a determinative force, but rather as a limiting factor setting limits on cultural possibilities. Possibilism, as this doctrine was styled, also emphasized the science of human regions because it was in specific physical milieux that distinctive *genres de vie* – modes of life – found expression.

A third strand of determinist criticism emanated from Carl Sauer and the Berkeley school of cultural geography in the United States. Here inspiration was derived less from evolutionary biology than from cultural anthropology and can be traced back to the seminal influence of the anthropologist Franz Boas. Boas had begun his academic career as a physical geographer but turned to anthropology when his work among the Inuit led him to question environmental determinism. The mild cultural relativism that he came to espouse was mediated to Sauer through anthropological colleagues at Berkeley and Sauer built on these foundations as he emphasized the importance of residual material culture as historical artefacts of cultural diversity.

Whatever the differences in approach, all these geographers shared a conception of geography as a study of regions. And this brand of geography received its benediction in Richard Hartshorne's influential monograph *The Nature of Geography* in which he argued his apologetic case from a partisan review of historical – and in particular German – sources. Thus the notion of geography as the 'regionalizing ritual', provided a paradigm that still governs much geographical work, whether in the qualitative contributions of writers of regional personality or in the more quantitative emphasis of the practitioners of regional science.



## The Go-between

Alongside these efforts to delineate for geography a piece of cognitive territory – a sector of conceptual space in the academic scheme of things – there were those who were rather more inclined to stress its functional role. Frequently the case was made that geography was the integrating discipline *par excellence* that kept the study of nature *and* culture under one disciplinary umbrella. W. M. Davis, for example, otherwise remembered for his elucidation of the cycle of erosion, nevertheless felt that physical geography was incomplete without ontography, its human counterpart. This go-between function was valuable in a number of contexts. For one thing it was appealed to to justify geography as a coherent and independent academic discipline both in Britain and the United States. Indeed Halford Mackinder in Britain found this to be the only foundation on which geography as a causal science could be built. In the United States Isaiah Bowman championed the same view.

Besides this, geography's bridging role between nature and humanity frequently took the form of a strenuous engagement with questions of resources. In America the roots of this geographical tradition go back to such figures as Nathaniel Southgate Shaler and George Perkins Marsh, and later J. Russell Smith, whose contributions were resurrected by early twentieth-century geographers seeking the recovery of a tradition of environmental sensitivity. For some this emphasis led to a historical reassessment of 'man's role in changing the face of the earth'; for others the needs of the future fostered an engagement with environmental systems analysis or with ecological energetics in the attempt to model the changing human–nature interface. In our own day, as the environmental crisis has bitten even more deeply, geographers like Timothy O'Riordan and Andrew Goudie have done much to keep this tradition at the forefront of geographical discourse. Moreover, so far as institutional identity is concerned it is noteworthy that university and college geography is not infrequently housed in schools of environmental studies.

## A Science of Space

If some identified geography's essence in its focus on regional integration, there were those who found the emphasis on the particularity of places lacking in methodological rigour. To them, all the talk of bridging the gulf between the sciences and the humanities seemed little more than academic–political rhetoric, and the idea of regional personality frankly unscientific. Fred Schaefer spearheaded the attack with his article on 'Exceptionalism in geography' published in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* in 1953. Schaefer's critique was designed to transform geography into a true science by urging that it become a law-seeking explanatory discipline concerned with universal laws, not regional specifics, or, as he put it, 'exceptions'. Schaefer's paper, it is commonly believed, heralded the introduction of logical positivism into the discipline and its curriculum was

defended in William Bunge's *Theoretical Geography* of 1962 and David Harvey's *Explanation in Geography* published at the end of the decade. And thus was born the idea of geography as a science of spatial distribution – locational analysis as it was frequently styled – and soon various theorems seeking to explain the location of economic behaviour were introduced to geography by figures such as W. L. Garrison in America and Peter Haggett in Britain. In particular the earlier economic theorizing of Von Thünen, Alfred Weber, Walter Christaller and August Lösch soon began to receive an airing in the discipline.

Along with this definition of geography as spatial science came the paraphernalia of scientific know-how, and thus geography received its newest initiation into scientific method and statistical technique. Not of course that geography had been utterly innocent of quantification hitherto. The roots of geography as a mathematical practice can be traced back at least to the period of the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century, and doubtless before that. Nor does it mean that all geography was quantified; plainly many areas of the tradition remained statistically immune. Still, positivism did make substantial inroads into geographical theory and practice from the 1950s and a variety of reasons for geography's relatively late baptism in positivist philosophy have been put forward. A Marxist-converted Harvey believes it represented, at least in America, a strategic attempt by geographers to escape the political suspicion falling on social science in the post-McCarthy era by retreating into the safety of number-crunching. At least as compelling, I think, would be an explanation that takes seriously the perceived need for geographers to accrue to themselves a set of craft competences which bolstered their professional vested interests in creating a spatial *science*.

## Statistics Don't Bleed

Whatever the causes of geographical quantification may have been, recent decades have witnessed a sequence of attacks on positivism from different perspectives. From the radical side comes the complaint that the whole quantitative procedure is ideologically laden from the start. The argument here is that by keeping geography just a sort of spatial calculus, a geometric technique for depicting distributions, fundamental questions of justice and political involvement are simply – and too comfortably – ruled out of court. Accordingly various contemporary radical geographers see themselves in a geographical lineage stretching back to figures such as Elisée Réclus, Peter Kropotkin and Karl Wittfogel who strenuously advocated social engagement. In this scenario, and it has to be admitted that it is far from unified, there is something of an emphasis on the determinative role of economic structure. Whether investigating the significance of residential segregation, the vicissitudes of the world economic system or the historical change from feudalism to capitalism, this same *motif* regularly reasserts itself.

From another perspective, there are those humanistic geographers who insist that the quantitative tabulation of economic data and other activities has dehumanized geography by ignoring, not to say suppressing, human agency. Statistics are simply not made of flesh and blood. Whole acres of human experience – fear, imagination, emotion – are left out of the picture. And these geographers have seen it as their task to keep the geographical world open to the artistic side of its history by their interrogation of literary texts and their championing of subjectivism in the subject. Yi-Fu Tuan's meditations on 'topophilia' and 'topophobia', David Ley's excursion into the mind of the inner city ghetto, and



Leonard Guelke's turning to Collingwood's idealist philosophy of history are just some of the currents to have swept through the discipline recently. Again partisans are quick to point out that this is not a wholly new departure: some claim that the earlier behavioural geography of J. K. Wright, David Lowenthal and William Kirk accorded a key role to subjective experience, while others – ignoring Vidal's natural science aspirations for *géographie humaine* – speak of the revivification of the Vidalian tradition.

## Everything in its Place

These respective emphases on the role of social structure and human agency in accounts of geographical phenomena have most recently led some to wonder whether explanatory privilege ought to be accorded to either side of the equation. In the attempt to find a way out of the impasse, some geographers have turned to the theory of 'structuration' advanced by the Cambridge sociologist Anthony Giddens. This account of social formation and transformation highlights the interplay of both forces: human beings find themselves in structural circumstances not of their choosing, but through the exercise of their own agency can do something to bring about change. The never-ending ebb and flow of agent–structure intercourse provides the engine power of social transformation. Where geography enters the picture is in the need to 'earth' this general model of historical change. Just how the interplay of social structure and human agency falls out is evidently different from place to place and depends crucially on the particular arena of encounter. Hence geographers – arguing for the prime significance of locale – increasingly call for the geographizing of social theory.

What has given further encouragement to this renewed emphasis on the significance of place is a whole series of philosophical and social developments. The details need not concern us, save to note that the idea of cultural and epistemological pluralism now seems inevitable. Fragmentation of knowledge, social differentiation, and the questioning of scientific rationality have all coalesced to reaffirm the importance of the particular, the specific, the local. And in this social and cognitive environment a geography stressing the centrality of place is seen as having great potential. Once again the constitutive nature of the relationship between geography's internal domain and external context is clearly evident.

## Geographical Conversations

Little needs to be said in conclusion. My argument throughout has been that the geographical tradition, like a species, has evolved as it has adapted to different social and intellectual environments. Geography, as was noted at the beginning, has meant different things to different people at different times and in different places. It has employed different vocabularies to suit different purposes – from magic and theology to science and art. Sometimes these discourses have been in conflict; at other times they have been mutually reinforcing. Sometimes the conversations have admitted a range of geographers; sometimes only a select group were allowed to take part. Either way what is important is that in telling the story of the tradition to which geographers belong there needs to be a recognition of the integrity of each of these diverse discourses in their own terms. Otherwise the history and future of geography will be enslaved to partisan apologists who wish to monopolize – even hijack – the conversation in order to serve their own sectarian interests.

# The Student's Companion to Geography

Edited by
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and Andrew Goudie

1992
386 p.

BLACKWELL
Oxford UK & Cambridge USA

First published 1992
Reprinted 1993

Blackwell Publishers
108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF, UK

238 Main Street, Suite 501
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142, USA



*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

The Student's companion to geography /
edited by Alisdair Rogers,
Heather Viles, and Andrew Goudie.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0–631–17088–X :
ISBN 0–631–17089–8 : (pbk)
1. Geography. I. Rogers, Alisdair.
II. Viles, Heather A. III. Goudie, Andrew.
G116.S78 1992
910–dc20

91–27557
CIP

Typeset in 9 on 11 pt Melior
by Photo-graphics, Honiton, Devon
Printed in Great Britain by
T.J. Press Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

# Contents