The Interwar Years

Readings for next time . . .


Environmental determinism is the belief the physical environment – especially climate – determines culture.

Probabilism is a “watered-down” version of environmental determinism. Like determinism, it views the physical environment as the driving force in human life, but not to the point of being totally deterministic.

Possibilism is the belief that a given physical environment offers a number of possible ways for a culture to develop, and that the ultimate choice will be guided by one or more social factors, particularly cultural heritage.

From Richard Peet, Modern Geographical Thought (1998)

Barrows, “Geography as Human Ecology”

- Geography is the “Mother of Sciences.” It gave rise to geology (among other disciplines), which is now nurturing geography.
- Seeks a central focus to differentiate geography from other disciplines.
- Says the answer lies in human ecology – “the mutual relations between man and his natural environment.”
- Geography should relinquish such non-human-related specialties as physiography, climatology, plant ecology, and animal ecology.
- On the other hand, we should the study of economic, historical, social, and political geography – all within the context of regional geography.
Fenneman, “The Circumference of Geography”

- Seeks to identify a focus that can differentiate geography from other academic disciplines.
- Notes that geography and geographers, by their training and interests, overlap with other disciplines.
- Portrays this relationship with the aid of a now-famous diagram showing geography as a big circle that is overlapped on its circumference by smaller circles that represent other disciplines.
- If we eliminate the areas of overlap between geography and other subjects, then what is left?
- The answer: The study of regions in their composition and complexity.
- Justifies regional geography as the core of the discipline.

The content of high school geography in 1911, as may be gleaned from Charles Redway Dryer’s “High School Geography”

- Corresponds with content recommended by the Nat’l. Educ. Assoc., and the Assoc. of Amer. Geographers (p. 7).
- Part I: Physical Geography, pp. 9 – 262.
- Part III: Regional Geography, pp. 331 – 515.
- “[Man’s] intelligence enables him to live in all lands and all climates.” (p. 256)
- “Man’s worst enemies are no longer beasts of prey... but the minute organisms which infect his body.” (p. 256)
- “[Man’s] structure indicates descent from ancestors of ape-like habits.” (p. 255)

Mark Jefferson (1863-1949)

- Specialist on South America and world population.
- Human geography should be about human impact on the land, not environmental impacts on humans.
- Most influential work(?): Civilizing Rails, 1928. Argues that the geography of the contemporary “civilized world” is largely a function of communications linkages. The greater the connections, the greater the prospects for civilization.

Isaiah Bowman (1878-1950)

- American geographer educated at Harvard and Yale, where he taught from 1905-15.
- Published on physical geography, regional geography (mainly South America), and political geography. Most noteworthy work: The New World, 1921.
- Chief territorial adviser to President Woodrow Wilson at the Versailles Peace Conference.
- His work at Versailles helped to demonstrate the applied value of the discipline of geography.
- President, Johns Hopkins University, 1935-1948.
Bowman, “The New World” (1921)

- A very influential work in regional geography which nevertheless is subtitled “Problems in Political Geography.”
- “The effects of the Great War are so far-reaching that we shall have henceforth a new world.” (p.1)
- Has a strong historical perspective, which is suggestive of the overlap between history and geography as shown in Fenneman’s diagram.
- 581 pages with 215 maps and 65 engravings from photographs, plus bibliography and index.
- The status of Europe consumes pp. 1 - 417.

Countries At War, 1914

Ethnographic map of Jugo-Slavia, 1921, from The New World, by Isaiah Bowman

Resource production and consumption map from The New World, by Isaiah Bowman

Carl O. Sauer
1889-1975

- Professor of Geography, U.C. Berkeley, 1923-57.
- Chairperson for 30+ years.
- Supervised 40 doctoral dissertations, several by people of future prominence.
- Founder of the sub-discipline of cultural geography (“the Berkeley School”).
- Saw culture as an active force that shapes and modifies the physical environment (not vice versa).
- Fervent opponent of environmental determinism.
"The Berkeley School" of Cultural Geography

- Focuses on the impact of human culture (especially material culture) on the land.
- Sees culture as an active agency that can transform a passive natural landscape into a cultural landscape that reflects the cultural attributes of the human modifiers – which is rather the opposite of environmental determinism.
- The cultural landscape, therefore, is viewed as the principal unit of study.
- A cultural landscape may itself be subsequently transformed time and again by future occupants, resulting in a cultural landscape consisting of features put in place by different peoples from different times and cultures.

Richard Hartshorne, 1899-1992

- Famous American political and regional geographer.
- During WWII served in the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA.
- Author of *The Nature of Geography* (1939) an important methodological work. Says geography should concentrate on areal differentiation — descriptive regional geography focusing on how and why places differ from each other.
- After WWII, became a symbol of old-fashioned (outdated) geography.
- His approach to geography was ultimately and successfully challenged by people espousing a more scientific brand of geography.

From Carl O. Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape"

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Richard Hartshorne

The "Fractional Code" For Land Use Mapping Developed in 1933 by Vernon C. Finch

- Facilitated detailed study of small areas to help identify unifying characteristics of broad regions.
- Major step in promoting geography as a tool for planners.
- A manual GIS?
- Used numbers or alpha-numerics (e.g., 6a) to identify different kinds of land use. By combining them as fractions on maps, multiple characteristics could be shown.
- Study focused on Montfort, WI.
1939 Aerial Photograph with fractional code (near New Philadelphia, Illinois)