

Chapter 1

A Concise Introduction to Human Geography

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Chapter Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- 1) awaken your sense of curiosity about the world beyond your doorstep and gain a new awareness of your own geographical imagination;
- 2) provide a working definition of Human Geography and identify the five central concerns of Human Geography;
- 3) recognize the importance of the rise, reign, and faltering of the West from the fifteenth century in the making of the contemporary world;
- 4) understand how this book is structured and reflect upon how you might approach the task of reading and digesting it.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century humanity will be forced to confront a number of questions of epic significance. How many people will exist on planet earth in the year 2100 and where will these people live? Can the earth support continued population and economic growth? Is climate change really happening and what might its consequences be? How can societies make better usage of renewable energy resources? Why are **natural hazards** seemingly occurring with increasing frequency and why do they tend to affect vulnerable people dwelling in poorer countries most? Why are cities across the world expanding so rapidly and what are the implications of this rapid urbanization of the earth's surface? Why are people migrating in ever-larger numbers, where are they moving from and to, and what might the consequences be for both sending and receiving countries? Why do cultures clash with one another and how might intercultural understanding and dialogue be promoted? Will the world in future be governed by supranational entities like the European Union instead of **nation states**? Will the **Brici countries** oust the United States and become global economic leaders by the end of this century? Will the blight of world poverty finally be ended by 2100?

If these questions exercise your mind too then congratulations! You have made a good start already by choosing to study Human Geography. In this book you will discover the ways in which Human Geography's unique take on the world makes it singularly well placed to contribute insights and perhaps even on occasions solutions to the grand challenges facing humankind today. You will also be invited to view Human Geography itself as a work in progress and to reflect upon the ways in which the subject needs to develop in future if it is to continue to make sense of an ever-changing and complex world.

The purpose of this book is to provide you with a concise introduction to Human Geography. The objective of this opening chapter is to encourage you to become more conscious of your own mental map of the world, to provide you with a working definition of Human Geography and an understanding of Human Geography's five key concerns, and to introduce you to the overarching explanatory framework around which this book is written.

Becoming Conscious of Your Geographical Imagination

Indulge your imagination for a second and try to visualize the sorts of people, places, and landscapes you might encounter were you to embark upon a whirlwind tour of the world. What do you see in your mind's eye? Try to imagine that you are now in some of those locations. What is your sense of the places you are visiting? If you have a vivid imagination perhaps you will be able to convince yourself that you can actually smell, touch, taste, and hear, as well as see certain places? Perhaps your virtual voyage has even stirred within you a renewed sense of wonderment, puzzlement, and intrigue about the arrangement, texture, shape, and color of the varied human landscapes that mark the face of the earth.

The purpose of this exercise is to force you to flex what might be called your **geographical imagination**, that is, it has forced you to think more consciously

about the different ways in which human beings have occupied the surface of the earth in different parts of the world. If you have found this exercise fun and enjoyable then it is likely that you possess the kind of curiosity that will make you a good human geographer. It is the aspiration of this book to further cultivate this curiosity. If you have found this exercise relatively easy then it is likely that you already enjoy a well-developed geographical imagination. This book will help you to become more conscious of this imagination and assist you to reassess and to strengthen it.

For now, the accuracy or otherwise of your mental map of the world and the specific itinerary you followed during your imaginary tour is not of especial importance. As you read this book, nevertheless, you might find it illuminating to reflect upon your choices and descriptions (see Zoom-in Box 1.1). Why did you make the selections you did? How do you visualize places beyond your own doorstep? Are your choices and descriptions strictly personal? Does it matter that you are looking at the world from a particular location? If so, how does your present location affect your “ways of seeing” or perceptions? Is it possible to overcome such bias and to look at the world as a neutral? Does it matter? If so, why?

Zoom-in Box 1.1: From Where Do You View the World?

For a number of years now I have asked students embarking upon introductory courses in Human Geography at universities in both Scotland and Ireland to choose places that interest them from around the world and then to describe their sense of these places. A rich variety of images are normally conjured up without pause for reflection. Some of the more memorable include:

- the quiet solitude enjoyed by isolated hamlets in Nuuk in Greenland;
- the rich bounty yielded in the regimented and rustic colored plains of the Canadian prairies;
- the chaotic hustle, bustle, and din of impoverished and overcrowded Delhi;
- the plume of pollutants filling the Valley of Mexico and enveloping Mexico City;
- nomads trekking silently and skillfully through parched sand dunes in the Saharan desert;
- the lucrative palm oil plantations in hot and humid Malaysia;
- flooded paddy fields in Vietnam drowning rows of rice arranged neatly in series;
- feverish factories, manufacturing for the world, in Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Southern China;
- salubrious shopping malls in Dubai and Abu Dhabi;
- skyscrapers towering proudly over Manhattan Island in New York City;
- gigantic rows of stacked shipping containers lining the industrious port of Rotterdam;
- traumatized refugees glancing nervously through wire mesh fences in makeshift refugee camps in the horn of Africa;

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Box 1.1 (Continued)

- the spectacular Three Gorges Dam hued into the rugged valleys that contain the Yangtze River;
- Mecca, Saudi Arabia, thronged with pilgrims during the Hajj;
- large clearances in the Amazonian forests created by the brutal lancing of swathes of tropical rainforest;
- spiritual vibrations emanating from Uluru (Ayres Rock) in the vast and empty Australian outback.

Did any of these destinations make it on to your list too? Most of the students completing this exercise identified themselves as British, Scottish, or Irish. Do you think that their backgrounds made any difference to their choices and descriptions? If so, how and why? Reflect now on your choices and descriptions. Are these strictly personal to you? In what ways might your past and upbringing have played a role?

What is Human Geography?

Human Geography is a branch of knowledge which *seeks to venture descriptions of and explanations for the uneven distribution of human activity across the surface of the earth*. Or to phrase it slightly differently, Human Geography *seeks to describe and explain variations from place to place in the ways in which human beings have inhabited the face of the earth*. According to the National Council for Geographic Education and the Association of American Geographers' *Guidelines for Geographic Education, Elementary, and Secondary Schools* (Lanegran and Natoli, 1984), Human Geography is built around five key concerns: location, place, interactions between people and the environment, movement, and region. These five themes provide beginner undergraduate students too with a good introduction to Human Geography's anchor ideas.

Location: How are human activities distributed across the face of the earth? Human beings and human activities (for example industry, agriculture, cities, political boundaries, and populations) are rarely scattered randomly over the earth's surface. Human geographers believe that there is an order to the uneven ways in which human beings have inhabited the planet. A simple glance at a satellite image of the earth at night quickly reveals that humans have occupied the world in uneven ways (Plate 1.1). Some areas are densely populated, others less so. Human activity is concentrated in some areas and dispersed widely in others. One pattern develops here, another there. Human geographers pinpoint places by referring to their **absolute location** (for example, their latitude and longitude) and their **relative location** (for example, whether they are near to or far from other places). Human geographers are also interested in the ways in which the distribution of human beings and their activities change over time. There can be a drift to the north, south, east



Plate 1.1 Black marble: Europe, the Middle East, and Africa by night. Source: NASAWorldview.

and/or west. **Centrifugal forces** can drive human beings together and create clusters, concentrations, and agglomerations whilst **centripetal forces** can disperse human beings and distribute human activities over a wider area. Patterns can dissolve and recrystallize.

Place: What is it like in particular locations? Human geographers are also interested in finding out what locations are actually like to live and work in and to visit. How have human beings converted this or that patch of the earth's surface into a home? Human geographers examine how human culture (population, economy, government, race, religion, ethnicity, class, gender, language, and so on) develops differently in different places. They believe that human beings attach emotions, significances, and values to places and in so doing turn empty locations and environments into intensely meaningful places. They use the idea of the **cultural landscape** to capture the ways in which human cultures etch their imprints onto the face of the earth. For context, human geographers are also interested in the physical characteristics of places including the geological, hydrological, atmospheric, and biological processes which collectively define the local physical environment.

Human/Environment Interaction: What is the relationship between humans and their environment? In making earth home, human beings necessarily enter into relationships with the natural environment. Societies exist by metabolizing resources from their surrounding natural environments and in so doing create an **ecological footprint**, but natural environments, and in particular environmental hazards, exert a reciprocal influence over their trajectories. Human geographers examine how societies use natural resources (for example, soils, water, oil, and minerals), how in so doing they often pollute the environment (for example, effect climate change, poison rivers, and salinate soils), and how natural hazards

(such as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, and droughts) can become social, political, economic, and cultural disasters.

Movement: How and why are places connected with one another? Societies are increasingly becoming interconnected with one another, meaning that it makes sense to study places only in relation to the wider networks in which they are enmeshed. Human geographers use the idea of diffusion to track the spread of humans and their activities and ideas from a particular origin or a hearth. Relocation diffusion refers to the physical relocation of people (migrants, refugees, and tourists), pollutants, trade, capital, disease, and aid, from a central hearth. Expansion diffusion refers to the spread of an idea, piece of information, or culture from one place to another. Interconnections between places are often structured around power relationships which are hierarchical. Often one place meddles in the affairs of another motivated principally by self-interest. As places interact a **hierarchical network** often forms, in which only dominant places (or command and control nodes) get to orchestrate the direction of movements.

Regions: How and why is one area similar to another? Human geographers often group places that share particular characteristics into larger regions. Regions can vary enormously in **scale**. Regions can be formal, functional, or vernacular. Formal regions are those that are designated by official boundaries, such as countries, local authorities, states, counties, and parishes. Functional regions are those that are held together by social and economic processes; for example, major cities are often said to be part of a wider functional region that includes suppliers, customers, and workers drawn into the life of the city from the hinterland. Vernacular regions are regions that exist principally in the imagination. They may lack any official status but nevertheless they are popularly imagined to exist as powerful entities; examples include the West, Asia, the Islamic world, the Baltic countries, the Caucasuses, Latin America, and so on.

We might say, then, that the mission of Human Geography is to describe and explain how and why human beings locate themselves and their activities unevenly over the earth's surface, create distinctive places, generate various kinds of ecological footprints, connect places into webs and networks, and invent regions of various scales (see Zoom-in Box 1.2).

The Rise, Reign, and Faltering of Western Civilization from the Fifteenth Century in the Making of the Modern World

The mission of Human Geography is to describe and explain variations from place to place in the ways in which human beings have inhabited the face of the earth. But how might one go about making sense of these variations? What explanatory frameworks might guide us? Although one of the first books of this ilk to be written for beginner undergraduates, this book forms part of a growing tradition of human geographical writing which places front and center the role of the rise, reign, and faltering of Western civilization from the fifteenth century in the making of the world.

Zoom-in Box 1.2: Five Key Themes in Human Geography: The Case of London

A useful way to become more familiar with the five key themes in Human Geography is to apply them to particular places. Start with the place you call home and then – if different – the place you are currently studying in. How might you use the five key themes to make sense of the Human Geography of both places? In what ways might the ideas of location, place, human–environment interactions, movement, and region help you to gain a better appreciation of these places? Practice your technique by undertaking similar exercises for places that interest you.

By way of example let us take the case of London, in the United Kingdom.

Location: London is located in the South East of England and its absolute location is Latitude 51°30'30" N and Longitude 0°07'32" W. London's relative location can be defined in terms of its embroilment in the Age of European Empire, its relationship (as a capital city) to the rest of the United Kingdom, its proximity to the European Union, and its location with respect to the global economy.

Place: London is located in the temperate lands of the Global North and enjoys a mild climatic regime which is neither too cold nor too hot during any season, nor normally too dry or too wet. It is a city with approximately 8.3 million inhabitants. The landscape, urban design, iconic buildings, and majestic parks speak of London's role as former capital city overseeing the British Empire. As home to the British Parliament, London remains a key political center and site of power. Recently, it has consolidated its status as a leading financial center in the world economy, housing the largest banks, pension funds, and insurance companies, and a globally significant stock exchange. But like any global city, London has its fair share of low paid, poor, and underprivileged communities, many of whom work as unskilled laborers in the service industries.

Human–Environment interactions: As a world city with a surging economy and large population, London has an enormous ecological footprint. London is a thirsty city and draws water primarily from the River Thames and the River Lea. Antiquated infrastructure, however, ensures that supply systems are beset by wasteful leakages. Notwithstanding the comparative decline in recent years in the manufacturing industry and growth in the service industries, as the engine in the United Kingdom economy London still produces a significant quantity of greenhouse gases. Air pollution remains a problem. Moreover, London secretes enormous amounts of waste; currently London recycles and reuses nearly two thirds of all its waste but alas less than a quarter of **Municipal Solid Waste (MSW)** is recycled or reused. Landfill and incineration continue to be overused solutions and present environmental risks. London remains at risk from flooding but

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Box 1.2 *(Continued)*

flood defense systems introduced along the River Thames have to an extent mitigated these risks.

Movement: London is a key node in large-scale flows of people, trade, culture, information, investment, and finance. London plays a command and control role in networks of global finance, connecting with other leading financial centers around the globe and lending to and trading on behalf of capitalists and governments based in economies all around the world. London houses migrants from the four corners of the world. These migrants bring with them cultures which enrich the life of the city. They also stay connected with their countries of origin (through remittances, social media, visits, investment, philanthropy, voting, etc.) making London a point of origin for complex transnational flows. Londoners also consume products from around the world, and these goods are shipped in through British ports and routed through airports via a restless supply chain. Finally, with world-class airports and attractions such Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, and the Houses of Parliament, London is a magnet for tourists.

Region: London forms part of a number of regions of different scale, including Greater London, England, the United Kingdom, the European Union, the British Commonwealth, and finally the West.

To some this starting point might appear a little strange. This is, after all, a book about Human Geography and not human history. That is until it is realized that it is impossible to make sense of how human beings have inhabited the surface of the earth (their location and distribution over the earth's surface, the places they have crafted, their ecological footprints, the movements, webs and networks they have contrived, and the regions they have willed into existence), without paying attention to the West's ascent to the pinnacle of world history from the fifteenth century, its subsequent supremacy for over 500 years, and its precarious dominance over global affairs today. In important ways, it remains the case that to study the historical development of any world region, including its principal demographic, social, cultural, economic, technological, political, and environmental features, is to study how that region figured in the story of the rise, reign, and faltering of the West as a global superpower (see Zoom-in Box 1.3).

We will certainly have cause to question the integrity and coherence of the very idea of "Western civilization" throughout this book. Indeed, arguably there is no more slippery a word in the English language than the "West." There are, it seems, as many "Wests" as there are commentators. But this should not stop us from recognizing that from the fifteenth century a number of dramatic intellectual, social, cultural, political, and economic changes coalesced in Europe and propelled European, and then later other countries, to a position of global dominance. These changes were given first life by the European Renaissance, the

Zoom-in Box 1.3: Denis E Cosgrove's Plea for Historical Understanding

Denis E Cosgrove was a British historical and cultural geographer. His core concern was with the history of Western ways of thinking about landscapes, regions, and places – and in later years the whole of planet earth. His musings focused initially upon cultures in early modern Europe (1450–1650 – his early work, for instance, sought to understand landscape design, depiction, and modification in sixteenth-century Renaissance Venice) but toward the end of his life his focus broadened to include cultural imaginings in twentieth-century Rome and to twentieth-century popular cultural images of the globe. This led him to an awareness of the role of the ascendancy of the West, and in particular the European capitalist economy, in the making of popular views, perceptions, and images of regions, places, landscapes, and eventually the globe itself.

According to Cosgrove, the rise of the West was a world historical event that ought to be central to geographical enquiry. Consider his opening remarks in his 1984 book *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*:

Between 1400 and 1900 much of Europe and the society it founded in North America were progressing towards a characteristic form of social and economic organisation which we now term capitalist. ... In developing a capitalist mode of production Europeans established and achieved a dominance over a global economy and a global division of labour which remains a critical determinant of our present social and economic geography. The European transition from societies dominated by feudal social relations and their associated cultural assumptions to capitalist centrality in a worldwide system of production and exchange is a phenomenon of central historical importance in making sense of our own world. We understand a great deal about many of the fundamental features of the change: its associated demographic trends, alterations in agricultural and commodity production, the political reorganisation of peoples and territories, and the changing relations between individuals, groups, and classes. Whatever the specific focus of historical attention, it is the internal reorganisation and outward expansion of European societies, gathering pace throughout the period, which insistently compels historical enquiry and demands historical understanding. (Cosgrove, 1984: 2–3)

Like Cosgrove, this book too insists that historical enquiry is central to Human Geography. Like Cosgrove, it too argues that to understand the Human Geography of the world today it is necessary to study the ways in which the rise of European society from the fifteenth century has profoundly shaped (but clearly not determined) the fate of all world regions. This book seeks to convince you that Cosgrove's view of the world remains as relevant and vital today as it did in 1984.

Protestant Reformation, and the Age of Reason or European Enlightenment. They bore witness to the rise of European modernity and a new tradition of Western **utopian** thought. At Westphalia (in Germany) they stimulated the formation of sovereign nation states and, through the Age of Revolutions, witnessed the rise of liberal democracy (where political rulers are voted in and out in free and open elections and on the basis of mass enfranchisement). At their heart were the development of free-market capitalist economic systems (based upon private ownership of property and systems of production, distribution, and consumption), the industrial revolution, and the rise of a global capitalist economy. Through the European Age of Exploration and the Age of European Empires, they presided over the rapacious march of European countries to the four corners of the world.

As these developments unfolded, a number of powers (incorporating countries we recognize today as Portugal, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Russia, and the United Kingdom) steadily broke from the pack and collectively climbed to the summit of world history. For 500 years these countries came to dominate world affairs. Through exploration, colonization, and exploitation of Latin America, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and the Polar Regions, they expanded their prowess and exerted their will over the entire world. The fate of other civilizations became inextricably intertwined with their fate. Through mass emigration from Europe to the New World, they were subsequently to be joined, and in some instances trumped, by their offshoots, the newer Western countries of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Meanwhile, from the eighteenth century, and under the influence of the Netherlands, Japan began its Datsu-A Ron (“leaving of Asia” or “Good-bye Asia”) and became Asia’s leading pioneer of **Occidentalism**. Thereafter through all sorts of complex and tortuous routes, and to varying degrees, other countries too embraced the ways of the West.

From the mid-twentieth century onward the ascent of the West began to peter out and, indeed, according to some, the West began to degenerate. Perhaps the most visible sign of the West’s reversal of fortunes was the collapse of the European imperial project. **Decolonization**, which had begun in Latin America from the late eighteenth century, swept across Asia and Africa, and Europe was forced into retreat. From the mid-1970s onward, on virtually every measure of development, the gap between the West and most of Latin America, Asia, and even parts of Africa began to narrow. Today the West’s flagship nation, the United States, would appear to be losing ground to the Brici countries. Perhaps the second half of the twenty-first century will belong to China. Meanwhile, the West is being forced in a variety of ways to reap the harvest of its past misdeeds in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. All the while, anticolonial movements, perhaps wearing the clothes of radical Islam, continue to remind the West that many around the world perceive it to be a rapacious and abusive power.

It is undoubtedly premature to announce the death of the West and in no sense is the decline of the West irreversible or inevitable. But in an important sense our world is a world currently coming to terms with the fate of a civilization which for 500 years directed global affairs but which is now struggling to maintain its dominance (see Zoom-in Box 1.4).

Zoom-in Box 1.4: An Image of the World Today? **The Monument to the Discoveries, Lisbon, Portugal**

Standing proudly on the northern bank of the River Tagus in the city of Lisbon is the famous Portuguese Monument to the Discoveries (Plate 1.2). This monument commemorates Portugal's pioneering role in the European Age of Discovery; that period commencing in the fifteenth century when European explorers began to venture forth and to discover the existence of lands in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Polar Regions.

At the head of the monument sits Prince Henry the Navigator (1394–1460), inventor of modern seafaring navigation and founding father of the European Age of Discoveries. Among the many other Portuguese luminaries to feature on the monument are: Vasco da Gama (1460–1524, pioneer of shipping routes between Europe and India); Pedro Álvares Cabral (1467–1520, the first European to discover Brazil); Bartolomeu Dias (1451–1500, the first European to sail through the Cape of Good Hope); and, Diogo Cão (1452–1485, whose explorations in Africa revealed to Europeans the existence of the Congo River).

Portuguese exploration raised awareness of the potential riches which might be procured from the colonization and domination of lands that lay beyond the horizon. Perhaps not unexpectedly, Portugal emerged thereafter as a global power, presiding over a vast empire that reached into the four corners of the world. Portugal's most famous colonies included Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé, Príncipe, Goa, East Timor, and Macau.

But the Monument to the Discoveries is far from a symbol of Portuguese greatness. Initially designed as a showpiece for the World Fair held in Lisbon in 1940, the Monument was eventually built in the late 1950s and unveiled in 1960, during the **Estado Novo**, Portugal's so-called Second Republic. Under the reign of António de Oliveira Salazar, Prime Minister of Portugal from 1932 to 1968, the Estado Novo was a Roman Catholic, conservative, authoritarian, and nationalistic regime which bemoaned the loss of Portuguese influence in the world. Salazar's mission was to return Portugal to the halcyon and glory days of old.

By 1960, of course, many colonies had gained independence, and other countries in Europe were actively preparing to downsize their empires. Salazar, in contrast, was determined to stand alone and to defend what remained. In particular, he displayed a dogged refusal to cede any of the remaining Portuguese colonies in Africa. His quest was to be in vain. By 1975, Portugal had lost its last two jewels in the imperial crown, Angola and Mozambique. The winds of change could not be arrested or reversed.

The Monument to the Discoveries, then, was a statement of defiance in the wake of a crumbling empire. It sought to revel in the achievements of Portuguese explorers at precisely that point in time when the sun was setting on the Portuguese empire. At once a celebration of Portugal's ascendance

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Box 1.4 *(Continued)*

and global dominance and a desperate act of vanity by a nation in the throes of decline, in an important sense, the story of the Monument to the Discoveries captures exactly the state of the world as it presents itself today.



Plate 1.2 Monument to the Discoveries, Lisbon, Portugal. Source: © Atlantide Phototravel/Corbis.

How to Read This Book

This book will be structured as follows. Chapter 2 will provide you with a brief history of Human Geography and will introduce you to the idea that Human Geography itself is a child of Western civilization and to this day remains a quintessential Western subject. Chapter 3 will examine key watersheds in human history that preceded and made possible the rise of the West. It will explore environmental history explanations which hold that the deep origins of the West's ascendance and dominance lie in the head start **Eurasia** secured at the time of the Neolithic Revolution from as early as the tenth century BCE. The purpose of the remaining chapters will be to show you the ways in which the story of the West's rise, reign, and faltering has become intertwined and interlaced with key geographical processes and has shaped their outcome. Specifically, it will reveal the ways in which the rise, reign, and faltering of the West triggered and shaped: the establishment of **capitalism** as an economic system, the formation of a world capitalist economy, and the engraving of uneven development across the surface of the earth (Chapter 4); the innovation of the sovereign nation state and liberal

democracy, the violent colonization of and command over by European nation states large parts of Latin America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Polar Regions, and the postcolonial geopolitical order which is emerging today (Chapter 5); civilizing missions evangelizing the myth that “West is best” and resulting culture wars over what constitutes civilized spaces and unruly places (Chapter 6); a dramatic rise in world population and a redistribution of human beings across the earth’s surface (Chapter 7); the super-exploitation by human beings of the earth’s resources and a historically unprecedented ecological footprint (Chapter 8); **urbanization** and the emergence of a new generation of megacities (Chapter 9); patterns of migration, migrant experiences in host countries, and transnational ties within and between countries in the Global South and the Global North (Chapter 10); and, notwithstanding a new mastery over the natural environment, the heightened exposure of whole new swathes of humanity to natural hazards (Chapter 11). Chapter 12, the conclusion, will draw upon earlier chapters in the book and will ruminate on the topic of explanation in Human Geography. It will argue that, to the extent to which the West has made it what it is, Human Geography offers an indispensable but inadequate set of tools through which sense might be made of the world. A postcolonial future for Human Geography will be advocated.

Three points should be borne in mind whilst reading this textbook. First, this book has been written with a particular chronological sequence in mind (see Figure 1.1). But in no sense should you assume that the sequencing of chapters settled on implies a simple causal chain, with processes examined in any particular chapter being “explained” by processes introduced in prior chapters. Indeed, the sequence presented need not be strictly followed by instructors or students. An introduction to the past, present, and future of Human Geography as an academic

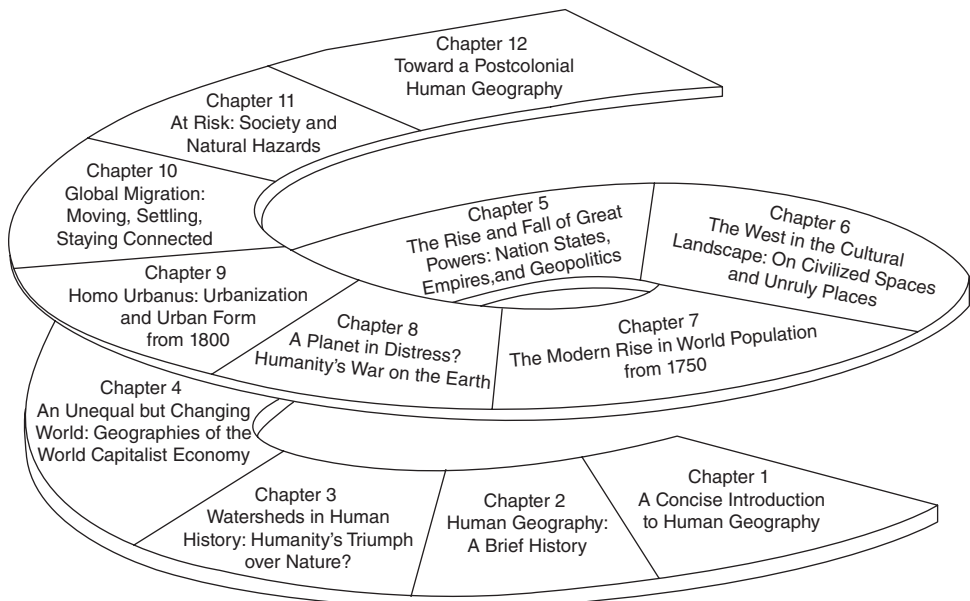


Figure 1.1 The story of the rise, reign, and faltering of Western civilization and the making of the contemporary world.

discipline provides a suitable foundation for the book (Chapter 2). Moreover, it is my view that human history (Chapter 3) provides a useful context within which to study the rise of the European capitalist economy (Chapter 4), and that both provide a backdrop against which the rise of European empires (Chapter 5) and the rapacious march of Western culture to the four corners of the world (Chapter 6) might be better understood. In turn, this bundle of chapters helps to inform understandings of the modern rise in world population (Chapter 7), the unprecedented pressures which humanity is now placing on the earth's resources and ecosystems (Chapter 8), the urbanization of the surface of the earth (Chapter 9), the growing scale of international migration and the routes traversed by such migrants (Chapter 10), and the uneven vulnerability of people in different parts of the world to natural hazards (Chapter 11). And the above together make the conclusion reached in the final chapter (Chapter 12) possible. But no single process is necessarily antecedent or more of a progenitor of history than any other and no chapter is intrinsically better as a point of departure or logically prior to any other. Moreover, if you find it difficult to master any single chapter, fear not; each chapter is in a sense autonomous from the rest and can be read and digested on its own merits.

Second, Chapters 3 to 11 have been written so as to introduce you to core themes within systematic branches of Human Geography (see Figure 1.2). And so, for instance, in addition to providing you with a snapshot overview of key watersheds in human history, Chapter 3 will also familiarize you with core ideas within Environmental History. In turn, Chapter 4 will furnish you with an induction on Economic Geography; Chapter 5, Political Geography; Chapter 6, Cultural Geography; Chapter 7, Population Geography; Chapter 8, Environmental/Resource Geography; Chapter 9, Urban Geography; Chapter 10, the Geography of Migration; and finally, Chapter 11, the Geography of Hazards. Because these

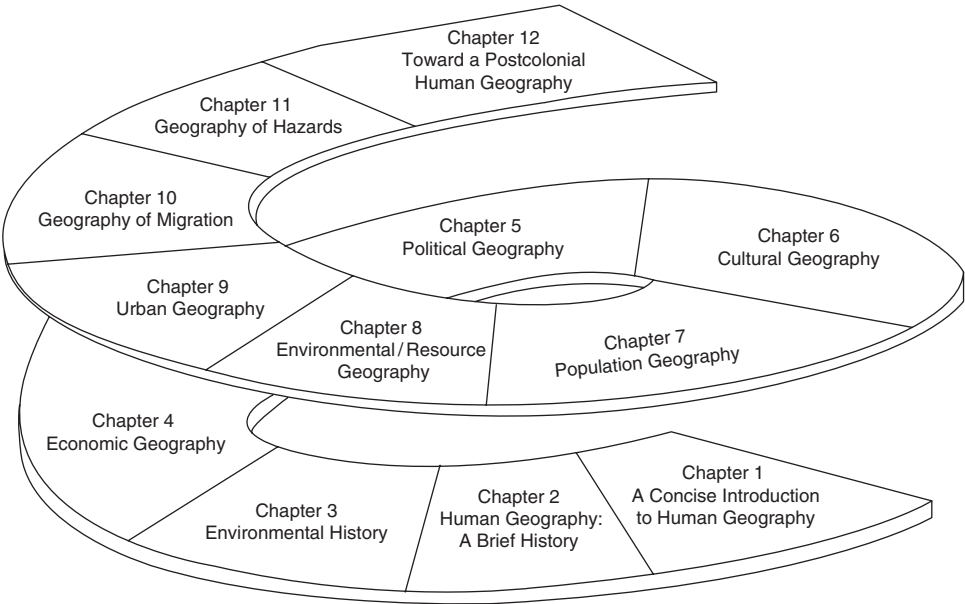


Figure 1.2 Systematic branches of Human Geography engaged in each chapter.

systematic branches of Human Geography are being introduced in and through the story of the rise, reign, and faltering of Western civilization, in no sense will a comprehensive coverage of each be presented. Moreover, whilst incorporated in different ways into different chapters, no single chapter has been dedicated to such systematic branches of Human Geography as Rural Geography, the Geography of Health, or the Geography of Tourism. Nevertheless, the intention is that by the end of the book you will know more about the key ideas that undergird some of Human Geography's most important subfields.

Finally, insofar as it places the story of the past, present, and future of Human Geography under scrutiny, Chapter 2 provides a fitting introduction for the book. I believe it is important that an introductory textbook should furnish students with an opportunity for taking stock of Human Geography's heritage, biography, and future aspirations. But Chapter 2 treats Human Geography itself as an object of study in a way that is consonant with the overall framework of the book. In my view, a solid understanding of the rise, reign, and faltering of Western civilization is necessary before it is possible to appreciate the history and philosophy of the discipline of Human Geography. As you will see, in many ways Human Geography is a child of the West and to this day remains in important respects a quintessential Western subject. Human Geography is both a product of and has contributed variously to the rise, reign, and faltering of the West from the fifteenth century. Today, its central challenge is to become less ethnocentric and **Western-centric** and more capable of rendering the world intelligible from other vantage points. Locating this chapter at the outset, then, is a little problematic. You may need to understand Chapters 1 and 3 to 12 if you are to properly grasp the story of the birth, development, and aspirations of Human Geography. For this reason, Chapter 2 is perhaps best read as a floating chapter, to be engaged with repeatedly as you digest each subsequent chapter. Certainly, it ought to be revisited at the end of the book when its full meaning might be culled.

Conclusion

The purpose of the book is to help you register, nourish, expand, and fortify your geographical imagination. The mission of Human Geography is to describe and explain the irregular distribution of human activity over the face of the earth (location), the variety of places which are emerging today (place), the ecological footprint which society is now creating (human–environment interactions), interconnections between places forged as people (migrants, refugees, tourists), information, trade, capital, aid, and culture circulate around the world (movement) and the organization of the world into distinctive regions (region). In seeking to describe and explain the ways in which human beings currently inhabit planet earth this book takes seriously the role of the rise, reign, and faltering of the West from the fifteenth century in the fashioning of the modern world. Historical enquiry is central to Human Geography. To understand why our world can be described as unequal and unfair but amidst a process of rebalance and change, it is necessary to situate the present with respect to events which have unfolded in the past or at least whose roots lie in the past.

Checklist of Key Ideas

Key ideas to take from this chapter include the following:

- 1) Everyone has a geographical imagination, that is, a mental map of the different ways in which human beings have occupied the surface of the earth in different parts of the world. Becoming conscious of one's own geographical imagination is a prelude to strengthening and cultivating that imagination through formal education.
- 2) Human Geography is at root a discipline which seeks to describe and explain the differentiation of human activity across the face of the earth. Human Geography has five central concerns: the location of human beings and their activities; the places human beings create; the relationships human beings have with their surrounding environment; the movements generated by human activities and the interconnections between places which result; and the regions human beings invent.
- 3) This book places front and center the role of the rise, reign, and faltering of the West from fifteenth century in the making of the modern world.
- 4) This book is written around 12 chapters which will introduce you to the role of the rise, reign, and faltering on the West in the forging of the contemporary world, and which will also provide you with an introduction to key systematic branches of study within Human Geography. Although sequenced in a way intended to be helpful to you, in principle it ought to be possible for you to read any particular chapter as a standalone entity and to read chapters in any order. Chapter 2 is a distinctive chapter in that it introduces you to past and present schools of thought within Human Geography and reflects upon the direction in which the subject is going.

Chapter Essay Questions

- a) Write an essay titled: "My Geographical Imagination." Include in this essay a commentary on the ways in which the place in which you were born and the places in which you have lived might have played a role in shaping your mental map of the world.
- b) Provide a definition of Human Geography and outline and comment upon Human Geography's five key concerns. Using these five key concerns, describe the Human Geography of the area in which you live.
- c) The story of the rise of the West from the fifteenth century and its role in the making of the modern world is of central interest to human geographers. Discuss.

References

- Cosgrove D E (1984) *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Croom Helm, London).
- Lanegrn D A and Natoli S (1984) *Guidelines for Geographic Education in the Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Association of American Geographers, Washington, DC).

Guidance for Further Reading

Coverage of the five central concerns of Human Geography can be found in:

Lanegrn D A and Natoli S (1984) *Guidelines for Geographic Education in the Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Association of American Geographers, Washington, DC).

An excellent book tackling the fundamental question, what is Human Geography? is provided by: Bonnett A (2008) *What is Geography* (Sage, London).

Whilst this book provides you with a short introduction to Human Geography, longer introductions to the subject can be found in:

Cloke P, Crang M, and Goodwin M (eds.) (2014) *Introducing Human Geographies* (3rd edition) (Routledge, London).

Daniels P, Bradshaw M, Shaw D, and Sidaway J (2012) *An Introduction to Human Geography: Issues for the 21st Century* (4th edition) (Pearson, New Jersey).

Fouberg E H, Murphy A B, and de Blij H J (2012) *Human Geography: People, Place, And Culture* (10th edition) (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester).

Knox P and Marston S (2012) *Places and Regions in Global Context: Human Geography* (6th edition) (Pearson, New Jersey).

Norton W (2013) *Human Geography* (8th edition) (Oxford University Press, Cary, NC).

Rubenstein J M (2012) *Contemporary Human Geography* (2nd edition) (Pearson, New Jersey).

Rubenstein J M (2013) *The Cultural Landscape: Introduction to Human Geography* (11th edition) (Pearson, New Jersey).

An excellent introduction to Human–Environment interactions from a geographical perspective is provided in:

Moseley W G, Perramond E, Hapke H M, and Laris P (2014) *An Introduction to Human–Environment Geography* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester).

Short introductions to Human Geography which adopt very different approaches to the one adopted in this book can be found in:

Jones A (2012) *Human Geography: The Basics* (Routledge, London).

Short J R (2014) *Human Geography: A Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, Cary, NC).

Excellent resources for students wishing to explore the full breadth of Human Geography include:

Agnew J A and Duncan J S (2011) *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Human Geography* (Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford).

Castree N and Gregory D (eds.) (2011) *Human Geography: Major Works in Social Science, the Humanities and the Physical Sciences* (Sage, New Delhi).

Kitchin R, Thrift N, Castree N *et al.* (eds.) (2009) *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (Elsevier, Amsterdam).

Kuby M, Harner J, and Gober P (2013) *Human Geography in Action* (6th edition) (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester).

Lee R, Castree N, Kitchin R *et al.* (eds.) (2014) *The SAGE Handbook of Human Geography* (Sage, London).

Students wanting to learn more about key thinkers and seminal works in the discipline should consult:

Hubbard P, Kitchin R, and Valentine G (eds.) (2011) *Key Thinkers in Space and Place* (2nd edition) (Sage, London).

For definitions and discussions of key ideas in Human Geography students might find it useful to consult:

Gregory D, Johnson R, Pratt G *et al.* (eds. (2009) *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (5th edition) (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester).

Rogers A, Castree C, and Kitchin R (2013) *A Dictionary of Human Geography* (Oxford University Press, Oxford).

For insights into the kinds of careers human geographers often follow see:

Solem M, Foote K, and Monk J (2012) *Practicing Geography: Careers for Enhancing Science and Society and Environment* (Pearson, London).

For guidance on how to research and write essays in Human Geography see:

Northey N, Knight D B, and Draper D (2012) *Making Sense in Geography and Environmental Sciences: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing* (5th edition) (Oxford University Press, New York).

For practical exercises illustrating Human Geography in action see:

Noble B, Hackett P, and Gunn J (2013) *Lab Manual to Accompany William Norton's Human Geography* (8th edition) (Oxford University Press, Cary, NC).

Website Support Material

A range of links to useful websites are available from the Wiley website: www.wiley.com/go/boyle. Students are strongly encouraged to visit the Wiley website and to follow up on these links if they wish to explore the themes discussed in this chapter in greater depth.