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# WHAT IS HUMAN GEOGRAPHY?

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## CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Human geography is one of the world’s oldest academic disciplines, having developed as an area of knowledge as early as the preclassical period.
- Early forms of geographic thought include physical geography as cause, known as “environmental determinism,” as well as the study of human interactions with their environment and the study of the human landscape.
- Contemporary geography has seen a marked separation between human and physical geography.
- Human geography continues to take the approaches of landscape, regional, and spatial analysis.
- Regional geography has increased its awareness of the connectedness of the world (globalization) and has incorporated Marxism to examine the unevenness of development.
- Spatial geography has continued its approach of spatial analysis with quantitative techniques.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- have a broad understanding of how geographic thought developed formally and informally from the preclassical period to the present;
- identify the major contributions to geography from the Greek, Chinese, Islamic, and European civilizations;
- identify the main tools, methods, and techniques that geographers use to gather and frame knowledge;
- distinguish geography from other disciplines in the social sciences;
- understand the differences between human and physical geography; and
- identify the different schools of thought and the major thinkers in geography since the time geography was institutionalized as a discipline to the present.

## KEY TERMS

**Areal differentiation** From Hartshorne, a synonym for “regional geography.” (p. 17)

**Chorology** A Greek term revived by nineteenth-century German geographers as a synonym for “regional geography.” (p. 17)

**Cosmography** The science that maps and describes the entire universe, both heavens and earth; this Greek term is rarely used today. (p. 11)

**Discourse** A system of ideas or knowledge that serves as the context through which new facts and ideas are understood. (p. 5)

**Environmental determinism** The view that human activities are controlled by the physical environment. (p. 15)

**Géographie Vidalienne** French school of geography initiated by Paul Vidal de la Blache at the end of the nineteenth century and still influential today, focusing on the study of human-made (cultural) landscapes. (p. 14)

**Landscape school** American school of geography initiated by Carl Sauer in the 1920s and still influential today; an alternative to environmental determinism, focusing on human-made (cultural) landscapes. (p. 15)

**Landschaftskunde** A German term, introduced in the late nineteenth century, best translated as “landscape science”; refers to geography as the study of the landscapes of particular regions. (p. 15)

**Latitude** Angular distance on the surface of the earth, measured in degrees, minutes, and seconds, north and south of the equator (which is the line of 0° latitude); lines of constant latitude are called parallels. (p. 6)

**Longitude** Angular distance on the surface of the earth, measured in degrees, minutes, and seconds, east and west of the prime meridian (the line of 0° longitude that runs through Greenwich, England); lines of constant longitude are called meridians. (p. 6)

**Possibilism** The view that the environment does not determine either human history or present conditions; rather, humans pursue a course of action that they select from among a number of possibilities. (p. 15)

**Teleology** The doctrine that everything in the world has been designed by God; also refers to the study of purposiveness in the world and to a recurring theme in history, such as progress or class conflict. (p. 6)

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Describe the different traditions of geography as they arose from different civilizations of the world, namely, Greece, China, the Islamic world, and Europe. Outline some of the major differences and similarities.
2. What has been the relationship of the development of scientific knowledge and scientific and mathematical instruments to the development of geographic thought, tools, and techniques?
3. What is the importance of the teachings of Immanuel Kant, Alexander von Humboldt, Carl Ritter, and Paul Vidal to the development of geographic thought? How are their teachings and writings incorporated into contemporary geographical methods and subjects of analysis?
4. How did institutionalization of geography as an academic discipline change the organization of the knowledge held by geographers and their subsequent studies?
5. Describe the contemporary geography approaches of regional studies and spatial analysis. What are the core differences in these approaches and subjects of study? Describe any similarities between them.

## LINKS OF INTEREST

- The Canadian Association of Geographers  
<http://www.cag-acg.ca>
- The Association of American Geographers  
<http://www.aag.org/>
- The International Cartographic Association  
<http://www.icahistcarto.org/>
- Map Societies around the World  
<http://cartography.geo.uu.nl/mapsoc/indexname.html#C>
- National Council for Geographic Education  
<http://www.ncge.org/>
- The Atlas of Canada  
<http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/english/index.html>
- The National Atlas of the United States of America  
<http://www.nationalatlas.gov/natlas/Natlasstart.asp>

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Johnston, R. J., and J. D. Sidaway. 2004. *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography Since 1945*, 6th edn. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

An overview of English-language geography since 1945; thoughtful debate of the role of geography in society.

Martin, G. J. 2005. *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas*, 4th edn. New York: Oxford University Press.

The best comprehensive history of geography, with detailed discussions of geographic developments and early geographers.

Morrill, R. L. 1984. "The Responsibility of Geography," *Annals, Association of American Geography* 74: 1–8.

A thoughtful assessment of the obligations of geographers, including those to society and humanity.

## YOUTUBE VIDEOS

- GeographyHub. 2016. "A Brief History of Cartography and Maps." YouTube video, 7:03. Posted January 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLdvInDrQ2c>
  1. What is cartography responsible for?
    - Cartography shapes how we think about the globe. It allows us to understand our environment.
  2. What did the age of discovery result in?
    - After a 1500 sketch of Caribbean islands, the interest in the "new world" spurred investment in cartography, sciences, and new advances to discover the world.