



AN INTRODUCTION TO  
**HUMAN GEOGRAPHY**

**5TH EDITION**

EDITED BY

**PETER DANIELS**  
**MICHAEL BRADSHAW**  
**DENIS SHAW**  
**JAMES SIDAWAY**  
**TIM HALL**



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# AN INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

FIFTH EDITION

Edited by

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## Lecturer Resources

For password-protected online resources tailored to support the use of this textbook in teaching, please visit [www.pearsoned.co.uk/daniels](http://www.pearsoned.co.uk/daniels)

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# Acknowledgements



As ever, the on-going success of this project relies on the goodwill and enthusiasm of the contributors. We would also like to thank the panel of reviewers who assessed the fourth edition and made suggestions on the ways in which it might be improved. This edition therefore includes some new chapters that reflect the feedback from the panel and which continues to ensure a lively collection of contributions: from those who have contributed from the outset, from those who joined as new contributors to the second, third or fourth editions, and from those who are new to the fifth edition. All have enthusiastically responded to the editors' edict that they should seek to adopt an accessible writing style that will engage readers and encourage them to make connections between many of the issues discussed in the book and their day-to-day experiences. This is achieved by using contemporary/everyday examples that makes the material more meaningful and less abstract. The importance of developing global perspectives is retained while also encouraging the contributors to include as wide a range of examples as possible, especially from Europe. We have again sought to ensure good integration between the case studies/artwork and the text so that the reader can see why a particular feature is situated at a particular point in a chapter, what it is there to illustrate, how it can provoke readers to think through the issue, and how it relates to the main narrative. It has also been very important to ensure that the fifth edition continues to offer readers perspectives on recent debates, issues and controversies that were a feature of the earlier editions. The contributors have risen to all these challenges and we would like to acknowledge their constructive response to the dialogue that this has necessitated along the way.

The editors and contributors are indebted to Patrick Bond (then at Pearson) who initiated the discussions that led to the decision to prepare a fifth edition. Just as the process was getting underway he handed over to Lina Aboujieb, who then offered invaluable support and encouragement during the process of pulling together the final manuscript and liaised with the contributors over contracts and queries associated with the artwork and illustrations. There are other members of the editorial and production staff at Pearson that the Editors do not meet, such as those tasked with preparing the artwork or undertaking the copy-editing and proofreading; we

owe them all a debt of gratitude for seeing this project through to completion. Thanks are also due to Peter Jones, Department of History, University of Birmingham, for advice concerning Section 1 of the book.

Those who have used earlier editions will note that this one includes a new editor. For the fifth edition a new (fifth) member of the editorial team (Tim Hall) brings fresh ideas, energy and insight. The old hands are very pleased that Tim so readily agreed to join us! For all of the editors, production of the fifth edition has taken place at a time when we have all been facing numerous challenges and demands on our time, whether as a result of moving to pastures new, family commitments, making the transition to formal retirement, or simply coping with the ever-changing landscape of higher education. However, we have continued to work closely together as a team. Sticking to the task has again been made easier by the continuing enthusiasm shown by all the contributors and the team at Pearson; this has ensured that we have produced a fifth edition that we can all be proud of.

The School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Birmingham kindly offered us temporary office space, where sections of this edition could be assembled during the spring and early summer of 2015 and where an early draft of the Introduction was first hammered out by James and Tim. We are all grateful for this and James also thanks them for the wider hospitality during his sabbatical visit to Birmingham in 2015. James would also like to thank colleagues and students at the University of Amsterdam and National University of Singapore, where many of the ideas in Section 5 were rehearsed.

As with all the past editions, the most important motivation, of course, is our hope that the ideas, perspectives and challenges discussed in this book will encourage readers to connect with human geography; after all, the vitality of the discipline depends on students being enthused and critically, as well as creatively, engaging with human geography within and beyond the classroom.

PWD  
MJB  
TH  
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JDS

*Birmingham, July 2015*

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### Figures

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## Tables

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# GEOGRAPHY: FINDING YOUR WAY IN THE WORLD

## Introduction



**James Sidaway**  
**Michael Bradshaw**  
**Peter Daniels**  
**Tim Hall**  
**Denis Shaw**

Geography is indispensable to survival. All animals, including American students who consistently fail their geography tests, must be competent applied geographers. How else do they get around, find food and mate, avoid dangerous places?

(Yi-Fu Tuan 2002: 123)

We believe that our everyday lives are simply teeming with the kinds of issues and questions that are often pigeon-holed as theory. Much of the excitement and value in Human Geography lies in addressing these issues and questions by thinking through aspects of our own lives and of the world(s) in which we live.

(Cloke *et al.* 2014: 2)

This book is the fifth edition of *An Introduction to Human Geography*. The first edition was published in 2001. The task of compiling the first edition therefore dates back to 1997–98 so that it is now approaching 20 years since we wrote the first introduction. While the fifth edition incorporates further changes to the structure and contents and one new editor, we have retained the original goal, which was to provide an introduction to human geography that focuses upon contemporary *issues* and approaches. What introductory textbooks in human geography choose to include and foreground (and what is excluded or neglected) some years ago became the subject of heated debate in a leading disciplinary journal (*Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*). According to one of the protagonists, textbooks (in part via their influence on a prospective new generation of geographers) become part of what shapes the dominant themes for research and scholarship in a discipline. Textbooks are thereby implicated ‘in strategies to mobilize support for a particular set of disciplinary practices’ (Johnston 2007: 437).

Textbooks also reflect *where* they are written and where they are read. For example, most textbooks written in North America devote a significant number of words to explaining what geography is and what constitutes a geographical approach. Early on in one of the most widely used American human geography introductions, Marston *et al.* (2011: 2) noted that:

The power of geography comes from its integrative approach, which addresses global connections, historical trends, and systemic political-economic and socio-cultural relations by drawing on the intellectual tradition in both the natural and social sciences.

The reason why introductory textbooks in the United States need to explicitly consider definitions of human geography and devote space to explaining what a geographical approach amounts to is that many of the students taking a module in introductory human geography are not geography majors; that is, they will not go on

to specialize in geography, and they will usually have experienced limited or no exposure to it as a discipline at high school. Geography is seldom taught in the American ‘K–12’ (kindergarten to pre-university) school system. The institutional setting within which the present textbook has been put together is different. The editors and most of the contributors are currently attached to (or associated with) British or continental European universities, or in countries where the influence of a British style educational system is more evident. Many of their students have chosen to specialize in geography at a secondary school or college and have made a choice to read for a degree in geography. Consequently, students from these countries often have ideas about the subject matter of the discipline (although this may turn out to be rather different from much of what they will subsequently encounter at university: see Bonnett 2003 and Stannard 2003). Further, the departmental contexts within which geography is taught and learnt within universities varies a great deal between different institutions and national systems of higher education. The fact that the discipline is being reproduced across a variegated international institutional landscape may be having an impact on geography’s immediate futures (see Spotlight box I.1).

Moreover, human geography and the world that it seeks to interpret and represent are dynamic. In the years since we embarked on the first edition of this book a great deal has changed in the world; ongoing processes of migration, urbanization and economic transformations (such as the fast pace of development in parts of China, the Persian Gulf and India) are producing new spaces, connections and flows that require new maps and geographical narratives. New divisions are also being created, old conflicts revived and, on first appearances, the world might appear to be more fragmented and contested than it was at the start of the twentieth century. For example, the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, which is still being felt in many economies across the world, seems to have accelerated the shift in the centre of geo-economic power further towards parts of Asia; although such shifts are uneven and there are some countervailing trends.

### Spotlight box I.1

#### Departments and the reproduction of geography: where do you fit?

University geography departments are very diverse entities. As Noel Castree (2011, 5) has noted, ‘A century ago, a small number of university geographers in England and

elsewhere worked hard to create a subject that is, today, far larger and more buoyant than they could possibly have imagined’. The scale and complexity of geography as an academic discipline is apparent in a number of ways, one of which is the complexity of its management arrangements, the ways in which it is organised into departments



in universities. Some geography departments are single subject, autonomous units but increasingly, in the UK at least, and for much longer in other countries, geography is managed alongside other subjects such as archaeology, sociology, environmental science, geology and a host of others from across the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities. One of the editors, along with a number of other colleagues mapped the changing management of geography within UK higher education, interpreting these trends within the wider political economies of UK and international higher education systems (Hall *et al.* 2015). And all five editors were once either postgraduate students or staff at what was in the 1990s (when the first edition of this textbook was planned) a single subject geography department (founded in 1924, although the subject was taught from the 1890s in Mason College, which became the University of Birmingham in 1900), but is now a larger School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Birmingham.

These different departmental configurations and management arrangements reflect a number of things including traditions of academic management, national systems of higher education, fluctuations in student numbers, financial and administrative pressures as well as disciplinary and intellectual fashions, trends and aspirations. For example, in most North American universities geography courses are required to meet the needs of non-geography students who are taking geography as an option or elective. Single subject, autonomous geography departments are therefore the exception rather than the rule, and in many continental European countries, physical and human geography are separate departments.

Think about the university department at which you are studying geography. Understanding the administrative place of academic geography can tell you a lot about the institutional pressures that it has to confront, its security, the wider structures that the discipline is located within and the possibilities for its immediate futures. Reflect upon the place of geography within your university and what this reveals. For example, is geography the only subject in your department or is it managed alongside other subjects? If it is the latter, what are the other subjects in

your department? Does it differ from the management of geography in other universities? Most importantly, though, does this management of geography in your university matter? Does it impact upon the geography you study? For example, are you able to take courses taught with students from other subjects, perhaps that are taught by non-geography staff? How does this affect your emerging geographical imagination (see page 6)? Does your exposure to perspectives from beyond geography enrich or diminish your own geographies? If you are in a single subject autonomous geography department look at the publications produced by your lecturers (usually their homepages indicate some of these, but they can also be searched on Google Scholar and the like). Do they conduct research and publish with non-geographers? Who are these collaborators, why have these collaborations arisen and what sort of geographies are being produced through them? Very quickly you will discover that geography is not a hermetically sealed discipline but it overlaps with other fields in many ways and for many reasons.

Think also about the history of geography in your university. Can you find out if the management of geography has changed over time? This information is not always readily available – but it may be worth looking into. Asking your lecturers may be a starting point or finding out if there is a published history of your department (such as the one for Birmingham by Giles, 1987). The issue of why has it changed and who got to decide geography's institutional position is often complex, however. Was this the result of decisions made by geography staff or university managers, most of whom were probably not geographers by background? You will find that geography is not just an intellectual pursuit that exists in a vacuum but is impacted by its immediate disciplinary, institutional and wider socio-economic contexts. The geography you will learn and the geographer you will become will also be a product of these and the many other contexts within which geography is reproduced here and around the world. You can start to understand and unpack the reproduction of geography by turning your critical eye on your own geography department and the geographies it is producing.

### Changing worlds: changing human geographies

Geographical knowledge is not – and should not attempt to be – static and detached from what is going on in the world, but is rather dynamic and profoundly influenced by events, struggles and politics beyond university life.

(Blunt and Wills 2000: x–xi)

The root of the word ‘geography’ combines *geo* (earth) and *graphy* (writing). To engage in geography is to write about the earth (which includes its lands and seas, resources, places and peoples) or, more widely perhaps, to represent the earth in text (which includes maps: some of the most complexly crafted of all texts). Of course, many other branches of knowledge such as history, anthropology,



So . . . geography is everywhere, and it can be expressed in a multitude of ways. While the vast majority of geographic texts are written in conventional academic style, there are also alternative ways of expressing geography. Examples include creative writing, theatre, photography, painting, films, music and poetry. Thus geography is a subject that can be expressed in multifaceted, multi-sensory creative formats (Madge 2014a, 2014b).

However, while geography is everywhere, it is everywhere differently. This poem is written from the frame of someone experiencing one specific illness, located in a precise place, with its particular system of health care, embedded in specific social and political networks and experienced through a distinct minded-body. Cancer is, however, a prevalent worldwide disease. As a health issue of (differential) global significance, it is therefore a topic of important consideration, but the experience of cancer varies enormously across the globe. Poetic expression can carve out space for 'other' stories about cancer from 'other' places, illustrating the intense social

and spatial inequalities in health outcomes and experiences. As poetry is also emotive and embodied, it has the potential to 'show' another person how it is to feel or experience something beyond their specific world perspective, enabling appreciation that the world is made up of manifold, heterogeneous geographies, which are constantly changing.

Thus, geography is everywhere and is continually emerging: it is a living subject. The poem was a response to my changed life circumstances, but it was also a reflection on living on and shaping a world in which I was part. It is on this point that I wish to finish. Geography is a living subject and in its liveliness we all have potential to shape the world in which we live. Geography is not simply a static, flat canvas which we describe and interpret as scholars, but we can shape the contours and terrain of that geographical landscape too. It is exciting to think about all those diverse geographies not yet expressed, waiting to emerge out of your (multiple) experiences, voices and visions.

Through such myriad social-cultural, political and economic geographies, we inhabit a world, as John Pickles (2004: 5) pointed out:

that has, in large part, been made as a geo-coded world; a world where boundary objects have been inscribed, literally written on the surface of the earth and coded by layer upon layer of lines drawn on paper.

Those geo-codes have increasingly become digital. They are stored, transformed, transmitted and negotiated electronically; as in the signal that your mobile phone is transmitting regarding your current location (unless you have turned it off) or the data about you that is in archives, online or within that phone (be it on or off).

Such complexity, connections and challenges (as well as diverse 'geo-codes') are evident when we consider the idea of 'globalization'. As many of the chapters spell out, a combination of technical, political, ideological, cultural and economic transformations throughout the twentieth century enhanced the sense of global interconnection. Take the case of this book. The copy that you are reading may well have been printed far from where you picked it up. Or you may be reading it as an e-book. Either way, it was published by a multinational company, whose ownership and 'home' location may not be immediately evident. The shares of the publisher (Pearson) are traded in London, part of the daily turnover on the world's largest stock exchange. In addition to textbooks such as this, Pearson publishes Penguin books

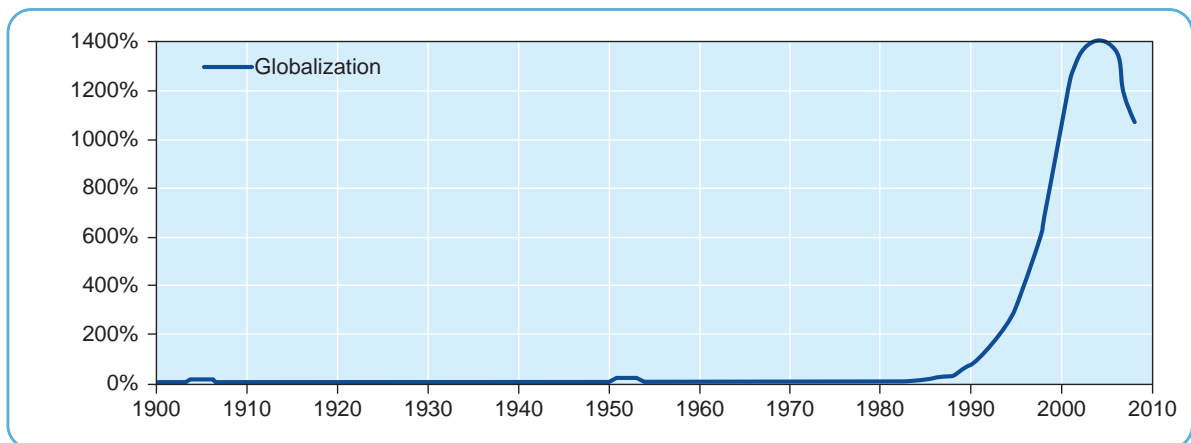
and, until 2015, also published the daily *Financial Times* and the weekly *Economist*. The company found itself in the headlines in March 2011, when it was revealed that the holdings of the Libyan Investment Trust (LIT), who held 3.2 per cent of Pearson's shares, had been suspended, along with the freezing of other assets belonging to the then government of Libya (and the Qaddafi family who formed its core). This followed the outbreak of a civil war – in which Britain and other outside powers had taken military sides with the anti-Qaddafi rebels, who soon after overthrew the regime leading to protracted civil war. In turn, Pearson's stake in the LIT reflects the flows of money associated with geographies of resources (oil and gas) and the modern financial system that are considered in later chapters. But, in turn, Libyan economic and political geographies cannot be understood without reference to colonial histories (the then Ottoman Turkish lands that today comprise Libya were invaded by Italy in 1911, in a bloody war that cost thousands of Arab lives), nationalism, revolution and geopolitics. It can be argued that these led the post-colonial Libyan state (established in the early 1950s in the debris of Italian fascist imperialism and the Second World War) into violent conflict with the West, with some of its neighbours (whose boundaries themselves were drawn by competing European colonialists) as well as with more conservative Arab regimes. Such colonial histories continue to be contested elsewhere in the Middle East, with ongoing consequences for Libya and the wider world.

To describe contemporary technological, economic, cultural or political tendencies as ‘globalization’ is to invoke a certain *geographical imagination*: a vision of the growing significance of a global scale of action, of the world as a single place. Yet, we know that many people and places remain relatively marginalized, sense dangers or face threats from these supposedly hypermobile ways of living and working. And some people and places benefit from them more than others. Of course, such power and inequality are not themselves new. Consider the profits and consequences of the transatlantic slave trade between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example (see Chapter 2). Cheap sugar and cotton for northern hemisphere markets and manufacturers in Europe and America enabled new links, markets and economies. But the humans traded as unpaid workers (slaves) and objects of exploitation who did the work did not see it that way (if they lived long at all). Today, a low-paid worker (or self-employed prospector) in a diamond mine might experience the global trade in these minerals rather differently to the companies that dominate the jewellery business. Certainly the benefits of globalization are uneven. This is not new.

As an alternative to the term ‘globalization’, we might use other terms: ‘imperialism’, ‘power’ or ‘capitalism’, for example. Each carries particular connotations. In this way, ‘globalization’ serves as a particular concept that is used to make sense of the world whereby a certain geographical imagination, of an increasingly connected and ‘shrinking’ world for example, is emphasized. Yet just because something is *imagined* and interpreted in particular ways and by reference to particular geographies, it does not make it any less *real* to those caught up in it. Globalization is seen by some as a broadly positive

force, breaking down barriers, making capitalism more efficient and spreading its benefits throughout the world. For others it is a more negative process enabling another round of exploitation, often with the further destruction of local cultures and identities and further commodifying life and nature. Everything is for sale, everything has a price. Obviously, globalization has been contested, in terms of both the meanings attributed to it and the evaluation of its consequences. Judge for yourself, but as you do so, do not make the mistake of assuming that everyone everywhere shares your vantage point and experiences of the world. And having boomed as a term and way of talking about the world in the 1990s, recent years have seen use of the term begin to decline. Although based on a selective sample of books published in English since 1900, data provided by Google’s scanning of books indicates that the number using the term ‘globalization’ peaked in the mid-2000s after a steep rise from almost zero in the 1980s (see Figure 1).

Some events and moments have had global coverage as an iconic image likened by some to the moment when the American Apollo 8 spacecraft in 1968 captured the first image of the earth as a whole from space, or the reception of photographs of the earth from space by subsequent NASA missions (see Plate 1). These images have since circulated widely and are credited with reshaping human perceptions of the planet (see Cosgrove 2001). Yet the way that some events become ‘significant’ or ‘global’ reflects where they happen and who they affect. The spectacular losses of thousands of lives in Manhattan on ‘9/11’, for example, became a global media event and subject of debate in the way that the death of several million people through a decade of war from the mid-1990s in the Democratic Republic of Congo never did.



**Figure 1** Use of the term ‘globalization’, 1900–2009, based on a survey of digitized material in Google books.

Source: [http://ngrams.googlelabs.com/graph?content=globalization&year\\_start=1900&year\\_end=2008&corpus=0&smoothing=1](http://ngrams.googlelabs.com/graph?content=globalization&year_start=1900&year_end=2008&corpus=0&smoothing=1)



**Plate 1** 'The Blue Marble'. Photograph taken by a crew member aboard Apollo 17 on 7 December 1972. (NASA)

### The evolution of academic geography

A brief glance at the available disciplinary histories of geography gives an indication of a long association between geography and the militarized attempts to claim territory on behalf of a particular imperial project.

(Nayak and Jeffrey 2011: 5)

Consider how the contents and style of this text, like those others, is marked by *where* it was written. Geography, as a subject, has both history and its own geography; it has varied in space and time. As a student of the subject, you might want to venture online, or into the recess of a library, to discover past textbooks, such as Haggett (1972) which over 40 years ago was a ground-breaking text. It is important to appreciate this – and the longer-term – intellectual heritages of geography.

As a distinct subject (with students reading for a degree in it) geography has been present in European universities since the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Before then, however, geographical knowledge was studied and taught in many universities (not only those in Europe, but in the great centres of learning in the predominantly Islamic world, such as Baghdad and Cairo), as part of a variety of programmes of study – sometimes alongside mathematics and geometry for example, or as part of (or alongside) natural history, astronomy or cosmography (see Withers and Mayhew 2002). In the second half of the nineteenth century, universities were reorganized around modern disciplines, increasingly with discrete departments and

separate degree schemes. This happened as the old curriculum – based on classical learning in philosophy and sciences – began to break down with the rise of science, commerce and new capitalist rationalities. The fact that the late nineteenth century was also a time when many European states (chief amongst them Britain, France and the Netherlands) were engaged in overseas colonization and empire-building, and all were keen to foster their sense of national identity and territorial coherence, gave geography a new practical relevance. Children needed to be taught, it was argued, about their nation and its place in the world and their teachers thus required a degree in geography. At the same time, geographical knowledge had direct strategic and military relevance (this was the moment too of the birth of geopolitics, as detailed in Chapter 20) as well as commercial and imperial relevance, such as in schemes to exploit the perceived agricultural potential of colonies in Africa and Asia, for example. Nineteenth-century ideas about the relations between climate, environment and 'race', and (to use the language of that time) 'civilization' and progress, were caught up with the emergence of the discipline, but so too were the impacts of Darwin's ideas about evolution (which influenced physical geography too: in the conception of the way that landforms evolve).

The early years of the modern discipline were therefore inescapably tied up with nationalism and empires. This continued into the early twentieth century, with a growing number of geography departments being established at universities in the USA and Canada, in many Latin American countries, in the European colonies and dependencies and in Japan. In some instances, such as Russia, the earliest departments were organized in the 1880s and this was tied to nation-building rather than overseas expansion. Such was also the case in Germany and in Scandinavia. By the time of the Second World War, geography was relatively well established – and the practical knowledge (as part of military 'intelligence', for example) it yielded in wartime helped to consolidate the discipline's place in universities in many countries. After 1945 new challenges arose as other disciplines expanded, but (with some exceptions such as the closure of a few departments in the United States), geography benefited from the first big post-war expansion in the number both of universities and of students in the 1960s. Human geography increasingly reoriented itself to the technological and scientific spirit of the times, fed by a new phase of military competition in the Cold War (on this, see Barnes and Farish 2006).

In an age of formal decolonization, where the old imperial disciplinary role was waning, human geography also found new fields of study and outlets for its graduates (such as conservation, development and planning; but also



many others, by virtues of the broader skills they would acquire within a geography degree). There were, however, fierce debates about the appropriate focus (for example over the status of regional geography) and methods (such as the role of statistical analysis), which meant that what undergraduate students were exposed to (and thus had to learn) to pass a geography degree continued to change (though unevenly, depending on where they studied).

By the 1960s and 1970s, the world was changing and so was human geography. At first it led geographers to adopt statistical techniques, seeking to render the discipline more scientific. But other, more radical social and political changes (think of the hippies, the rise of feminism and gay liberation, or the movements against the American war in Vietnam and for civil rights in America and the wider spirit of revolution that came to the fore in the late 1960s) kindled interest in the underlying economic causes of inequality, turmoil and conflict in capitalist societies. An early 1990s textbook, introducing the ensuing theoretical debates in human geography, noted how, by the 1970s, 'human geography as an academic discipline had just entered into a period of considerable turmoil' (Cloke *et al.* 1991: viii). They go on to note how:

One of the most obvious characteristics of contemporary human geography is its diversity of approach. Within human geography today there is an unprecedented liveliness to the engagement with issues of method and theory. Rarely, if ever before, has the subject seen such a plurality of research methodologies and encompassed such a broad sweep of topics of investigation.

(Cloke *et al.* 1991: 1)

This liveliness has continued, reflecting both changes in the world (including political, economic and cultural shifts) and accompanying technical developments, theoretical exuberance and shifting funding arrangements for, and ways of, running universities. Cloke *et al.* (1991) looked back to what one particularly creative geographer had once termed a geographical imagination. They thus cited David Harvey (1973: 24):

This imagination enables the individual to recognize the role of space and place in his own biography . . . to relate to the spaces he sees around him, and to recognize how transactions between individuals and between organizations are affected by the spaces that separate them. It allows him to recognize the relationship which exists between him and his neighbourhood, his territory, or, to use the language of the street gangs, his 'turf' . . . It allows him to fashion and use space creatively and to appreciate the meaning of the spatial forms created by others.

Nearly 40 years later, another leading geographer claimed that:

it is worth affirming the importance of the geographical imagination, as a matter of both practical wisdom and scholarly reflection, and not least for its pleasure and enchantment, for people's love of learning about the world and their place within it.

(Daniels 2011: 186)

Today though, the taken-for-granted 'him' of Harvey's (1973) quote would be qualified with 'him or her': and with this perhaps a recognition of significant gender differences in experiences and assumptions. For example, where do men and women experience space differently and how does this relate to spaces of power, sexuality, work and reproduction? Such sensitivity has evolved out of the ways that by the 1970s geographers, David Harvey amongst them and later joined by others from many different backgrounds, started to ask more difficult questions about inequality, power, exploitation and difference. In turn, capitalism entered a phase of heightened restructuring (shaped by economic recessions, new technologies and new forms and places of production and regulation, as detailed in Section 4). Reflecting the times, human geographers became more concerned with inequality, economic and political crises and contradictions. Feminist, humanistic, ecological and other critiques also started to impact on human geography and feed into re-evaluations both of its history (the way that early twentieth-century imperial geography was shaped by racism and sexism, for example) and contemporary contents. Moreover, the boundaries between many of human geography's sub-disciplines, such as urban, political, historical or cultural geography, became more blurred. However, along the way, the modelling, data processing and visualizing capabilities of geographic information science continued to be refined (Fairbairn and Dorling 1997; Fotheringham *et al.* 2000; Schuurman 2004) and the Internet, digitisation and mobile technologies produced new capacities for communication and altered relations and perceptions of proximity and distance (see [www.zooknic.com](http://www.zooknic.com) for work on the geographies of the Internet). For some, outside the discipline, the decline of the Cold War in the late 1980s brought the 'end of history'. For others, the development of technology and the globalization of the economy were creating a 'borderless world'; some even proclaimed the 'end of geography'.

Yet the fact that social and economic processes take place across space matters. Indeed the way they do so is vital to how they operate. Human geography is not just about *describing* the spatial manifestations of economy

and society: it is about *explaining* how space is configured and shapes economies, societies and social processes. Thus, geography is not a passive outcome; it is a critical component of dynamic social and economic processes. More than that, geography in its broader definition provides an interface between the human and the natural worlds. We would argue that geography is a *key* subject for the twenty-first century, in part because many of the challenges that face humanity are at the interface between human societies and natural environments. One of the oldest themes of human geography (and indeed of geography as a whole, including its physical side) – human–environment relations – has become an urgent agenda for the twenty-first century.

Human geographers have also become more aware of the ways that knowledge is socially constructed. This is complex, reflecting ideology. But in the simplest terms, the way you see the world is partly a function of who you think you are and, hence, *where* you see yourself as coming from. Human geographers have come to realize that much of the knowledge and understanding that they claimed to be universal is in various ways Eurocentric: it comes from somewhere and any idea that it is universally true (for all and everywhere) might be challenged. Similarly, Eurocentrism has been associated with a very ‘white’ view of a multi-ethnic world such as the fairly widespread self-perception that white folk are not really themselves members of a particular ‘ethnic’ group, except amongst racists and white supremacists. Yet in global terms they are arguably a distinctive ‘ethnic minority’ whose identity has been forged through comparisons and interactions with other people classified as non-white. In turn, however, such ideas about race and ethnicity are rooted in colonial histories (and hierarchies) that are evidently themselves particular (imperial) ways of knowing, ordering and interpreting the world. These resurface in contemporary racism, and have their own historical geography. Ideas about race, which today may seem self-evident and obvious, would not have been present in, for example, the Roman Empire, which had other ways of ordering and stratifying society and demarcating insiders, barbarians, citizens and slaves. All this means that geographers must now reconsider the ways in which assumptions and value judgments shape the way they view the world. They must accept that *all* descriptions of the world are culturally determined, often politically motivated, and can always be contested.

So, think about your position; realize that this book presents the views of human geographers working at particular places and times. We have set out to challenge readers to think about the ways that human geography interprets the major social, cultural, economic,

environmental and related issues that face the world in the early years of the twenty-first century. It is for you to use this book to inform your own insights and opinions as geographers; and to read beyond it. In other words, reading this textbook is the beginning of your introduction to human geography, not the end.

Today, human geography is characterized by a wide variety of approaches; there are many ways of writing geography and approaches to doing so (see Spotlight box I.2). The idea of a single, all-encompassing geographical approach (which may have been evident in times past) is not convincing anymore. Since we have adopted an *issue-based* approach, there is not the scope here to say much more about the evolution of debates in human geography. You can further explore their trajectory using some of the other readings listed at the end of this chapter. Alternatively, track down and read Chris Philo’s (2008) fluent summary alongside his ‘map’ of changing approaches in human geography. But at this point please accept our word that this story (like Philo’s ‘map’) becomes immensely complex, intertwined and convoluted, reflecting the intellectual trends and social changes mentioned earlier.

However, it is important to appreciate some shared concepts. Most disciplines have their central concepts and ideas that define what it is they study and how they study it. Human geography is often accused of borrowing ideas from elsewhere, rather than generating its own; but it is possible to identify a set of concepts that make it distinct and different. We might disagree on what they might mean (and each is the subject of a vast literature), but ideas of place, space, and scale are certainly central to human geography and have been for a long time, as has an interest in landscape, difference, connectivity and unevenness. All of the core ideas of human geography can be deployed to interrogate and explain the places where we live and the places where we travel. As geographers, we seek explanations as to why something came to be where it is, how places are experienced, connected and represented, or how the physical environment and nature are transformed by society. Chapter 12 notes how the planetary scale of such transformations has been re-conceptualized as a human-influenced geological epoch (the Anthropocene). At a more personal scale, in Spotlight box I.3, one of the editors explains his engagements with a particular place – or set of places connected on a path. It is our hope that, as a practising human geographer, you will also find your own literal or metaphorical paths through this discipline and be inspired to think geographically. For us, then, human geography is a way of seeing, enquiring and understanding past, present and potential future worlds.