Chapter 1

Introduction

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Contemporary human geography in the English-speaking world is amazingly pluralistic in terms of its objectives, subject matter, theories, and methods. This is judged by some as a negative: the field is "a doughnut with a hole in the middle" because there is no agreement about some central theory or method, usually that preferred by the critic in question. A tendency to laud the most recent and fashionable ideas is similarly put in a dim light. On a more positive note, it is the very absence of a disciplining orthodoxy and the openness to fresh thinking that now makes the field so interesting to a broader audience. Indeed, the flow of influence of the field on others has increased as it has developed its own heterodox ideas about landscape, environment, space, and place rather than engaged in imitating biology, economics, or whatever other field by adopting their current orthodoxies. In our view, the reason for this is not hard to fathom. What seems undeniable is that we all live in a world in which geographic space has been subject to considerable social, economic, and political reformulation and as a consequence how we think about it must also change. If Michel Lussault's (2009) adage of *De la lutte des classes à la lutte des places* (perhaps best translated as "from class struggle to the struggle of how one fits into the new global spatiality of places") probably overstates the increased importance of place-to-place differences in a globalizing world and the degree to which the basis to many old conflicts has been transcended, it nevertheless captures the sense that old theoretical frameworks are not necessarily up to the task of dealing with new "realities." This is the paramount reason for the growth of new ways of thinking in human geography that also appeal to those in fields like literary studies, sociology, economics, international relations, and cultural anthropology. But some conventional approaches are also in crisis because collectively we have become aware of the degree to which established methods of mapping the world and theorizing about it reflect political-economic and technological eras

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that are passing away. There is much discussion, for example, of the "crisis of cartographic reason" (e.g. Harley 1987; Farinelli 2009) and the unreliability of geographical fieldwork (e.g. Gerber and Goh 2000; Driver 2000). Human Geography has gone through a veritable renaissance over the past twenty years because its pluralization signifies the advent of new ways of thinking about environment, space, and place that help us "read" and engage with the changing world around us and engage with critiques of previously dominant practice (Lévy 1999).

The purpose of this volume is to survey the history and contemporary character of the field of human geography in the English-speaking world over a fairly long time period but with a definite emphasis on the contemporary. From the outset, we make no pretense to cover physical geography or contemporary non-English language human geography, except insofar as they have had direct impacts in this world. The book is designed to supplement rather than compete with the other *Blackwell Companions* addressing such sub-fields of human geography as economic, political, and cultural geography by surveying theoretical trends and substantive emphases that have influenced and shaped all of them. Given this focus, the volume will give considerable attention to historical context as well as to contemporary themes. Much of the concentration on "key concepts," "key thinkers" and "key trends" in recent publications about the field is missing much if any sense of historical context by which to judge how the present differs from the past. Indeed, a celebratory "presentism" often prevails in which the "new" is valued independently of either how much it contributes to the collective enterprise or how it fits into longer-term trends. But we also want to avoid merely duplicating within one volume the sub-field divisions of other *Companions* and other recent surveys (e.g. Benko and Strohmayer 2004). Thus, beyond chapters that assay the historical legacies of the field, we provide chapters that have a thematic rather than a sub-field orientation.

In both nominalist and more substantive registers, present-day human geography is still worth situating in relation to past efforts at organizing a field as such. There is still such a thing as the "geographical tradition" (Livingstone 1992). Much of what goes for geographic research even now involves some situating or positioning in relation to forebears or intellectual ancestors, if only to show how much they have been "left behind." In counterpoint to the tendency to dismiss the past as irrelevant to current concerns this volume will try to situate present debates and differences in relation to past ones. Consequently, the book will be divided into three sections: *Foundations*, tracing the history of human geography (as defined today) in terms of pre-professional ideas and influences from the ancient Greeks down until the late nineteenth century; *The Classics*, surveying the significant German and French as well as British, US, and other "roots" of later human geography and then emphasizing the creation of an academic discipline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the attempts at providing an intellectual rationale for this initiative; and *Contemporary Approaches*, highlighting the ways in which the field is subdivided and how human geography is practiced today by examining a selection of themes with two different perspectives on each, and the operations of its practitioners in education and the larger world. In this final section we do not aim to have authors confront one another but simply offer their own perspectives on the same theme. The purpose is to emphasize divergent interpretations

against the tendency to offer interpretations that suggest a general consensus of opinion or a uniform account of what has been happening over the past twenty years or so. We want to show the pluralism of the field at the same time we illustrate the degree to which recent trends draw on and legitimize themselves by reference to historic precursors.

Globalization and Human Geography

Globalization is a buzzword for a world that is seen as increasingly stretched, shrunk, interwoven, integrated, and less state-centered than in the past. It thus typically involves a claim about the changing nature of the world. But it also can involve a parallel claim that this world needs new theoretical tools or modes of understanding. Approximately since the 1970s when the US government's abrogation of the 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement liberated major world currencies to float freely against one another, tariff barriers to international trade (particularly in manufactured goods) decreased dramatically, as major corporations began to the see the world as "their oyster," and cultural flows of all sorts started to undermine images of "stability" and "homogeneity" in territorialized national states, past nostrums about social and moral order (typically located at the scale of the national state) have been thrown into question. Particularly significant for a field such as human geography, long sensitive to issues of scale and geographical differentiation, this has proved to be both crisis and opportunity. Often tagged by parallel if somewhat competing terms relating more to the character of theoretical perspectives than to ontological claims about the nature of the world, "postmodernism" and "postcolonialism" are perhaps the most well known, "globalization" has evolved into a complex theoretical notion relating to a significant degree to the overarching question of how cultural and political attachments are actively mediated through space, all the way from the local to the global, and how the complexities of identity in turn affect popular and academic understandings of the world and how it works. It remains contested because of the relative emphasis placed on the source of its "power" and whether it is deployed theoretically more ontologically or epistemologically. So, if the sociologist Ulrich Beck sees globalization as a movement to a totally "new modernity," the anthropologist James Clifford sees it as an emerging world of enhanced "mobility" both geographical and psychological, and the geographer David Harvey views it as an economic process involving strategies of capital investment made possible by new space-shrinking technologies (Harvey 2006). Clearly, Beck and Clifford would be more likely to make the claim for epistemological "new times" than would Harvey.

Critical, then, has been the question of the extent to which old or well established theories and methods can be adapted to the new circumstances or should be sidelined by "completely" novel ones. Understanding the interconnection of local places, ecologies, and cultural practices in global networks of greater and lesser geographical scope has become the leitmotif of the age. This is the context in which debate over the recent past and present of human geography must be situated. As you will see in the bulk of the chapters in the *Contemporary Approaches* section of this book, this is the recurring background condition for much contemporary thinking. Many of the disputes aired out there are based in different responses to how to deal

with the sense of a dramatically changing world. A field such as human geography is not at all like, say, physics, because its very subject matter is contingent on an ever-changing external world of political and economic actors and cultural forms. Arguably, therefore, theoretical frameworks and research methods must change in tandem. That this does not necessarily entail the rise of some new singular theoretical orthodoxy, however, is also an important conclusion of what we have been saying above.

Chronology versus Tradition in Human Geography

Many accounts of the history of human geography are chronological not just in the sense of sets of ideas associated with or seen as dominant in different historical eras but of new ones replacing previous ones in a rigid sequence rather like in a cladistic or tree diagram of the evolution of species (e.g. James 1972; Peet 1998). Time seems to be a causal factor with some approaches becoming more "successful" as they branch off prior ones. This can be read as akin to the notion of "paradigm shifts" developed by Thomas Kuhn to apply to the history of physics. The story of human geography does not seem to fit very well with this conception of intellectual change (Philo 2008). Rather, the field seems to exhibit much more the relative persistence of many approaches over time with different eras associated only with the invention of new ones (and adaptation of old ones) than with the total replacement of older ones. Nevertheless, there are persistent efforts if not only to "stand on the shoulders of giants" (or to cut them down to size) but to situate new approaches in relation to established ones. Thus, the "new" cultural geographies of the 1980s and 1990s explicitly situated themselves in relation to such precursors as Carl Sauer's "old" cultural geography.

Some sort of minimalist chronology, therefore, seems inevitable. In the first several chapters of this book in particular and many of the others more generally the "dating" of some key concepts and arguments is part of what they do. By and large, however, they avoid the tendency to see some kind of teleology or generic progress over time with a new "wave" or avant garde sweeping away previous ones. The focus is much more on how the common "strains" (such as determinism versus agency, conceptions of races, methodological panaceas, understandings of place or region) that crop up repeatedly as part of the arguments in favor of this or that theoretical approach or philosophical position got started and are reproduced. The first chapters do, however, attempt to offer something extra. This is a consideration of what can be called the historical "canon" on which the tradition of human geography (the basic concepts and language, the names of Big Figures, the most famous disputes, the original conceptual grounds, the institutional structures of the field) has been built and in relation to which much contemporary debate and dispute is often situated. Even when not openly acknowledged, therefore, the past of the field, its tradition, enters into subsequent practice.

Three chapters explore the *Foundations* of modern human geography. *Where Geography Came From*, chapter 2 by Peter Burke, goes back to the Greeks. Subsequent chapters focus on the roles of European exploration and colonialism as vital historical contexts for understanding the field both in the past and in the present. Contemporary debates about cartography and fieldwork, for example, have

their roots in these previous epochs. But they are also important in the present day because in many respects globalization represents a challenge to what goes for classical thinking. Yet, as will become clear throughout this book, much geographical thinking about the world remains in many ways trapped in the concepts and orientations of previous eras. The past is never entirely passed. In *The Classics,* six chapters trace the professionalization of human geography in universities beginning in the nineteenth century. Arguably, it is in Germany and France that modern Anglo-American human geography has some of its most important roots. Contemporaneous British and American geographers borrowed heavily from their "continental" colleagues and subsequent generations built their careers around interpretations of seminal German and French thinkers. One thinks, for example, of the American Richard Hartshorne's heavy reliance on the writings of the German Alfred Hettner. Following the chapter on German "precursors" and French "challengers" comes one on the institutionalization and development of human geography in the English-speaking world. This is the story of how the field became a subject in higher education and how it has adapted to the increasing emphasis on "research" at the expense of the teaching (and exploration) that were long seen as its central activities. Finally, two of the great intellectual disputes in the history of the field then take center stage: the argument over whether landscape or region should be the central concept of the field (beginning in the 1920s) and the dispute over region versus space (beginning in the 1950s). With these two sets of disputes we begin our innovation of having two chapters each offering a distinctive perspective, in this case on each of the disputes in question.

Politics of Human Geography

A serious danger lies in seeing the development of the field in an entirely naturalistic light (as if it just evolved) without attending to the ways in various structured choices have always entered into decisions about different approaches. A range of influences have been proposed as critical to the origin, persistence, and relative fading of different theories, methods, and broad philosophical orientations. New ideas never arise in a politico-social vacuum. There are geopolitical, institutional, and micro-political bases to the success or failure, persistence or decline of different idea-complexes. Geopolitical hierarchies make some ideas more equal than others (e.g. Agnew 2007). It seems clear, for example, that ideas generated in US universities (particularly ones with prestigious reputations) tend these days to be more successful, other things being equal, than those generated in more "lowly" intellectual centers. Not surprisingly, then, centers of intellectual initiative in the history of human geography also have shifted, if with some lag, as geopolitical hierarchies are shuffled. Studies of influential figures in contemporary human geography using citation factors, for example, show a high positive correlation with ranking of universities. As is well known, currently most of the world's highest ranking universities are in the US and UK.

At the institutional level, some fields and theories are heavily sponsored and successful whereas others must fight for survival. What we have in mind here is the degree to which dependence of universities on external funding directs not only research but also the very academic division of labor itself. In the Cold War historical

context of the US, for example, an entire intellectual division of labor arose in response to the US government's desire to fight Soviet Communism through dividing the world into zones (the so-called Three Worlds) in which different academic disciplines were to be differentially invested. Mainstream economics, political science, and sociology were designated to study the premier "modern" First World of the US and its western allies, whereas various "specialties" were trained to study the ideologized Second World of the Soviet Union and its allies and the "development" problems of the "traditional" Third World. "Special" theories and methods were needed to study the latter two Worlds, while "normal" positivist or law-like behavior being held to characterize the First, no such specialization was needed (Pletsch 1981). Human geography never fit very well into this framework. So, arguably the end of the Cold War has been a godsend for the field, if only because the "frozen" zones and national borders of that time have now once again been put in motion.

Finally, within fields themselves there are hierarchies of influentials and departmental rankings (and cultures) that affect the flows and persistence of ideas. Knowledge tends to pool up in different places and different strands become identified with them rather than easily transferred from one place to another (Meusburger 2008). "Filters" of various sorts – cultural, economic, and psychological – interfere with the ready transfer everywhere of codes of knowledge and the reputational backing that come from being associated with knowledge production in particular milieux. But different theories and methods (even schools) are closely associated with different places. Some of this tendency can be put down to a so-called intellectual "tribalism" in which scholars are inducted into specific norms that include training in particular methods and theories that they then go on to reproduce in their own careers (Campbell 1979; Johnston 2006). This can also involve defending "turf" against competitors and promoting those who conform rather than those who represent some alternative framework or approach. But the emphasis on defining and defending intellectual turf is also encouraged by institutional mechanisms of various sorts. For example, the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK has had the effect of encouraging claims to novelty in much publication because of the weighting given to so-called innovative as opposed to follow-up research. Because of the metrics used it also encourages a vast amount of self-citation and the citation of others in your particular camp publishing in your journals. One ancillary impact has been to discourage longer-term research projects and the monographs typically associated with them (Harvey 2006). Another has been to encourage the professionalization and specialization of publication at the expense of publishing for more popular audiences in more understandable language as was once apparently much more the case (Downs 2010). Geography's presumed "accessibility" to the public, written in ordinary language dealing with observable facts, has, from this point of view, been more curse than blessing.

Thematic Foci

Inevitably, selecting themes for a book such as this is fraught with difficulty. We have chosen those which have been both the subject of most debate over the past ten years from our different positions in Britain and the United States and which also have entertained some of the most sophisticated discussion from the viewpoint

of theoretical differences. Obviously, two other people might have come up with themes (and labels) somewhat different from ours. We would like to believe, however, that the ones we have chosen, and the authors we have selected to write about them, give an excellent flavor of the current state of Anglo-American human geography. We have not directed authors to contest with one another nor have we tried to find authors who would provide starkly alternative views on a given theme or about how it has been engaged. In line with previous discussion about the current period as one of globalization we have selected some themes that resonate strongly with that whole broader debate but we have also included some much longer standing themes that are now being addressed in distinctive ways from how they tended to be thirty to forty years ago. Because each theme has two separate authors writing from their own perspectives we would want to emphasize the extent to which this gives a possibly richer reading of the particular themes than would either a collaborative chapter or a single one, however comprehensive.

By way of organization, we have sorted the chapters into four broad categories. The first consists of some themes (nature, landscape, place, territory) that have long been central to but that have also long bedeviled the field. The second are emergent concepts that are redolent of the current wrestling with the presumed effects of globalization (globalization, world cities, governance, mobility, networks and scale). The third grouping consists of chapters about how human geography is engaging with categories that have long loomed large in and across the social sciences and humanities but with new emphases in light of contemporary sensibilities (class, race, sexuality, gender). Finally, we have also included some older themes from the history of human geography that have gone through something of a recent revival of interest (geopolitics, segregation, development).

It is our intention that in reading through the three sections of this book you will acquire a fairly substantial understanding of the early history and institutionalization of human geography as we see it today and a detailed sense of some of the major conceptual disputes and contemporary trends in the field as a whole. Although the whole is intended as greater than the sum of the parts, a book such as this also serves to give hopefully interesting and enlightening overviews of the more specific thematic debates going on in contemporary human geography.

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