

FOREWORD

Over the past 100 hundred years or so, human geography has grown into one of the most vibrant university disciplines around the world. Expanding from its origins in the colonial pursuit of geographic knowledge, modern human geography has developed into a diverse collection of sophisticated, spatially inflected knowledges underpinned by a refined set of theoretical concepts and methodological tools. As a result, defining contemporary human geography is not an easy task, not least because what passes for geographic theory and praxis varies across time and space. For us, what marks the discipline from other social and natural sciences is its focus on the relationship between people and the world they inhabit, its core metaconcepts (such as space, place, landscape, nature, mobility, environment, and scale), and its use of geographically sensitive methods of data generation and analysis. Human geography, as the contents list of this encyclopedia amply demonstrates, focuses on key issues of the day, and opens up new and vital perspectives on questions that affect our everyday lives. It engages with and problematizes apparently unequivocal statements such as:

- the planet is large;
- the planet teems with life; and
- the planet is under threat.

Through the lens of human geography, these statements are revealed as equivocal and often paradoxical. What do we mean by 'large' in a period in which a scientific shift based on the discovery of fractals has expanded our perception of the length and complexity of lines at exactly the same time that transport and communications technologies shrink the world to such an extent that we can interact in real time with people on the far side of the planet and maps of the planet can be called up online by ordinary citizens and analyzed in diverse ways? What do we mean by 'life' in a

period in which we keep discovering more of it in more and more unlikely places, while scientific and cultural changes are continually expanding our definition of what 'life' consists of? What do we mean by 'threat' when we are unable to agree on the nature of a threat, let alone a solution, when technologies that offer the promise of salvation all too often create new problems and when increasing populations offer new resources as well as consume them?

Human geography seeks to answer such questions not only in order to understand the world but also to make practical interventions. Unlike many disciplines, it is built on unsure foundations without much in the way of a canon. Some might say that that is its attraction; that it has perennially been driven by the changing world around it. The discipline is willing to go where other disciplines fear to tread because its history is loosely connected, more like a conglomerate than a series of well-defined strata – it has not been wed to a single or limited theoretical approach but rather it has explored and drawn together all manner of approaches in order to address issues geographically. Equally though, it is born out of a longing for a planetary citizenship, with that longing sitting alongside a radical appreciation of how all the differences that make up the discipline both compromise and strengthen that goal. Whatever might be the case, at the heart of this endeavor has been the notion that geography matters – the spatial configuration of events is not a mere add-on to other somehow deeper, more abstract aspatial processes, but rather is central to how the processes unfold.

These tensions between a discipline organized around understanding the world and a discipline consisting of and defined by its own approaches, are manifest in how geography tells its own history (and how one might organize an encyclopedia). One way would be to trace the changing approaches, epistemologies, and concerns of the discipline.

Thus one could track the multiple interpretations of the writing of Alexander von Humboldt, often cited as one of the key disciplinary ancestors. Alternately, one could chart the intellectual genealogies of 'key' texts, concepts, and places to provide counterpoints to more traditional chronological histories of various theoretical schools. Or, one could create accounts that organize the discipline via key processes and events in the world. To take other examples, there are presently attempts to write about differences in more satisfying and nuanced ways, ways that can bring about new means of living and experiencing the world through reinventing familiar categories like gender, race, and sexuality, categories that have their own complex geographies which are a very part of the process of reinvention. There are efforts to reconceive cities taking account of the affective, the mundane, the ongoing incompleteness, fuzziness, and unpredictability that make up urban life, and there are attempts to reimagine the economic as thoroughly infused with the cultural. Sometimes clumsy and awkward, sometimes plain inspired, these kinds of developments are surely worth following in a world too often characterized by division and despair. And follow them, this encyclopedia does.

The Encyclopedia

The *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* is a multinational attempt to capture and trace the state of human geography as a discipline and as a description of the world as it exists today and as it changes its shape in the future. Its ambition, in other words, is to provide a major and continually updated resource that provides an always temporary but hopefully authoritative means of answering questions of the sort posed above, and many others like them. This it does by taking on the venerable format of an encyclopedia which we can understand both in its original meaning as a course of education – in this case with the description 'human geography' – or in its more modern meaning as treating a particular branch of knowledge comprehensively through the medium of articles arranged alphabetically, by subject.

Of course, producing an encyclopedia provides real opportunities, most especially the ability to stretch out explanations in a way not available in the more common dictionary form. Thus, our aim has not been to produce a portable, condensed summary or bite-sized definitions of concepts, but rather clear, authoritative statements that set out the evolution and implications of geographic thought. Such an endeavor also produces some inevitable challenges. We want to use these challenges to explore how this encyclopedia has been put together, understanding that such challenges do not have to be understood just as undesirable or unpleasant choices between alternatives. They can equally well be understood as producing the means to fuel productive encounters.

The first challenge is an obvious one. There is an inevitable degree of arbitrariness about what is included and what is not. We have made an honest attempt to cover the whole range of what can possibly be treated as human geography in terms of issues on the ground and traditions within the discipline. This has been achieved through an intensive, iterative process involving all the editors, worked through at face-to-face meetings, conference phone calls, and e-mail. Inevitably, there will be topics, methods, and thinkers considered important by some that we felt did not justify a stand-alone entry. Moreover, we fully expect that as some issues grow or decline in importance – to the world and/or the discipline – we shall have occasion in the future to expand or contract the coverage in different fields. This dilemma of selecting what to cover brings with it other issues too. Foremost among these has been how to shape the coverage of each entry and title each entry in an informative yet pithy way. There are many bodies of conceptual and substantive knowledge that cannot easily be encompassed by a single term or phrase. The result is that some of the entries have somewhat contrived titles. Better that, though, than titles that are vague or oblique, especially in these days of voluminous information accessible across the Internet.

The second challenge is an authorial one. It was a guiding principle of this encyclopedia that we would attempt to extend authorship beyond the 'charmed circle' of Anglophone/Western geographers, both as a response to postcolonial critiques and as a response to the critiques of scholars from outside the Euro-American zone who felt disenfranchised by what is possible to perceive as an Anglophone/Western ascendancy. We have then been attentive to the geographies of the discipline of geography, not least since scholars in diverse locales see the world differently in terms of what processes seem most important and what traditions of interpretation they use. We have not always been successful in achieving our goal of wide international authorship, partly because the geographical establishment is simply larger in some countries than others and partly because human geography still bears some of the marks of its own history, not least as a colonial enterprise. Inevitably perhaps, the historical geography of geography kept coming home to roost. Moreover, scholars from different locales had varying abilities to contribute due to issues of time, access to resources, and language. As a result, we have not been able to include some topics and perspectives. That said, entries have been solicited from 844 scholars located in over 40 countries around the world working within different traditions and we have managed to describe the different ideas and practices of geography in many countries/language groups. Again, this is a project that will be added to, over the coming years.

The third challenge was to draw on the expertise of the human geographical community in ways that ensured

some degree of diversity. In particular, we are proud that we have been able to balance the voices of established scholars with those of younger writers. This has had salutary effects. For example, we have been able to trace the history of philosophical ideas in geography both from the point of view of those that have been deeply involved in the explosion of different conceptual possibilities that took place in the discipline from the late 1960s onward, as well as the point of view of younger scholars who have set out quite different agendas.

The fourth challenge was to ensure a relatively consistent standard of scholarship for each entry and to provide a balanced content with respect to ideas and geographical coverage. To that end, each entry was initially refereed by a section editor who had overall responsibility for a selection of related entries (e.g., political, urban, regional development, quantitative methods, people) and a senior editor. Each senior editor oversaw three sections in order to ensure sections were approximately commensurate in style, content, and length. To provide breadth as well as depth, authors were asked to draw on examples and traditions from around the world and not simply rely on charting an issue with respect to their own local circumstance.

The fifth challenge was to use the Internet in productive ways. One of the motivations for this encyclopedia was the production of a platform upon which we might then build a future memory for human geography. It is an attempt to begin to produce a living, breathing archive which will gradually evolve, by using the powers of the Internet. Though in this first edition, both print and Internet editions exist side-by-side, in later editions the Internet edition will exist singly, opening the way to a vision of geography which is in keeping with the age in which we now live. Since the articles are on the web, it will be possible to update them on a regular, rolling basis without having to wait for the revision of every other article. Equally, they will have all kinds of extra resources associated with them – illustrations of all types, including more and more videos as well as maps and diagrams, ‘active’ reference links that will take the reader straight to the listed journal article, and so on. Then, more articles will be added at regular intervals, both filling in gaps and supplementing existing articles. All articles will be left *in situ* – old articles will not be deleted – so that, in time, we will be able to produce a ‘timeline’ for many subjects, making it possible to see how thinking has evolved, thereby producing a real sense of historical accretion. Over time, we hope that the encyclopedia will become an institutionalized memory of human geography.

The sixth challenge was to produce an encyclopedia of human geography that was relevant to issues that must concern us all. We sought an encyclopedia that espoused responsibility to the planet and its people certainly. But we also became, however awkwardly and unsuccessfully,

involved in thinking what that responsibility might mean. A difficult but ultimately productive instance of what this might entail – and how difficult it can be to think through – was provided by the proposed boycott of the encyclopedia by some authors concerned at Reed International’s (a sister company to Elsevier) involvement in the arms trade, an affair settled when Reed withdrew from these activities. Here, we saw the same concerns being aired by many participants but radically different solutions being put on offer. We hope that the encyclopedia mirrors this diversity of response.

Bringing these six, and especially the last three, points together we hope and trust that this encyclopedia will be counted as a contribution to the global commons of knowledge. The production of a discipline depends on the goodwill of many who labor over ideas, who disseminate, review, and rework them. We are painfully aware that in the current global climate of academia, when what counts as valued academic practices is narrowing, writing authoritative and scholarly articles for publications such as this venture provides few rewards and attracts little institutional support. However, it is a vital component in the reproduction and development of a discipline. Rather than simply being understood as the creation of canonical knowledge by authorial communities we would like to thank all those who have written and reviewed material here for an activity that may be deemed a professional service but is one that, sadly, is seen as subverting the institutional priorities of a number of universities.

By Way of Conclusion

This encyclopedia is an attempt to summarize knowledge of the discipline using the encyclopedia format. In time, we hope that this encyclopedia will build into a comprehensive resource which constitutes both an archive of the discipline and, of course, of what it knows about the world. That knowledge, what facts are arraigned to support it, and what theories and methodologies are used as a means of making it credible, is, of course, a movable feast. Think of the notion of the ‘world’, which it is easy to demonstrate has changed its form many times over the course of history, as the development of the map shows all too well as Denis Cosgrove noted:

There is no single map of the world, but a vast range of images that present different facets of the globe and its contents. ... A map of the world is a global cultural artefact, an extraordinary human accomplishment, produced by contributions from many cultures. It is a highly sophisticated scientific achievement, and each advance in the various technologies that coalesce within it renders it more detailed, flexible, and widely available. Google Earth is certainly not the last stage in its evolution.

Yet even [a] cursory survey of world mapping ... reveals that science and technology are only a part of the story. Of equal importance are such affective aspects as imagination, faith, fear, and desire. We spot them immediately in the world maps of nonmodern cultures, and even in early examples of the modern world map. For us humans, the earth is always more than its physical form and nature; it is, indeed, a world. ... Today that world seems wholly visible, even transparent. ... Yet today's world maps are as hued by the contingencies of our own times as any previous ones, and we are 'mapped' into them as surely as Xiuhtechitli was mapped into the fifteenth century Mesoamerican world. Because every 'world' is social and imaginative as much as it is material, our own world maps will in due course come to seem as quaint as Jain mandalas or medieval mappae mundi seem to us today. (Denis Cosgrove, 2007: 112–113)

Or, indeed, consider the idea of the encyclopedia itself. Encyclopedias are often thought to be an invention of the West. Specifically, the general-purpose, widely distributed, printed encyclopedia is usually considered to have been conceived in eighteenth-century Europe with Chambers' Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences (1728), and the Encyclopédie of Diderot and D'Alembert (1751 onward). These volumes are often considered to be the first to take on a recognizably

modern form, with a comprehensive list of topics, discussed in depth and organized in what we would consider a systematic way. But, once we take a broader view in which places and times are not necessarily weighted by particular prejudices, a very different account hoves into view in which all manner of authors in different parts of the world revealed an encyclopedic instinct, and from much earlier on. For example, a tradition of encyclopedia-like volumes can be found in China from the eleventh century onward, and these were often massive undertakings involving as many as a thousand volumes.

The point that these two examples make is that all we can be certain of is that the contours of knowledge will constantly change. There can be no absolute certainty about what will be included in and what will be excluded from human geography in times to come. But with this encyclopedia, we believe we now have a tool that will be able to trace this evolution as it happens.

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Further Reading

Cosgrove, D. (2007). Mapping the world. In Akerman, J. & Karrow, R. (eds.) *Maps. Finding Our Place in the World*, pp 65–158. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.