

INTRODUCTION

The world of politics provides plenty to whet the appetite. The anticipation of an upcoming election, the intrigue behind a *coup d'état*, and the chaos of a war zone are gripping fare for the intellectual, student and layperson alike. What unites geographers in their study of political events like these is a focus on the spatial organization inherent to them and the power relationships that underpin them. Geographers look at how politics affect spatial order, and how spatial orders inform politics.

Traditionally, political geography has used the state as a primary unit of analysis. Political geographers studied how states were organized internally, and how they interacted with other states in regions and the international system as a whole. In recent years political geography has added other units of analysis to its repertoire. These include not only smaller levels of analysis, such as the 'local', but also larger ones, such as the supra-national. Their use has also brought renewed attention to the different ways that political actions play out *across* scales.

In many ways this change in focus reflects changes in the world around us. When the Cold War ended in 1989 there was uncertainty not only about what would happen to formerly communist states, but also what would happen to the balance of power between them. The emergence of globalization also brought new political actors to the fore, including international organizations, social movements, non-governmental organizations and warlords, among many others. How this mix of old and new actors and the changing relations of power between them will play out is yet to be seen, but political geography will be there to document, analyse and ultimately theorize them.

Political Geography through Time

The development of modern political geography was intimately connected with the colonial project (Peet 1985). These connections are readily apparent in the subdiscipline's two most formative schools of thought – environmental determinism and geopolitics. While these approaches initially made the discipline of Geography popular in and out of the academy, they would eventually be debunked, leaving political geography

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fighting for its survival. A brief introduction to each is provided here. Geopolitics, which has witnessed a resurgence of interest under the label 'critical geopolitics', is also discussed in Chapter 7.

Environmental Determinism

Environmental determinism was developed in the mid-nineteenth century purportedly to explain the discrepancies in standards of living between European colonizers and their colonial subjects. Environmental determinists were influenced by social Darwinism, although most preferred to draw from Lamarckian rather than Darwinian versions of evolution (Livingstone 1992).¹ Proponents of the theory, including Friedrich Ratzel, Ellen Churchill Semple and Ellsworth Huntington, posited that climate and topography determined the relative development of a society, and its prospects for future development. Temperate climates were seen as invigorating whereas tropical and arctic climates were deemed to stunt human development. Geographers also postulated that river valleys produced vibrant societies while mountainous environments inhibited them.

For much of the early twentieth century, especially in United States, environmental determinism dominated the entire discipline. Even as the approach was becoming a meta-narrative of the field, scholars in other disciplines were subjecting it to withering criticism. The anthropologist Franz Boas labelled the theory simplistic and reductionist because it failed to explain how vastly different cultures could emerge in the same environments (Livingstone 1992). Eventually, geographers would abandon the theory as well. One of the first to do so was Carl Sauer who adopted culture, rather than environment (alone) as the key explanatory variable in human differentiation across space (Livingstone 1992). Half a century later, geographers would describe the discipline's fixation with geographic determinism as an imperialist impulse (Peet 1985; Smith 1987).

Geopolitics

Social Darwinism also influenced political geographers' view of the state. Most notable in this regard was Friedrich Ratzel, whose book *Anthropogeography* formed the basis for environmental determinism. Ratzel theorized that states were very much like organisms; both had

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life cycles, and states, when they were young, needed *lebensraum*, or living space, to grow. Ratzel's theory of *lebensraum* was further developed in the German context by Karl Haushofer and Richard Hennig and in Britain by Halford MacKinder (Livingstone 1992). In the 1930s, Nazi ideology combined the geopolitical view of state life cycles, and the territorial imperative underpinning them, with eugenics (Livingstone 1992). After the Nazi atrocities were brought to light at the end of World War II, geopolitics looked as ill-conceived as environmental determinism had before it. As disciplinary historian David Livingstone (1992: 253) succinctly observes, these schools of thought failed to separate out 'the science of geography from practical politics'.

Theoretical Influences

In many respects, political geography is an empirically driven sub-discipline (Mamadouh 2003). Political geographers tend to employ mid-level concepts rather than meta-theories to analyse the spatial organization of politics. Historically, concepts like region, territory and scale gave the sub-discipline its coherence, with debates emerging around how these concepts should be defined and employed. The focus on regional studies during the Cold War buttressed this trend in Anglo-geography as political geographers worked to build a dossier of thick, in-depth knowledge on places deemed of political importance by the government and/or military establishment. When political geographers use meta-level theory, they tend to select from two general theoretical frames: political economy and poststructuralism.

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Political Economy

Although some of the discipline's key thinkers can reasonably be labeled Marxist geographers, most political geographers borrow from the Marxist canon rather than working fully within it. These approaches are generally termed political economy to indicate that economic structures are emphasized in the analysis of the political realm. Several schools of thought can be broadly fitted under the political economy framework. These are discussed below, although the reader should refer to Chapter 10 on Political Economy for a more

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detailed account of the genesis of the term and its uses in political geography.

World Systems Theory

World Systems Theory (WST) posits that macro-level patterns govern social and economic change. Although popular in geography, WST was developed by a political scientist, Immanuel Wallerstein (1974). Wallerstein wanted to challenge conventional notions of economic development in both history and the social sciences. Drawing on the work of French historian Fernand Braudel (1993), Wallerstein argued that history was not about singular events – the start of a war or the signing of a diplomatic accord – but about materially structured ways of life (Wieviorka 2005). Understanding history required understanding the material foundations of society, not just the actions of its elites. Wallerstein's work was also informed by the work of André Gunder Frank (1969), who criticized contemporary understandings of modernization, or lack thereof, in the developing world (Wallerstein 2006). Frank argued that countries did not develop (or fail to develop) simply because they had taken (or failed to take) the necessary steps; they developed (or failed to develop) because of their place in the colonial order. Wallerstein posited that the contemporary world system emerged during the colonial period and was consolidated as a world (rather than regional) system by the early 1900s. This process created a spatial structure in which so-called core countries were able to develop economically and politically through the extraction of peripheral countries' surplus.

Geographers who use WST tend to employ the approach in one of two ways (Flint and Shelley 1990). In the first, they use the model largely as it is, or with minor variations, to frame their analysis of political and economic change in given states or regions. Jim Blaut (2000) has used the theory, for example, to criticize historians who argue that the industrial revolution happened in Europe rather than Africa, Latin America or Asia because it possessed special features these other regions did not. Rather, the extraction of peripheral countries' surplus allowed core countries to develop, and at the expense of those places whose surplus they took. In other cases, geographers have nuanced the model, examining how world systems theory can be applied at different scales. They note that the categories of core and periphery are better seen not as static places on the globe but as scalar process (Dyke 1988;

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Straussfogel 1997). So conceived, apparent contradictions in the model (such as the appearance of peripheral-like places in the core – e.g. Appalachia in the US) can be explained. That is, core/periphery relationships operate not only at the global scale, but also at national and even local scales.

Regulation theory

The regulation school was developed in France by Michel Aglietta (1979) and Alain Lipietz (1992) in the late 1970s and 1980s. Regulation theory is not Marxist, *per se*, but its advocates accept the Marxist notion that the capitalist system is prone to crisis (Purcell and Nevins 2005). In particular, they argue that capitalism is subject to crises of accumulation and these will eventually lead to collapse of the entire system. Capitalism has, of course, proven to be quite durable, and the regulation school developed to explain what has kept its collapse at bay.

Regulation theory was developed at a time of crisis. The OPEC oil embargo in 1973 had flooded the world financial system with petrodollars (the profits gained from reduced supply and increased prices). Many of these dollars were invested in western banks, which redistributed them as loans to domestic and foreign borrowers. In the US, this extra cash helped contribute to stagflation, and led Paul Volcker, then chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, to enact sharp interest rate hikes beginning in 1979. Access to credit dried up and unemployment increased in the US and its trading partners. Meanwhile, in the developing world, many countries who were the recipients of loans financed by petrodollars saw their debt skyrocket under the higher interest rates. By 1982 several of the world's countries were on the verge of default. Regulation theorists sought to understand the crisis of the late 1970s by examining what states had done in prior periods to cultivate relative stability in the system; what Lipietz (1992) labels the 'grand compromise' between the state, capital and labour.

Geographers in a variety of sub-disciplines have employed regulation theory (Smith and Pickles 1998). For their part, political geographers have tended to use regulation theory to examine how states manage their economies in order to avoid a crisis of accumulation (Jessop 1995; Jones 2001; Purcell and Nevins 2005). Regulation theory's emphasis on managing competing class interests has also given rise to studies examining how states manufacture the consent of their populations to changes that may be unpopular, such as raising interest rates or

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increasing taxes (Jessop 1997; Purcell and Nevins 2005). Political geographers have also examined how labour can win concessions in a mode of production less friendly to them than Fordism (Herod 2000).

Political Ecology

Political ecology allows geographers to examine how the physical environment and processes affecting it, such as deforestation or climate change, are connected to human activity, generally, and societal modes of production more specifically (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Peluso and Watts 2001; Robbins 2004). A central premise of political ecology is that no ecology is 'apolitical', even though we often assume the contrary. Driving through Yellowstone National Park, for example, political ecologist Paul Robbins (2004: xv) argues that the park's presumably wild terrain has been subject to human imperatives for millennia. As he explains, Native American hunting patterns 'probably served to concentrate the elk, antelope, and other animals that made the site so attractive to Anglo-Americans who later occupied the land'. Likewise, the near extinction of wolves by westward development prompted booming elk populations in the area. Park managers responded by culling the herds, which triggered protest from those who thought natural predators should do the job instead, leading eventually to the reintroduction of wolves to the park. In short, Yellowstone's 'wild' landscape is the product of all sorts of human decisions, which were themselves the product of political institutions.

Political ecology addresses four areas of concern: land degradation, environmental conflict, conservation efforts, and more recently environmental social movements (Robbins 2004). In all of these areas, political ecologists tend to go against the grain. For example, while mainstream analysis of land degradation places blame on the poor land management techniques used by peasants, political ecology points to state policies which often force peasants to use land more intensively in order to meet their basic subsistence needs.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes language and the production of meaning in the analysis of societal relations. The emergence of poststructuralism in the social sciences is often referred to as the 'linguistic turn' and is associated with French scholars who came

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of age in the 1960s, including but not limited to Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Chantal Mouffe (Howarth 2000).

The use of the prefix 'post' to describe the theoretical frame developed by these scholars is a bit misleading. Poststructuralists did not abandon structure so much as change their notion of it. In the social sciences poststructuralists often self-consciously pitted themselves against the Marxist tradition (Bondi 1993). They argued that economic structure could not adequately capture the human experience. While one's class positioning could explain some facets of exploitation, for example, it failed to take account of abuses carried out on the basis of gender, race, sexuality or national origin. As such, poststructuralists examined how social categorization of dominant and weaker groups was normalized and rationalized through language. This focus is often referred to broadly as identity politics because the study of dominance and 'otherness' often boils down to how people are defined in society and how they maintain, resist, subvert or nuance those identities.

In this way poststructuralism also represents a critique of wider social science epistemology. That is, while traditional social science disciplines hold that the production of knowledge is neutral and objective, poststructuralists believe that knowledge production is political and so all truth claims are constitutive of the political orders of which they are a part. When leaders assert, for example, that a particular alliance is necessary or that a war is inevitable, poststructuralists deconstruct these claims rather than take them at face value. Deconstruction is a common method in poststructural analysis; it attempts to examine why truth claims are created and how they are naturalized. In geography poststructuralism has manifested in one of two broad ways – in feminist approaches and in critical geopolitics.

Feminism(s)

Some of the earliest forays into poststructuralism in geography broadly, and political geography more specifically, have come from feminists (Bondi 1990, 1993; Sharp 1996). The emergence of feminism in geography was both a political and an analytic venture. Politically, early feminists argued against the exclusion of women as geographic topics of study. In a now seminal piece in the *Professional Geographer*, for example, Janice Monk and Susan Hanson (1982) observed that while the discipline purported to describe and analyse the spatial patterns of

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humans it was actually doing so only for the male half of the population. Over time, feminists turned to analytic concerns as well. In particular, they argued that societal relations were gendered. Societies from North America to sub-Saharan Africa assume certain roles for women and men, and these broadly accepted assumptions shape what people do in life and how they are regarded, especially when they step outside of expected (and accepted) gender norms.

Within political geography feminism has focused on a variety of themes. A number of feminist political geographers have contributed to postcolonial studies, a cross-disciplinary topic that deals with issues in postcolonial societies and borrows heavily from poststructural theories of difference (Pratt 2000). Relatedly, feminists in political geography have examined how 'otherness' – social categories outside normative identity constructions – is spatialized. Gil Valentine's work on lesbian geographies (1994), for example, notes that lesbians have had more difficulty than gay men creating specifically lesbian spaces in cities so they have tended to focus on creating more informal and mobile gathering places: events at clubs, friends' houses, etc. Feminists have also worked to 'gender' classic concepts in political geography, such as nationhood (Sharp 1996). More recent interventions include Hyndman's call for a feminist geopolitics (Hyndman 2001, 2004a).

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Critical geopolitics

Critical geopolitics is another avenue of exploration within political geography that has been influenced by poststructuralism (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998). Critical geopolitics is an attempt to 'radicalize' geopolitics. It rejects the traditional understanding of geopolitics as 'a neutral and objective practice of surveying global space' (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998: 2). Instead, critical geopolitics holds that all truth claims are political: that they are made on behalf of vested political interests and often in the pursuit of political economic imperatives. In this way critical geopolitics manifests a classic concern of poststructuralism to highlight the contingent and political nature of knowledge production.

While there is no thematic 'centre' to critical geopolitics, scholars working within the approach tend to focus on unpacking geopolitical claims. This has, by necessity, led to a concentration on the production of discourse. In poststructural theory discourse is more than rhetoric. It is a linguistic structure of meaning through which social, economic and political hierarchies are established and then legitimized. A number of studies of the colonial period note, for example, that the discipline of geography

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helped justify colonialism by invoking neo-Lamarckian discourses on racial difference (Driver 1999; Godlewska and Smith 1994; Kearns 1993). More recent studies have examined how the imposition of free market policies in the West and in developing countries was designed to benefit financial interests over and against those of producers (Harvey 2000; Ould-Mey 1996). More information on critical geopolitics and its application to studies of colonialism and free market 'reforms' can be found in Chapters 7, 9, and 10 (on Geopolitics, Colonialism/imperialism and Political economy, respectively).

Fault Lines in a Subdiscipline

Most disciplines contain intellectual and political fault lines. Geography is no exception. Although students can get a bachelor, Master's, or doctoral degree in Geography, most students follow either a human or a physical track as they fulfil major requirements. And, once students have chosen a track, they are often expected to specialize in a subfield. At graduation, a human geography student with a focus on political geography may know very little about physical geography or even other human geography subfields. Perhaps not surprisingly, sub-disciplines behave in a similar fashion to the wider disciplines whence they stem. In political geography, there are a number of internal fault lines. Two of the most trenchant are discussed here.

The Regional versus the Thematic

While all political geographers want to know the world, they often disagree on how best to know it. One of the subdiscipline's longest-standing debates has been between those who think the pursuit of geographic knowledge should be based in regions and those who think it should be thematically organized.

In the 1950s the debate came to a head when Fred Schaefer (1953) published an article in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* that rejected the then prevailing regional approach in the discipline. He argued that geographers should adopt a more scientific approach to the discipline; they should delineate the key spatial patterns associated with human behaviour and uncover the 'rules' or 'laws' that underpin them. Richard Hartshorne, who had done much to put regional geography at the core of the discipline (see Hartshorne 1939) in the

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decades prior to Schaefer's article, responded by vigorously defending the need for a regional-based curriculum (1954, 1955). Within a decade of the debate, however, Schaeffer's approach was in the ascendant. Indeed, the growing sway of positivism in the social sciences during the 1960s and 1970s favored a systematic rather than place-specific approach.

The debate has continued, albeit periodically in the years since. The regionalist viewpoint, for example, re-emerged in the early 1980s when John Fraser Hart wrote an article for the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* describing regional geography as 'the highest form of the geographer's art' (1982). Like Schaeffer's challenge almost thirty years earlier, Hart's engendered swift and vigorous defences of the systematic approach (Golledge et al. 1982; Healey 1983). However, others in the discipline responded that the debate was 'sterile' and not particularly relevant (Smith 1987). Likewise, Mary Beth Pudup (1988: 385) argued that the debate missed a wider point – that regional geographers need a 'theory of description' to guide their 'interpretive quest'.

After the September 11 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC proponents of the regional approach emerged (Toal 2003; Wade 2006). Gerard Toal (2003), for example, made a strong case for 're-asserting the regional' in political geography. He argued that the American response to the attacks represented a 'clash of ignorance'. That is, George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden held stereotypical and messianic views of one another. In the case of George Bush, the result was a simplistic geopolitics that divided the world between the 'free' and the 'evil'. Situations on the ground, in Afghanistan and Iraq, are of course much messier than such a dichotomy suggests. And that simplistic and messianic vision that underpins the so-called 'war on terror' is likely to be the Achilles' heel of Bush's foreign policy. Toal argued that only a thick, regional knowledge can help the United States come to grips with the threat posed by Al-Qaeda, specifically, and with the US's changing role in the post-Cold War epoch more broadly.

While the debate between the regional and thematic approaches in geography is likely to continue, it is worth noting that many people in the discipline work every day to merge, blend or use both approaches (see Steinberg et al. 2002 for a good overview).

Politics versus politic

For much of political geography's history, the politics under consideration was of the 'big P' variety. 'Big P' politics has traditionally dealt

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with states and their relations with other states or groups of states. Geopolitics, for example, concerned itself with the way that states manipulate territory to their advantage. During the 1980s and 1990s, the influence of poststructural forms of analysis, especially feminism, ushered in a new focus on so-called 'small p' politics. 'Small p' politics includes politics by non-state actors who tend to work through social movements and other collectives rather than political parties and other state-centred institutions.

The divide between small and big 'p' forms of analysis has played out in a variety of ways. Demographically, the divide is often, though not exclusively, generational. Young scholars often cut their teeth on what Colin Flint calls 'post-1960 [political] issues' – identity politics built around gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and the environment. However, because mainline political geography has traditionally been focused on 'big P' forms of analysis, many people doing 'small p' studies do not describe themselves as political geographers. As Flint (2003a: 618) notes, most scholars doing 'small p' work are 'not 'card-carrying political geographers' even though they are doing political geography.

The social distance between 'small p' and 'big P' studies is particularly evident among the feminists working within the political geography tradition. While a feminist political geography emerged as early as the mid-1980s, the majority of the subdiscipline has ignored, or given only scant attention to its findings in the years since its arrival (Hyndman 2004a; Sharp 2007). As Sharp observes, of all of the discipline's subfields, political geography 'has been least influenced by feminist approaches and least inclusive of female geographers' (2007: 382). Feminist political geographers have explained this state of affairs in a variety of related ways. At a general level, many observe that the subfield is dominated by men and as such reflects the interests and biases of those who dominate it (Sharp 2000). At an epistemological level, Staeheli and Kofman (2004) argue that political geography is 'masculinist'. That is, the subdiscipline refuses to include gender as an important variable of political analysis, and by doing so, assumes, incorrectly, that political change only results from the actions of (male) elites. In a similar vein, Sharp (2000) argues that political geography's reluctance to move beyond the study of statecraft leads it to ignore how political change is embodied in everyday, local practices. Examining these processes is important because such practices often contradict formal discourses about the way political change is said to occur, and

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can complicate our understanding of the reasons for, and the effects of traditional statecraft.

As several scholars have noted, few political geographers have answered the feminist clarion call in the discipline (for an exception see Painter 1995). When they have addressed feminist concerns, they have often done so in a way that suggests that ‘small p’ concerns are not really the purview of the subdiscipline. In a 2003 forum on the state of political geography, for example, John Agnew argued:

much of what is labeled as political geography is not very political. Often the political is read off from the economic or the cultural such that this or that economic interest or cultural identity, respectively, is more the subject of analysis than is the organizing of political agency in pursuit of this or that interest or identity. Under the influence of economistic varieties of neo-Marxism (particularly those of a heavily Leninist cast), ethnic identity politics, and essentialist versions of feminism the distinctively political (and the agency that comes with it) has disappeared into analyses that presume superorganic categories which determine political outcomes. (2003a: 604)

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As these and earlier comments suggest, the gulf between feminist and traditional political geographers remains substantial. And the divide is likely to influence the shape of the subdiscipline for some time to come.

Organization of the Book

This book contains 28 concept chapters. Each chapter covers a key concept in political geography and is divided into three sections. In the first section, the concept is defined. In the second evolution in the concept’s meaning and/or key debates are reviewed. Each chapter concludes with a case study showing how geographers have applied the concept in their research.

The 28 chapters are organized into six parts, each of which contains a group of related concepts. In Part I (Chapters 1–4), concepts of **statecraft** are outlined. Statecraft has been a central concern of political geography, and the concepts discussed here cover many of the subdiscipline’s formative concepts, including governance, nation-state, democracy and sovereignty. In Part II (Chapters 5–8) concepts related to how political geographers understand **power** are discussed. The section includes chapters on hegemony, geopolitics, territoriality and

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superpower. Part III (Chapters 9–15) covers many of the formative concepts of the **modern era**. Since many of these concepts are temporally based – i.e. most cover a particular period within the modern era – they are ordered to reflect this. The section begins with chapters on colonialism/imperialism, political economy, ideology and socialism, and concludes with chapters on neoliberalism, globalization and migration.

Part IV (Chapters 16–18) is focused on the **interactivity** of political spaces. Special attention is given to connections and ruptures between political units. The section contains chapters on borders scale, and regionalism. In Part V (Chapters 19–22), concepts related to the spatial manifestations of **violence** are considered. This Part includes concept chapters for conflict, post-conflict, terrorism and anti-statism. The final Part (Chapters 23–28) contains chapters broadly linked under the heading of **identity**. Many of these concepts are related to the poststructural turn in the academy. They include nationalism, gender, citizenship, postcolonialism, the other, and representation. It should be noted that the inclusion of representation in this section is indicative of the influence of poststructuralism in political geography. In traditional political geography representation was defined as the mechanism by which space was divided into political units for electoral representation. In the last twenty years, however, representation has come to encompass a wider set of concerns related to the ways in which identity groups are represented by the state (and other power brokers) in society and how they counter such representations. The decision to cover the concept of representation in this way was made with caution because the more traditional definition of representation remains an important concern in political geography. However, since traditional understandings of representation are covered in Part I, the chapter on representation was reserved for the emergent definition of the concept.

This is both a reference book and a source of in-depth knowledge on the concepts. The organization of the chapters into three discrete parts, for example, allows students to compare and contrast concepts as well as to go straight to select information about a concept. However, each chapter is also substantive enough to provide a foundation for students interested in learning about and using a given concept in their own research. It is the authors' hope that students will come away with an appreciation of the depth, complexity and relevance of political geography.

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NOTE

- 1 Darwin developed the idea of natural selection to describe how certain traits became dominant in a species over time. Traits that allowed a species member to live longer, and thus reproduce more offspring, tended to become more common over time than 'weaker' traits. Lamark, by contrast, argued that species variation was a product of 'will,' environment, and habit; substantial variations could take hold in one generation, unlike the more gradual change envisioned by Darwin. Lamark's ideas were attractive to geographers because they enabled them to describe human differentiation as the result of human agency.