

AN EDITOR'S VIEW OF CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

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I shall try to suggest the current directions of scholarly activity in the field as seen from the vantage point of the editor of The Professional Geographer. This assessment is based largely upon my reading of the manuscripts that come to us. These are now arriving at a rate of about three hundred a year. In our journal we feel obliged to cover virtually the full spectrum of the field in order to accommodate the needs and interests of the members of our sponsoring organization, the Association of American Geographers. To serve our seven thousand readers we must therefore offer a variety of topics. In addition to the information I have gleaned from the manuscripts we receive, I have compared notes with the editor of Geographical Analysis, who is also a member of the faculty at the State University of New York at Buffalo. This latter publication is very different from our journal in that it specializes in the theoretical aspects of geography and caters to works that are mainly on the research frontier. My report to you will therefore go somewhat beyond the impressions of the field gained from items going into our general-purpose journal.

It is important to note at the outset that the articles we print are not an entirely representative sample of the manuscripts we receive. Inevitably many of the works submitted to us are from people who have not kept up with the development of the field. We cannot justify devoting our scarce resources to the publication of redundant or out-of-date work. My observations, therefore, apply only to such material as our reviewers judge to be worthy of printing.

As we look at the changing directions of the field, we find many persons expressing concern about the turns it is taking. Noting this common uneasiness abroad in the profession, Marvin Mikesell will be examining this problem in his address to the president's opening session of the AAG's annual meeting at Philadelphia later this month.* He will be asking this question: "Is our old discipline coming apart?" From all the new hyphenated forms of geography springing up, the field would seem to be going off in many directions at once. He finds consolation, however, in the ample indications that the common bonds of geography remain intact. He notes especially that the same questions are still

*Mikesell's paper will be reproduced in the November issue of The Professional Geographer.

being asked by geographers, the questions of "where" and "why." The big differences are in the approaches being taken to find answers to these questions.

Another matter that still troubles many persons is the existence of dichotomies in geography, something that has confronted the field almost from the beginning. A few years ago it was topical versus regional, a dichotomy that still persists in some quarters. Other dichotomies that have been around quite a while are theoretical versus empirical and quantitative versus nonquantitative. More recently we have had the behavioral offered in opposition to the normative.

To some extent, the appearance of new trends in the field occurs in response to the changing composition of our student and faculty populations. This is apparently true of some of the more recent developments, which seem to have their origins in the period of student unrest of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Today's young faculty members, who were graduate students during that time when social and political issues were all-consuming preoccupations, show their continued interest in such matters by the kinds of topics they choose to investigate.

As an example of this, we have been receiving numerous good manuscripts on studies having to do with questions of public policy, most particularly in that subspecialty we might call the geography of public goods. This, in fact, is to be the main theme of the August issue of The Professional Geographer. The issue will offer another of our special-feature sections, this one containing four articles dealing with spatial problems in achieving equity in the delivery of public goods, in avoiding inequity in taxation, and other public-policy questions. Each of these articles has practical implications for decision makers. The Views and Opinions section of this same August issue will likewise focus upon public policy, the lead article of the section being one written by the Geographer of the United States Geological Survey.

To a certain extent, the so-called radical geographers have participated in this recent trend toward geographical topics having social and political implications. We see little of a substantive nature coming from this group, however. Their influence seems to be more in the nature of a prodding of the conscience.

We are now seeing a growing number of policy-directed geographical works dealing with broader public issues of an economic

rather than a merely social nature. The special-feature section of last February's Professional Geographer provides an example of this latter type of geographical study. The four articles in this special feature dealt with a matter of considerable public interest in the United States, the North-South question. "North-South" in this case refers to the economic and demographic shifts now taking place between regions of the country. As these articles demonstrate, geography has important contributions to make in the analysis of such national issues.

The current interest in "applied geography" likewise has a public-policy component. This topic (which I think is misnamed) is gaining considerable attention in the United States at this time. Since becoming editor of The Professional Geographer, I have been continually urged to give the subject more exposure, especially because of the need to generate new kinds of employment for geographers who are finding fewer opportunities for academic careers. "Applied geography" is not only difficult to define, however; it is a topic that few authors treat successfully.

Still another major subject area that continues to occupy the interests of many geographers, judging by the manuscripts we receive, is "behavioral geography." The term "behavioral geography" is

applied so loosely that it too is difficult to pin down. Under this heading we see many studies of the housing market, residential change, and travel behavior, to name only a few. One trend we seem to notice in the behavioral studies reaching us is a declining emphasis upon mere individual motivations and a growing stress upon institutional controls--the controls imposed by society and government. Behavioral work in geography appears to be more in the direction of the "phenomenological," that is, the analysis of decision making in the light of total human experience.

The behavioral aspects still figure importantly in much of the research being done in economic geography today. Economic geographers are generally placing greater emphasis upon process, we notice. In stressing the dynamic aspects of location, economic geographers are giving more attention to the way firms make decisions. They take into account such characteristics as the nature of ownership, the type of management, firm size, and, more recently the institutional constraints on doing business.

Indeed, economic geographers have been giving such weight to the behavioral aspects that some people have begun asking whether normative economic geography has a future. However, judging by the manuscripts that are coming to us and to Geographical Analysis,

and also based upon our knowledge of the research various individuals are doing, we believe that the normative aspects will continue to have a significant place. In fact, we expect increasingly to see a linking of the normative and behavioral, a development that would appear quite logical. The general methodology of Weber and the neo-Weberians is seen as still viable; it is just being placed within new parameters.

As I look at the pieces we have been receiving in physical geography, it is a little more difficult for me to detect definite patterns. Perhaps the articles in physical geography reaching us now show more concern for the human implications than in the past. Here, too, we seem to be seeing a new concern for the public-policy implications of certain physical processes. An example of this is an article on stream measurement we are publishing next November. Among other things, it takes up the political problems that arise from the different ways in which streams are measured for the purpose of setting boundaries. The May issue is to contain an article on sun spots and the frequency of drought, which raises a variety of human problems. Environmental topics still appear among the manuscripts arriving on our desk, but they are not as numerous as in the past. Despite the show of interest by physical

geographers in the human aspects, I think that the majority of papers they are sending us still deal with purely physical questions.

One issue in the United States that is no longer debated openly but lurks in the background is the question of the role of quantitative techniques. Numerous individuals, particularly certain behavioral enthusiasts, are starting to speak of the "demise of quantitative geography." Indeed, some are already talking as though quantitative geography were already nearing its end. Despite all the talk, however, the evidence, in the form of manuscripts submitted to us, does not bear out this prediction. In fact, the reverse actually seems to be true; quantitative techniques appear to have secured a permanent place in the field. Ironically few of the behaviorally inclined writers send us papers that do not include some concrete quantitative calculations upon which their conclusions are based. Most of the very people speaking of the decline of quantitative methods are themselves well versed in these techniques and employ them in their work. The quantitative techniques used by geographers generally are becoming quite sophisticated, rivaling the best to be seen in neighboring disciplines. This is not intended to suggest that nonquantitative works are not welcome in our journal. To the contrary, we accept and publish many studies of

this nature.

Although some of the new developments in model building appear in manuscripts submitted to The Professional Geographer, they are even more apparent in the works reaching Geographical Analysis, which is very much at the center of such research. These manuscripts show a growing movement toward dynamic models rather than static ones; their main concern is with evolving systems through time. Especially notable is the work with very large-scale simulation models. The individuals working with these are attempting to develop a true geographical theory. They are taking a new look at the very fundamental, root questions of the discipline, with the ultimate aim of constructing a theory of geography that is more strongly based than the theories we have previously relied upon. These theorists are giving full attention to the behavioral aspects, but they are focusing more clearly upon economic behavior than the psychological behavior that received the most attention in the past.

In the modeling now taking place, there is a drive to synthesize, to consolidate what has previously been a great variety of independent models. Even in this most advanced work of a fundamental theoretical nature, however, we find that the problems being

addressed are still those that geographers have traditionally pursued. Although the questions being asked vary greatly in detail and differ considerably in scope, they are basically the same questions that have been addressed in the past. As Marvin Mikesell will be telling the Philadelphia meeting, only the approach to finding answers to these questions is new.