

DOI:10.1068/a37357

## Editors' reply

### Phil Hubbard

Department of Geography, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leics LE11 3TU, England;  
e-mail: [P.J.Hubbard@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:P.J.Hubbard@lboro.ac.uk)

### Rob Kitchin

National Institute of Regional and Spatial Analysis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth,  
Co. Kildare, Ireland; e-mail [rob.kitchin@may.ie](mailto:rob.kitchin@may.ie)

### Gill Valentine

School of Geography, University of Leeds, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 9JT, England;  
e-mail: [g.valentine@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:g.valentine@leeds.ac.uk)

Received 13 October 2004

First, we would like to thank Mark Boyle for organising this review forum and providing us with the right of reply to the six reviews. Second, we would like to express our gratitude to the reviewers who, from a variety of writing positions, have engaged with our text in a thoughtful and constructively critical way. These reviews provide a useful counterpoint to the book as they open up important questions concerning how the history of geographical thought should be mapped out. Moreover, they detail how and why the biographies and the intellectual genealogies presented in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, and the overall project itself, should be read critically and not simply as fact. We therefore hope that course leaders who use it as a reference text do so in conjunction with these reviews.

Collectively, these reviews also raise a number of important questions about the inclusions and exclusions that characterise *Key Thinkers*, not least the apparent bias towards particular Anglo-American, male, postpositivist thinkers. However, we do not want to offer a point-by-point response to these questions here, partly because space precludes the detailed response that these thoughtful reviews warrant. Indeed, such questions about the representativeness of the individuals profiled in our text are not simply questions about our own positionality and editorial authority, but rather pose wider questions as to whether it is possible to write histories of geography that do justice to the rich diversity of geographical traditions that exist both within and without hegemonic Anglo-American geography. As these questions are being considered more fully elsewhere (Garcia-Ramon, 2003; Lorimer, 2003; Minca, 2000; Monk, 2004; Samers and Sidaway, 2000), here we will merely recount our motivation for editing this book, by way of justifying why we think a book like *Key Thinkers* was worth publishing, despite the obvious dangers of it being read as a uncritical hagiography.

We knew from the outset that *Key Thinkers* would be a fascinating project to work on. Though biographical approaches to documenting disciplinary histories are widespread elsewhere, the absence of such texts in geography meant we were uncertain as to how contributors would approach the task of profiling specific individuals. Rightly, we surmised that a biographical approach would pose particular issues for contributors as they struggled to do justice to the background, career, and key contributions of specific individuals within a rigidly imposed 3500 word limit. Yet all our contributors rose to the challenge, and produced profiles which were often highly nuanced, carefully researched, and shot through with critical insight.

Yet, although the biographies our contributors produced were insightful, the project was troubling and unsettling from its conception. From our first conversation about proposing the book, we were aware that, although there were many merits in such an endeavour, the finished book would inevitably attract criticism. Although we imagined that some would question the inherent merits of a biographical approach, we knew that the criticism was primarily going to be about our selection of thinkers.

---

Foremost in our minds were the kinds of issues that have been flagged up by the reviews published in this issue—questions concerning the dominance of particular Anglo-American traditions, the gender imbalance, the ratio of geographers to non-geographers, the exclusion of certain key practitioners, and so on. Such questions of inclusion and exclusion troubled us greatly, and, consequently, we would wish to refute the accusation that we exercised a “careless power” in our choice of key thinkers. Indeed, we were acutely aware that *our* selection of key thinkers would inevitably be read by many as representing *the* most important thinkers in the discipline. As such, we constantly interrogated our own power, positionality, and authority, mindful of the problems inherent in writing geographical histories from particular vantage points (see especially Kitchin, 2004). So why did we go ahead with the book irrespective of these concerns?

*Key Thinkers* had two primary aims. The first was to provide a pedagogic text that would make the history and philosophy of geographic thought more accessible to undergraduate students. Our own experiences suggest that students find courses on philosophical approaches and traditions in geography both boring and difficult. In part, this is because they find the ‘-ologies’ and ‘-isms’ approach of most textbooks staid, difficult, and abstract, and only engage with philosophical debates when they are grounded in everyday geographies that they can relate to (whether the grand sweep of global geopolitics or the microgeographies of domestic reproduction). Two of us (Hubbard and Kitchin) sought to address this issue in an earlier text (*Thinking Geographically*) cowritten with Brendan Bartley and Duncan Fuller. This text sought to offer a nonparadigmatic history of geographic thought and to demonstrate the difference philosophy makes to geographic thought and praxis by demonstrating how particular geographic concepts (for example, globalisation, governance, finance, the body, texts) have been understood through the lens of particular ideas and philosophies.

On the same lines, we believed (and still do) that a text such as *Key Thinkers* would provide an interesting way of communicating ideas about the unfolding of geographic thought because it is grounded in the lives of academics as people. We should perhaps stress at this point that the book was explicitly aimed at undergraduate students (rather than the faculty inevitably charged by journals with reviewing books). Clearly, there are a number of texts which follow the well-trodden formula of presenting an episodic and paradigmatic history of geographic thought (for example, the books by Johnston, Holt-Jensen, Cloke et al, Unwin, and Peet). *Thinking Geographically* went some way to offering students an alternative way of approaching geographical thought, yet here the ideas and philosophies remained largely disembodied. In *Key Thinkers* we wanted to ‘flesh out’ geographical thought by focusing on intellectual genealogies. Consequently, we would argue that *Key Thinkers* is not a teleological project, as suggested by Mark Purcell’s review. To the contrary, it is the complete opposite. It is a book that tries to trace out genealogies (as opposed to history) to suggest there is no predestined progression of geographic thought. As such, our second major aim was to stress that every geographical idea, theory, or text emerges from a messy (yet traceable) network of people and places, and is a synthesis of charisma and context.

Irrespective of this aim, it was still evident to us that we needed to take difficult decisions about which personalities and genealogies to highlight. After all, a student text of this type would not work if we chose to profile an arbitrary selection of geographers past and present, both celebrated and less well known (though that too might constitute an interesting project). Clearly, we had to profile thinkers acknowledged as pivotal in the definition and conceptualisation of some *key* concepts if the book was going to be read alongside extant courses in philosophies of geography. Our initial aim was therefore to produce a biographical dictionary of

---

human geography. This would have included geographers and nongeographers drawn from different countries, traditions, and centuries with upwards of 350 thinkers. Entries would have been of variable length (between 1000 and 3000 words).

By having such a large list, thinkers representing a wide variety of disciplinary specialisms (for example, economic, social, cultural, political, demographic, health, and development geographies) would have been included. In order to compile such a list of thinkers we approached a number of colleagues in our own and other universities and asked them to produce a list of whom they thought should have entries. We then used these lists to produce a list we felt represented a broad range of disciplinary traditions and theoretical positions. After undertaking this task and writing a proposal we could not find a publisher willing to commission such a book because of its production expense. Sage, however, was interested in contracting the book, but only if it were much reduced in scope. Pragmatically we decided that we would proceed with this offer, with the aim of expanding future editions or producing companions.

Our rationale in trimming the content down to around fifty thinkers (the number the publisher felt was feasible) was to consider the target audience and on what courses the text was likely to be used on. Given the book's main target audience is primarily Anglo-American (a reflection of both our own positionality and the publishers' marketing strategy), we felt that it would be most useful to focus on Anglophone geography. Rightly or wrongly, we would anticipate that students in both the United Kingdom and the United States are expected to read work published in English. Until the works of key thinkers publishing in other languages is translated into English, introducing students to them seems relatively redundant (and remember, we are talking here about undergraduates, not postgraduates or faculty). A further criterion for selection was to focus on those who have made an important contribution to the theorisation of space and place in the last forty years (a rather arbitrary cut-off, yet one based on the judgment that many educators focus on the evolution of geographic thought in the aftermath of the 'quantitative revolution'). This was reflected in the original title: *Key Contemporary Thinkers on Space and Place*—the 'contemporary' being deleted after the cover designer asked for it to be removed as the word took up too much space! The selection of the terms 'space' and 'place' also reflects the harsh realities of publishing with a commercial publisher and seeking a wide target audience: the word 'geography' in a book title apparently kills sales, particularly in North America, where geography is a relatively weak discipline. 'Space' and 'place', however, are terms in vogue across the social sciences. Some of the contingencies of knowledge production revealed!

Given the compromises the production process required, we would not claim that the thinkers in the book are the fifty-two most important thinkers on space and place: this was never a ranking exercise, as the introduction makes clear. Rather, the ultimate selection comprises fifty-two thinkers who publish in English (or have had their work translated) and are likely to be referred to in courses considering the way that geographers theorise space and place (even if some have actually said little explicitly about space and place, and others are clearly not geographers). Clearly, the final selection is open to critique: maybe some important traditions are unrepresented; maybe there are not enough women profiled, and maybe our selection includes too many who are currently 'fashionable' at the expense of those who are not. Such criticisms are legitimate, and may be levelled at both our own editorial selection process and the discipline as a whole (which is of course riddled with inequalities and exclusions).

As such, we are pleased that *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (together with *Thinking Geographically*) is being read by some as a provocation to critique the ways that geographers document and teach the histories of geographic thought. It should come as no surprise that we are the first to admit that *Key Thinkers* represents a

---

compromised and flawed project. That said, we believe that the book provides a useful pedagogic tool for students seeking to understand the histories and philosophies of geography and, read in conjunction with these reviews, we feel that it raises a variety of important questions about the politics of the discipline. To that end, we are gratified that the reviews in this issue address a number of these important questions rather than simply taking issue with our selection of key thinkers. If the book continues to provoke this type of debate, it will have more than fulfilled its purpose.

### References

- Garcia-Ramon M D, 2003, "Globalization and international geography: the questions of languages and scholarly traditions" *Progress in Human Geography* **27** 1–5
- Hubbard P, Kitchin R, Bartley B, Fuller D, 2002 *Thinking Geographically* (Continuum, London)
- Kitchin R, 2004, "Disrupting and destabilising Anglo-American and English-language hegemony in Geography" *Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica* in press
- Lorimer H, 2003, "Telling small stories: spaces of knowledge and the practice of geography" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* **28** 197–217
- Minca C, 2000, "Venetian geographical praxis" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **18** 285–289
- Monk J, 2004, "Women, gender and the histories of American geography" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **94** 1–22
- Samers M, Sidaway J D, 2000, "Exclusions, inclusions, and oclusions in 'Anglo-American geography': reflections on Minca's 'Venetian geographical praxis'" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **18** 663–666