

The Unity of Geography in the U. S. A. and the U. S. S. R.

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This will be a personal impression of what has happened to geography as a coherent discipline in Russia and America over the past twenty years, during most of which time I have been based in North America and concerned with the interpretation of Soviet developments. The focus will be on the particular question of the unity of the subject and begins with the conviction that such unity is at least as important to the survival of geography as it is to any other modern discipline. Thus, since being asked by Prof. Lawton to "preach at the evening service" (and having been brought up in a small country where the calling of preacher was esteemed highly!), I have not been able to resist the temptation to inject some of that into what was originally intended as a relatively sober job of reporting.

The early 1950's was a relatively becalmed and outwardly untroubled period in both Soviet and American geography, although they could hardly have been more different from each other. The cumulative and somewhat surprising effect of the quarter-century of absolute Stalinist rule had been to make geography overwhelmingly physical in character, with the non-physical aspects of the subject in some danger of being squeezed out and absorbed by other disciplines. Moreover, the prevailing doctrine maintained the clear and necessary separation of physical from economic (i.e., all non-physical) geography, with their supposedly mutually exclusive

"laws," so that the integrated study of man in relation to his environment, a notable theme in pre-Soviet Russian geography, was ruled theoretically illegitimate.

At the same time, in Eisenhower's America, the opposite doctrine prevailed. "There is really only one kind of geography," as James said in the introduction to the anniversary volume--American Geography, Inventory and Prospect. However, this avowed unity appeared less than wholly convincing because of the obvious fragmentation of the subject reflected in that same book and the lack of demonstrated functional links between the many branches, as well as by the fact that physical geography had become as scarce in America as had non-physical in the Soviet Union. Under those circumstances, unity presented little problem. Parenthetically, I might mention that British geography (of which I was part at that time) appeared on the surface to be better balanced and unified according to tradition. However, the fact that its physical geography was dominated by a rather self-contained geologically-focussed geomorphology whose functional links with the rest of the discipline were difficult to discern, tended to belie a truly unified approach.

To sum up then, American and Soviet geography in the early fifties were far apart from each other in theory and practice, and each had also largely turned its back on its own national traditions as developed in the early years of this century. The Cold War was at its height and there was hardly any contact between geographers in the two countries. But in each case the unity of the subject was a key philosophical issue, whether for or against, while both professions demonstrated a certain orthodoxy, complacency and lack of dynamism and controversy which was soon to undergo a radical change.

When I began to dig into the Soviet geographical literature in the late 1950's in the Library of Congress, I was astonished to find myself in the thick of an intellectual disputation about the unity of geography which was far more intense and engaged than were any equivalents in the West. They also contrasted strongly with previous Soviet methodological statements, which had oscillated between the very prosaic and factual and the vituperative and xenophobic. The change in the general Soviet socio-political milieu was obviously fundamental. These early years of the Khrushchev decade, in spite of their lurching inconsistencies and "hare-brained schemes" (as they were afterwards dubbed), can now be looked back upon as, in relative terms, something of a Golden Age for the Soviet intellectual. It was a period of confident ebullience, following the great psychological release of the first Sputnik as well as Destalinization and the publication of books by authors previously (and often now again) banned. There was also the radical restructuring of the Soviet economy and a more out-going and relaxed foreign policy, before the setbacks of the Sino-Soviet rift and the Cuban missile crisis, coinciding with the reopening of international contacts and Soviet attendance at the first International Congresses for over two decades.

This atmosphere of ferment, coupled with the awareness of the rich Russian geographical heritage broken by the Stalin years, goes far to explain the intensity of the arguments, and it is interesting that the question of whether or not to re-establish an integrated approach to geography was the dominant one, and that technical questions were not, at this stage, important. V. A. Anuchin's 1960 book Theoretical Problems of Geography (which incidentally should appear in English soon) became a cause célèbre and the chief focus for these discussions which filled the

professional literature in the early 60's. The controversy finally spread to the national press and institutions like the Academy of Sciences and eventually led to a radical reshaping of basic geographical doctrine, theory and practice. The general effect was to shift the emphasis much more towards the human side and to "legalize" and promote once more studies of the mutual interaction between man and environment. These arguments have been analyzed in some detail elsewhere, and will be summarized in the introduction to the English translation of Anuchin's book; suffice it here to comment that they were, while they lasted, bitter and divisive, invoking so-called "Marxist" theory on both sides and involving, in a deadly serious way, the most powerful figures of the geographical establishment as well as the students who crowded to the public debates.

By the early sixties, when the Russian battle-royal over basic geographical philosophy was raging, a different one, sometimes imprecisely dubbed "The Quantitative Revolution," was in full swing in the United States and was in the process of being diffused to other corners of the world, including Britain and eventually even the Soviet Union. The last thing you would want from me, even if I had the time and competence, is an analysis of a movement which has entered into our intellectual lives, with a varying mixture of stimulus, elation, disturbance or revulsion, in the last decade or two. What I will just do is to suggest, in a personal impressionistic way, how I feel it affected the unity of geography--the subject at hand here--in the America of the Sixties, and how it tied in with the peculiar socio-political context of the time. For just as I arrived in America in the year of Sputnik, which event seemed not only to symbolize Soviet ascendancy and confidence but had an immediate impact on American science and education; so also I happened to arrive in Berkeley

in the year of the so-called Free Speech Movement there, which inaugurated a half-decade of unprecedented social discord not only on American campuses, but also elsewhere.

This was in many ways a ghastly period to live through in the United States, strident, divisive and intolerant, related not only to the disturbed campuses, but also racial conflict and, perhaps above all, the corrosive impact of the Vietnam war and its associated conscription. A self-righteous, uncompromising dogmatism filled the air and I suppose, could hardly have been expected not to have infected the atmosphere in geography, which was anyway in a state of flux. Dichotomies proliferated and were inflated unreasonably, such as those between deductive and inductive reasoning, nomothetic and idiographic approaches, description and explanation, quantity and quality, as well as the more traditional Regional-Systematic, Human-Physical, Formal-Functional ones. Departments frequently became polarized and, if circumstances allowed, quickly became narrowed to the procrustean bed of location theory or spatial analysis, lopping off not only physical geography but regional and culture-historical as well, within an aura of humourless, sometimes even illiterate, moral rectitude. This is a common concomitant of revolutions, of course, and should by no means blind us to the many provocative ideas and useful tools which this particular one brought. But it did seem--in the peculiarly abrasive social climate of the Sixties--to have initially a destructive effect on the unity of geography.

The general climate of thought in American and in Russian geography today seems remarkably different from what it was in the Sixties, and much more encouraging for believers in the unity of the subject.

Since the mid-Sixties, when the previously established Soviet policy of "legal separation" of the two geographies, coupled with a denial of integrated studies and a downgrading of economic or human geography, came under official censure, the theory and practice of Soviet geography has radically changed. The same leaders who upheld the dualistic philosophical framework for the subject now proclaim the reverse, namely that the typically and officially Soviet approach focusses on a set of integrated, synthetic themes, often regional, along the interface of environmental and economic (or human) phenomena, and guided primarily by human rather than physical significance. When one thinks about it, this is so obviously in line with the traditional precepts and spirit of Marxism that the wonder is that such disharmony between doctrine and practice had been allowed to develop in the period of total Soviet planning. As a result of the new "consensus," as well as the rather grey, "low profile," and also more repressive regime of the Brezhnev years, genuine controversy has receded and the literature become duller to read. The situation has reverted to a more normal one for the Soviet Union, with argument largely directed to means rather than ends. But actual work done in Soviet geography presents a broader and more vigorous appearance now, closer to Western usage and to the country's practical needs, and in the process building a much more solidly unified structure for the discipline.

The breadth of interest of contemporary Soviet geography is well reflected in the volumes, for the last two or three years, of the semi-regular periodical Voprosy Geografii (Questions of Geography), perhaps the most consistently lively and original in the geographical literature of the post-war years. Each issue has a separate theme and these have recently ranged from Climate and Man, Biogeography and the National Economy to

Regional Development, Urban Settlements and even the Geography of Services. The preoccupation with practical problems, while not surprisingly dominant, is by no means total--there have been recent issues concerned with local place-names and with historical geography. However, it must be admitted that the latter is very thin and that there is a glaring gap in the Soviet Union in the kind of cultural-historical geography long cultivated in my own department at Berkeley, as well as in foreign area studies. Only half as many foreign geographical works were translated into Russian in the second half of the Sixties as in the first--the Khrushchev period.

In general one can say that there has been an intensification of interest in the geographical aspects of Soviet national and regional problems with an emphasis on environment, resources, systems, the specifics of areas and an integrated approach to the analysis of these things. The Soviet journals are now all rather similar in tone to one called "Geography and the Economy," which came out from Moscow University as a rather revolutionary, and quite unique, organ in 1958. Not only is the Soviet literature much more consciously "applied" and public policy oriented than it was--it is also much less morphological and less purely physical. Several new journals, very geographically oriented, have been born in the last few years, such as "Applied Geomorphology," "Desert Problems" and "Water Resources." Oddly enough, judgments on "environmental determinism" tend to be kinder now in the Soviet Union than in the West, alongside a more subtle and critical view of man's impact on nature. Attitudes in both respects are poles apart from the views promoted in the period of Stalin's so-called "transformation of nature." Incidentally, the character of Soviet geography today would be much more intelligible and acceptable to

the pre-Soviet Russian geographers, and to Karl Marx, who personally spoke highly of them, than would its counterpart of a decade or two ago.

The atmosphere in American geography today also seems to me to be subtly and perhaps fundamentally different from what it was in the late Sixties, although the metamorphosis has not been launched by grand disputations or ex-cathedra declarations. Watergate notwithstanding, the social scene has become notably less strident and divisive, with the ending of the Vietnam involvement and of conscription and the calm which has descended on the universities and, to some extent, in race relations also. Further, the sudden revelation of Ecology or Environment, together with the partial dethronement of the Gods Growth and Development, in the minds of the public, has, for all their half-baked features, helped rejuvenate an integrated, man-oriented physical geography, and thus the unity of the subject.

But more basically--rather as in the Romantic Protest of the early nineteenth century against the intellectual sway of the Enlightenment, a reaction has set in in American geography against what is now often seen as an unduly mechanistic pre-occupation with technique, precision, "optimal" solutions and a narrowly spatial analysis.

Behavioural, historical and cultural, as well as environmental and regional approaches have been revived recently, while assumptions about economic man, social physics, or even Central Place Theory--not long ago hailed (by Bunge) as geography's finest intellectual product--have fallen into some disrepute. The renewed consciousness of the importance of approaching geography through what Kitson Clark, in this Institute two decades ago, called "the furniture of men's minds," or perception, has discouraged simpler and more beguiling social physics deductions as it did Environmentalist ones (the old variety) in Clark's time. These

developments have had the general effect of restoring man as a discriminating, even idiosyncratic, inhabitant and transformer of the earth to the centre of the geographical stage.

Another movement which represents a strong reaction against what is seen as the unduly technocratic and business- or Establishment-oriented economic geography of the Sixties is styled Radical or Revolutionary geography, which has been prominent at recent AAG meetings and has even given birth to a new periodical. Incidentally, it seems to be peopled disproportionately by British emigrants, and it is oddly symbolic of the change that David Harvey, a guru of the movement, now seems to have abandoned the plane of thought embodied in his book, Explanation in Geography, and has espoused a revolutionary Marxist stance, though one with which his fellow Soviet Marxists would not feel particularly comfortable.

Maps, values, even places, are now back, and there has been a strong revival of interest, say among students, in long-run geographical philosophy and purpose and the history of ideas, not only scientific methodology and technique. Several departments which had narrowed themselves rather precipitately in the Sixties, are now regretting it, and rapidly-trained specialists with little broad appeal are finding themselves stranded in a period of very slow growth of employment. Once again, it seemed, geography had been caught trying to jettison fundamental aspects of its traditional ways of thought concerning such things as environment, synthesis and the world view, just when others were coming to recognize their wisdom and urgency. The partial volte-face forced on the geographical profession by this public reaction may possibly be too late to recapture the initiative and some leadership in these areas.

In historical perspective, both the Stalin period in Russia and the period in the first two decades of this century dominated by Davis and the

Environmentalists in America, are now seen as diversions from the main stream of the discipline, to which both countries, regardless of particular techniques employed, have now returned. Not only is the spirit and practice of Soviet geography closer to its own early national traditions than is that of any other major school except perhaps the French, but there has been something of a convergence between American and Soviet geography. The general superpower détente has obviously not hurt this movement, although such political winds, and their effect on academe are notoriously fickle and even perverse. But it does seem to me that the intellectual climate in both countries is more favourable than it has been for several decades for the active tolerance of pluralistic ways of thought within the context of a purposeful cohesion of geography as a whole.

However, even if it seems clear that the functional unity of geography has been growing stronger in recent years in the two superpowers, it would hardly seem appropriate for some Kissinger of glad tidings to fly around getting lesser nations to fall into line. For instance, in normally enlightened countries like Sweden and the Netherlands and universities as far apart as the Australian National University and the University of East Anglia, geography is, for presumably good reasons, institutionally split. It would be hard to deny that centrifugal tendencies have plagued geography quite persistently over the past century, and that this results understandably from the apparently wild heterogeneity of its subject matter in a time of massive proliferation and specialization of knowledge. It's not just some crabbed subversion on the part of geographers with no family feeling.

But I do believe--and this is perhaps where I start preaching--that each of us should cleave to a central and binding idea which satisfies

us and which allows us to combine breadth with focus in our work. The spirit is probably more important than the letter. For instance, when, a decade and a half ago, I published my personal statement that the problems of human locations lay at the heart of geography, I certainly did not have in mind a narrowing to what has become known as spatial or locational analysis, still less a sidestepping of physical or regional geography. An all-pervading question should serve to sharpen the focus without narrowing the range of vision, and it seemed to me that this one, properly pursued, automatically engages the relevant investigations, whether environmental, historical, economic or whatever, and keeps ideas about place, or perception, to the forefront, while getting at the operative processes. Among the recent texts of the so-called "new" geography there seems to me a world of difference between Peter Haggett's "modern synthesis" explicitly giving equal weight to ecological, spatial and regional approaches, and the more exclusively spatial approach of Abler, Adams and Gould's view of the world, epitomizing the high point of the Sixties in America.

Geography has nothing to gain--least of all in the present climate of public interest--by cutting off any of its branches or restricting its range of methods and approaches, provided it maintains a dynamism and a recognizably cohesive internal logic. One way in which it is increasingly recognized is through its contributions to public policy, as has been made clear, from the Presidential Address onwards, in this Conference, but I don't know whether we would be wise to strive to make it our main raison d'[^]etre, any more than history should become largely a handmaiden to current politics. Geography has a natural applicability to a host of modern problems, particularly if the broad outlook is maintained, and we have a duty to indicate any policy implications our work may have; but we should not feel

that policy needs must define our questions for us, as often happens in the U. S. S. R. and sometimes in the U. S. A.

We must rebuild and rejuvenate our integrity as an academic discipline on our own responsibility, and this cannot be done if we tear ourselves apart, as we have done at various times. I take it for granted that the proven theoretical insights and data-handling techniques which have emerged from the recent "revolution" are here to stay, hopefully shorn of scientism and unnecessary game-playing, and, as someone who did a statistically-based Ph. D. thesis in the pre-"hardware" age, I applaud the luck of my young contemporaries. I take it for granted, too, that a broadly "systems" approach to human, physical and regional problems will continue to infuse our ways of thought, though I hope, never divorced from a broad historical perspective. I am sure also that the great rejuvenation of physical geography, with an increasingly integrated, ecological and man-related analysis of environmental processes will burgeon--the demand for it is obvious.

What I am least sanguine, though if anything most concerned, about, is the maintenance of what one may broadly call the Humanities approach. I still think of Geography--with all its metamorphoses--as closest philosophically to History (which has also changed), and as still primarily a cultural-educational subject in the broadest sense (not excluding, of course the education of policy planners and decision-makers).

There is still a great need for zestfully written geographical interpretations, without pruning out all colour and detail, of the living realities and complexities of our cities, regions and nations and their communities and informed by genuine critical appreciation. They should be in every bookshop, inviting readers who have a natural curiosity about their own and other regions. It would indeed be a pity if a rejuvenated regional

geography, haunted by the memory of some heavy-handed exemplars of the past, were to lose its confidence, and deprive the educated public of, in my opinion, the most basic of all geographical products. Allied with this is the need to rescue the habit of observation--both of landscapes and of human behaviour--preferably somewhere between the individual and the stochastic mass, in their living context. In fact no fewer than three presidential addresses by economists, English and American, which I have come across in the last couple of years, have called on their subject to turn back to analyzing concrete situations and toward a greater appreciation of actual observational powers in other disciplines. It would be a pity for geography to forsake these virtues at this of all times. I believe we should value and cultivate the art of understanding at least as much as the presumed science of explanation, imagination at least as much as "operationalization," accuracy at least as much as precision, and scholars at least as much as research workers. Conscious attempts to achieve a style which will give positive pleasure to the reader without sacrificing objectivity should regain respectability--sometimes it has seemed in recent years that heralded books by geography pundits have been received with the enthusiasm of an undertaker's mate receiving the coffin.

But that is surely enough of preaching--the genie must go firmly back in the bottle. Perhaps I am a congenital optimist, but it really does seem as if the stars are right for a rise in the fortunes of geography, in public and private life and for the recognition of its basic integrity as a discipline. But we do need individually to keep working at, and be personally convinced of, this unity which can easily go by default, especially as there now really are several vultures overhead. The

new-found atmosphere of tolerance and cooperation is propitious for a fruitful marriage of what is good and relevant in the new and the old geographies, in physical and human, topical and regional, and so on, in short, for a coordinated pluralism. While in New Zealand and Australia over the last few months, I got the impression that an inevitable time-lag of several years was accepted for developments in the United States to trickle down under, and that it seemed to be necessary to go through all the contortions. I hope that that kind of fatalism does not exist here. Far from intending to further superpower hegemony, part of my aim in reporting here on developments in Russia and America has been to suggest, if you needed it, some corner-cutting. In fact, I can end with sincere flattery, and say that the achievements of British geography, as exemplified in this meeting and in the report for the Montreal Congress, for instance, are calculated to warm the cockles of an exile's heart.