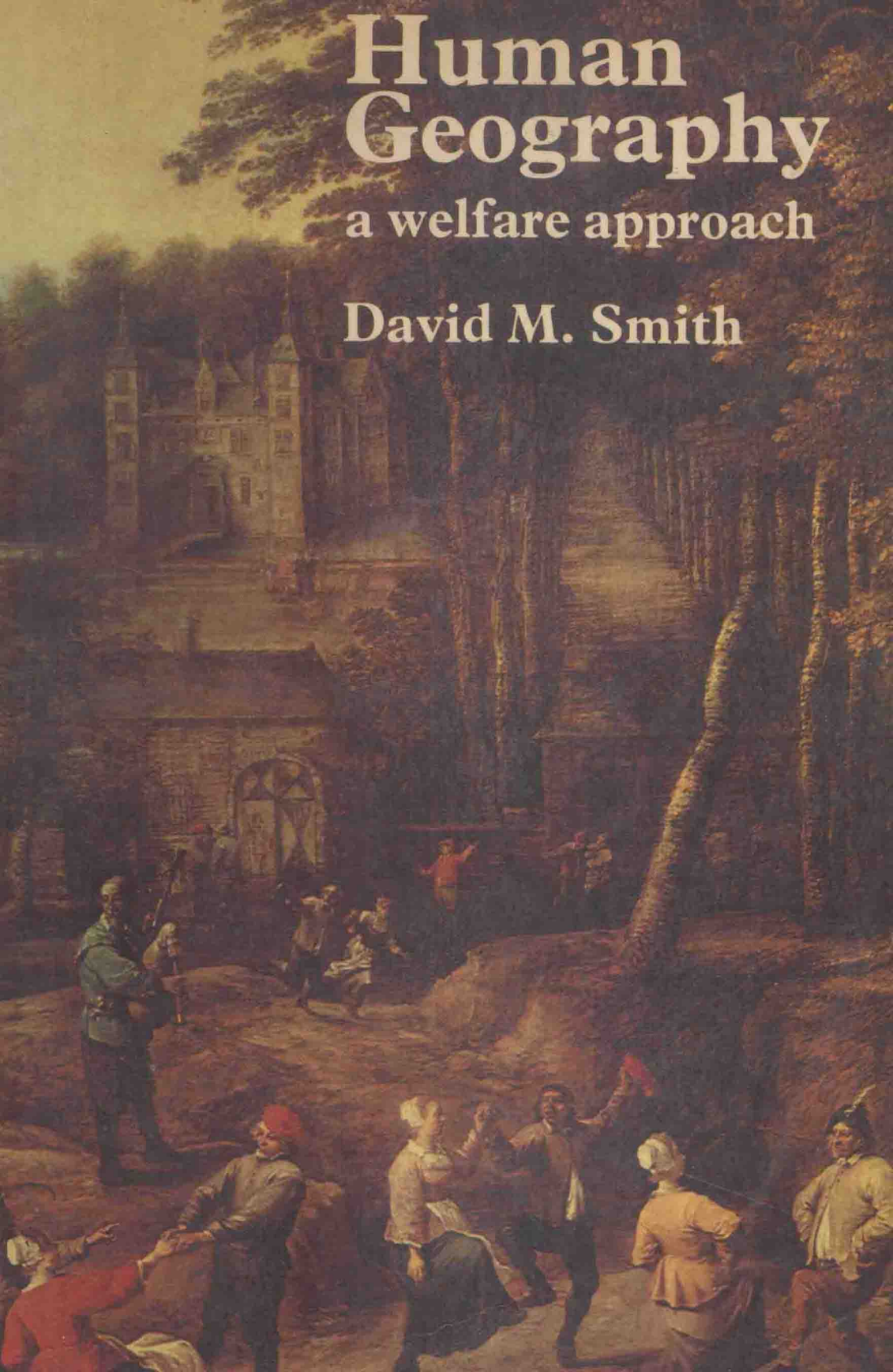


Human Geography

a welfare approach

David M. Smith



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Preface

This book offers a restructuring of human geography around the theme of *welfare*. Since the end of the 1960s the condition of mankind has emerged as a major concern of the geographer, with a growing emphasis on economic and social problems, relevance in research, and influence on public policy. Considerations of equity or social justice are supplementing those of efficiency previously adopted in passing judgements on the spatial arrangement of human activity. While the so-called quantitative revolution and the discovery of models has brought more sophistication in research methods, it has tended to produce a mechanistic geography somewhat removed from reality. To respond adequately to the problems of the modern world, human geography must be firmly rooted in human life, calling on the new methods to illuminate human problems rather than being largely moulded to techniques. The theme of human welfare provides an integrating focus for a more “relevant” human geography.

A welfare approach involves judgements among alternative structures or states of society. In geography, the judgements are between alternative *spatial* arrangements. Few people would question the legitimacy of an applied aspect to human geography, yet any attempt to recommend or advocate a particular course of action inevitably involves value judgements that can easily conflict with the ethics of scholarly objectivity and political neutrality still widely held in academic life. Thus the application of human geography in such normative fields as urban and regional planning requires a more-than-usual dose of intellectual discipline. That it also requires sound understanding of the way in which human life is actually organized in space, and the capacity for skilled scientific analysis of problems, should go without saying. This applies no less to the social activist lacking inhibitions about advocacy than to the more detached scholar seeking solutions without involvement. Social activism prompted by deep concern for one’s fellow beings is highly laudable, but it is of limited effect without a sound body of positive knowledge. To “change the system” is obviously facilitated by knowledge of how the system works.

The welfare approach to human geography attempts to provide both positive knowledge and guidance in the normative realm of evaluation and policy formulation. This is a formidable task, for the fields of inquiry outside geography from which assistance may be derived extend from certain environmental sciences right through the social or behavioural

sciences and into the study of ethics and philosophy. No single scholar can be well enough versed in all these fields to provide a comprehensive and balanced view: keeping up with literature in human geography itself is hard enough today, with the proliferation of textbooks, periodicals and discussion papers. The approach in this book leans most heavily on economics, and on the recent literature concerned with "social indicators" or the monitoring of social progress. This is in part an outcome of my own interests and expertise. It also reflects the belief that the major tasks facing mankind have to do with getting the best we can from limited resources—assuming that there is some kind of solution to the broader problem of people learning to live together in a cooperative spirit of mutual assistance instead of in aggressive competition. Economics deals with resource allocation and with how production and distribution are organized. Social indicators help us to identify the outcomes and to judge what is better or best. The heavy reliance on the work of other social sciences reflects the view that a broad multi-disciplinary perspective is essential in modern human geography.

Breadth of scope and limitation of space means that many important issues raised in this book can be treated only briefly. What is attempted is the construction of a skeletal framework for a welfare-oriented geography, complete enough to indicate general form without being specific on some of the detail. If the approach carries any conviction, others may be led to add the necessary flesh, or some changes in form based on different disciplinary perspectives.

As will be shown later, certain well developed bodies of knowledge in existing sub-fields of human geography fit logically into the framework offered in this book. Some of the flesh exists in advance of the skeleton. Examples include location theory in economic geography and work on human spatial interaction. In these cases integration with the welfare theme is achieved more by reference to the literature than by extensive repetition of existing knowledge. Most space is devoted to exploration of less familiar territory.

Discussion of the new techniques and models introduced into human geography in recent years has been largely omitted. Apart from space considerations, this is justified to some extent by the fact that many of these devices, while of technical interest, have as yet little revealed capacity to shed light on the type of problems raised by the welfare approach. In any event, familiarity with conventional statistical methods and techniques for the analysis of spatial patterns of location and movement should now be assumed in the student of human geography. There is an ample choice of other works covering this material. If the present book is used as a basic text in human geography prior to or parallel with quantitative training, my *Patterns in human geography: an introduction to numerical methods* (David & Charles, 1975; Penguin, 1976) would be an appropriate companion volume, demonstrating the application of a wide range of techniques in social problem situations. Placing emphasis in the present book on the problems instead of the techniques is an overt statement of current professional priority.

If light on numerical techniques, the book may appear to the impatient activist to be rather heavy on theory. There are lengthy and, at times, quite intricate discussions of various aspects of spatial welfare theory, to provide the necessary background for more applied research. Simple graphic models and imaginary cases are used extensively, to assist exposition. Neither these nor the algebraic formulations should cause undue mental discomfort for the undergraduate reader. A knowledge of elementary economic theory will help, but this is not assumed.

Value judgements are involved in the structure and content of any human geography text. It therefore seems wise at the outset to make explicit those of particular importance in guiding the present volume. The first is that the development of *useful knowledge* is a superior academic ethic to the development of knowledge for its own sake. What kind of knowledge is useful, and for whom, is itself a contentious matter, as we shall discover in some subsequent discussions. This leads to the second value judgement underpinning the book—that the focal point of human geography should be *the quality of human life*. How quality of life is defined is, of course, subject to many further value judgements, as will be explained in the exposition of the welfare approach. It is sufficient here to say that it concerns efficiency in the use of resources and equity or fairness in distribution of the benefits and penalties of life. Useful knowledge promotes the creation of a just world society in which the satisfaction of human needs has first priority.

Value judgements are also implicit in the particular approach adopted, based as it is on the belief that certain forms of intellectual activity are likely to be effective means of enhancing human life. To contemplate the application of scientific measurement and analysis to something as abstract and personal as the quality of life is itself a product of a particular intellectual climate, influenced by Western logic, positivist scientific philosophy, and belief in rational problem-solving. To advocate a particular academic approach is to some extent an act of faith. Experience alone is the final arbiter between the more or less effective bodies of knowledge.

The approach adopted here attempts to suggest ways in which the geographer may address the question of what *should be*, along with the traditional concern with what *is*. It is the neglect of the normative issues and associated value judgements that marks the weakness of existing textbooks in human geography. Their vain striving for objectivity and political neutrality distracts attention from the basic problem of equity in distribution. Spatial inequality of human life chances is a focus of this book, but its purpose is to trace the origins of inequality rather than to condemn injustice. The analysis will inevitably reveal certain fundamental weaknesses of the contemporary capitalist-competitive-materialistic society, but the temptation to offer a more radical critique of existing structures has been resisted, in favour of an approach that builds on the discipline's established intellectual tradition. At the risk of appearing ambivalent, the exposition deliberately juxtaposes alternative perspectives on both theoretical and practical problems, so that what makes most

sense of reality can emerge in a comparative framework. Again at the risk of ambivalence, an attempt has been made to provide the basis for an applied geography relevant both to liberal intervention and radical structural reform, for to concentrate on the latter overlooks the fact that most social change is incremental rather than revolutionary.

After an introductory chapter outlining the welfare approach, the book is divided into four parts. Part One offers a theoretical foundation, necessary before empirical problems can be properly formulated and explanations or solutions sought. Part Two provides a bridge from theory to reality, covering the problems of evaluation of spatial distributions and the application of a welfare approach to the planning of change. Part Three presents selected case studies designed to demonstrate the practical use of the knowledge of Parts One and Two to real-world situations. Part Four offers brief thoughts on desirable forms of human spatial and societal reorganization, followed by some conclusions on the nature of inquiry in human geography.

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I

Introduction: Geography and Human Welfare

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn whereso'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

William Wordsworth, *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, 1807

There was a time when geographers accepted the world very much as they found it. While not necessarily seeing the divine hand behind the spatial arrangement of man's works, they were at least tempted to think in terms of Adam Smith's "invisible hand" of the market, guiding human affairs towards some universally beneficial outcome. But the hands laid on the landscapes which inspired Wordsworth are those of a species whose actions show clearly that the pursuit of individual self-interest is not destined to produce the best of all worlds. As likely as not, the meadow is now built-on or smothered in DDT, the grove cut down and the stream flowing with effluents, while to see many of the common sights of the contemporary city in a favourable light requires more than the imagination of a poet. The state of the modern world is a matter of extreme concern—particularly to the geographer who understands something both of human frailty and of the delicacy of man's earthly environment. Increasingly, human geographers and other social scientists are reluctant to leave the fate of mankind to politicians and planners, far less to hidden hands. They now seek a much more active role in the promotion of human welfare.

1.1 Revolution in human geography

The problem of defining human geography is sometimes resolved by recourse to the axiom that geography is what geographers do. As a recognition that human geography has few really distinctive academic features, to define the subject by the type of investigation conducted has

much to commend it. While such expressions as "the study of spatial organization", "areal differentiation", "location analysis" and "spatial behaviour" may help to capture the general concerns of scholars who call themselves (human) geographers, these are not the sole preserve of a single discipline. With the emergence of regional science in the 1960s and the growing spatial awareness of economists and other social scientists interested in urban and regional analysis, there is now very little that the human geographer can claim as his or her exclusive domain.

So why have a field of inquiry called human geography? Why help to perpetuate part of a rather arbitrary and often unhelpful disintegration of the study of human existence? The only convincing argument is that the geographer still has some distinctive point of view. We may have lost our monopoly on spatial wisdom, or the capacity to understand how human life is organized on the surface of the earth, but we remain the only scholars who put space and location first. Geography still has a capacity to offer a broad, synoptic view of spatial relationships in human affairs, transcending the conventional subdivision of phenomena into "economic", "social", "political", and so on. The only other discipline that could make this claim with any legitimacy is regional science, as represented in the ambitious general theory of Isard *et al.* (1969). But even here human geography has something to differentiate it. While regional science is strongly characterized by the abstract theoretical approach of the economist, human geography is traditionally an empirical subject deeply rooted in the reality of experience.

The empirical spatial perspective may be the geographer's major theme, but human geography as what human geographers actually do is subject to perpetual variation. The past two decades have seen some particularly important changes, in subject matter, methodology and philosophy (Chisholm, 1975). Such has been their impact that they are commonly described as revolutions.

Until the middle of the 1950s human geography was more art than science. Facts were often established by casual observation in the field rather than by careful measurement; causal relationships came from intuitive judgement rather than from formal hypothesis testing; and the grand regional synthesis towards which the geographer worked was more of a literary masterpiece on a specific territory than something from which generalizations might emerge. The only theory to which observed location patterns could be referred was environmental determinism and its later variants such as "possibilism", relics of which still remain in some regional geography textbooks. Applied human geography was confined to vague connections with town planning, conservation and resource inventory.

All human geography of this era was not worthless, of course. The very flimsy establishment of cause and effect, particularly when guided by determinism, certainly produced some erroneous findings. But many of the human geographers of the first half of this century combined acute skills in fieldwork with a feel for the reality of man-land relationships which perhaps enabled them to get closer to real life than most practi-

tioners of today's more sophisticated approaches. The old regional monographs may well be "the tombstones of European geography" (Gould, 1973, 257), but at least they make a more decorative cemetery than some of today's computer-generated research. Nevertheless, human geography in the middle of the 1950s remained largely oblivious of the scientific methods in common use in other fields such as economics and sociology.

Then came the "quantitative revolution". The efforts of a few pioneers who began experimenting with statistics in geography (e.g. McCarty *et al.*, 1956) soon built up into a popular new approach to measurement and the establishment of empirical associations. This was assisted by the growing ease of access to computers, which enabled geographers to process much larger volumes of numerical data. The first book on statistical methods for geographers appeared (Gregory, 1963), to be followed by others (Cole and King, 1968; Yeates, 1968; King, 1969), by the first readers in quantitative geography (Garrison and Marble, 1967; Berry and Marble, 1968), and then by further texts at different levels (Tidswell and Barker, 1971; Theakstone and Harrison, 1970; Hammond and McCullagh, 1974; Yeates, 1974; Smith, 1975c). Within a decade the quantitative revolution had substantially changed the conduct of inquiry in human geography.

But to describe the "new" geography of the 1960s simply as quantitative or statistical is an oversimplification. Closely associated with the geographer's emerging numeracy was the discovery of models (Chorley and Haggett, 1967a). Model building is itself related to the development of spatial theory, for mathematical models are generally specific or operational versions of some theoretical structure. The contemporary geographical interest in theory dates from roughly the same time as the beginning of the quantitative revolution. Three influential works in spatial economic theory appeared (Lösch, 1954; Greenhut, 1956; Isard, 1956), a seminal text in regional science soon followed (Isard, 1960) and, together with the classic work of Christaller (1933) on central places, these provided a foundation for a new theoretical approach to economic geography. Growing interest in the conduct of inquiry and the philosophy of science culminated in Harvey's *Explanation in Geography* (1969), which raised the "nature and purpose" debate previously focused on the work of Hartshorne (1939; 1959) to new intellectual heights.

The human geography of the 1960s was thus characterized as much by its growing maturity and diversity as by the label "quantitative". The mainstream of quantitative analysis proceeded to a substantial extent independent of the theoretical thrust, the main inspiration for which was spatial economics rather than statistics or mathematics. The development and testing of models provided some connection, but much quantitative analysis was pure empiricism with little guidance from or contribution to theory. Only in the study of settlements as "central places" did location theory and statistical methods blend closely together.

Much of the energy of the quantitative revolution was expended on the development of research techniques. But by the middle of the 1960s the preoccupation with statistics, models and theories was beginning to

generate a new integrated approach to the substantive content of the subject. The first book-length attempts to pull quantitative methods and theory together in geography were by Bunge (1962) and Haggett (1965), who led the subject further towards the numerical analysis of location patterns in the context of human spatial organization. Subsequent general textbooks developing this theme include those by Morrill (1970), Adams, Abler and Gould (1971) and Cox (1972), while Haggett (1972) and Kolars and Nystuen (1974) have attempted even broader views incorporating the physical environment. These general approaches built on work of the quantitative—model building—theoretical type in systematic sub-fields such as transportation, population geography, industrial location and urban geography, where modern textbooks began to appear at the beginning of the 1970s.

During the quantitative revolution the focus of attention in human geography was on methods rather than subject matter. Topics which received particular attention, such as diffusion of innovation, social ecology of cities and multivariate regionalization, owed their popularity as much to the availability of convenient techniques or computer programs as to the intrinsic interest of the subjects themselves. Applied human geography in regional planning and urban development was often merely an opportunity for the application of some favoured technique, which may have been quite ill-suited to the problem at hand. The *avant-garde* of the quantitative movement was not generally among the most conspicuous participants in the resurgence of interest in public policy issues during the latter part of the 1960s.

Human geography's second revolution has been characterized alternatively as "radical" (Smith, 1971a) or concerned with "social relevance" (Prince, 1971). The quantitative revolution had never been accepted by a substantial old guard on both sides of the Atlantic, but at the end of the 1960s the younger generation of American geographers also began to express disquiet. Concern at the impersonal, mechanical approaches of the new geography was, in fact, part of a more general feeling that the discipline was failing to respond to major contemporary social issues. Particular targets were pollution, poverty, hunger, racial discrimination, social inequality or injustice, and the exploitation of colonial territories by the governments and businesses of capitalist nations.

Although the radical/relevance revolution, as a major shift in professional direction, occurred at the end of the 1960s, research on social issues had been building up steadily throughout the decade. Problems of regional economic distress attracted much attention in Western Europe and North America, and some of the new techniques of multivariate areal classification found outlets in the measurement of "economic health" following the work of Thompson *et al.* (1962). The study of physical health, in the form of medical geography, was developing strength (Stamp, 1964; Howe, 1972; McGlashen, 1972). And basic research on economic development continued to occupy geographers working in underdeveloped areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Dickinson and Clark, 1972). Other attempts to broaden the scope of the human geographer's concerns

included the suggestion that a level-of-living index might be used in regional delimitation (Lewis, 1968) and the efforts of Gould (1969) to relate space preference to a “welfare indicator”.

From the beginning of the 1970s the literature on social problems and what may loosely be termed welfare issues expanded rapidly. Poverty formed the subject matter of two issues of *Antipode*, a new radical journal (Peet, 1970; 1972), and of the first book in a “problems” series in geography (Morrill and Wohlenberg, 1971). Texts on the black ghetto (Rose, 1971), the geography of crime (Harries, 1974) and health care (Shannon and Dever, 1974) followed. The first collection of papers on the geography of social problems was published (Albaum, 1972). Calls for a “geography of social well-being” have been made (Smith, 1972a; 1973a; Knox, 1975). Chisholm (1971a) has suggested welfare economics as a possible alternative to conventional microeconomics as a point of departure for location theory, and the possibility of welfare as a focal point in human geography has already been tentatively explored (Smith, 1973c; 1974d). And Harvey (1972a; 1973) has drawn attention to the question of social justice in a spatial context.

That this growing interest in welfare matters should have taken place when it did was no accident. Like other scholars, human geographers are creatures of their times, reacting to the intellectual, social and political climate in which they live. Just as in the United States the era of the quantitative revolution was one of societal preoccupation with technological gymnastics (as exemplified by space exploration) and with a rational managerial approach to human affairs, so the late 1960s which spawned the relevance movement was one of radicalism among the young (and some not-so-young) prompted by the disillusionment with the war in Viet Nam and with the apparent insensitivity of government to various manifestations of social injustice. Radical geography is the geography of the years of the “pollution crises” and of “crisis in the cities”. It is also the geography of the end of the post-war era of continuous growth in the real standard of living, in which distributional issues are taking on a new urgency.

The relevance movement, like the quantitative revolution, has taken a number of different forms. The question of just what it means to be “relevant” has been debated at length, for example in a series of papers in *Area* (Chisholm, 1971b; Eyles, 1971; Berry, 1972; Dickinson and Clark, 1972; Blowers, 1972, 1974; Smith, 1973b). The inevitable division between liberals and radicals has occurred, the former working for incremental change within “the system” while the latter hold that nothing short of revolutionary socialism can create a just society out of the inhumanity of the modern capitalist-corporate state. Some of the former have attained influential positions in policy-making, consultancy and officially sponsored research. The latter, inspired mainly by Marx, attempt to restructure geography to the needs of a new kind of society.

For human geography to be relevant to the needs of a society, whatever its form, it must focus directly on the type of problem faced by people in their everyday lives. The quantitative revolution and its aftermath gave