

Schaefer –Hartshorne Debate

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Schaefer –Hartshorne Debate

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I. Introduction: The debate on the methodology of pursuing Geographical studies that ensued between the two geographers F K Schaefer and Richard Hartshorne is one of the most stimulating and academic exchanges the subject of geography has witnessed. This debate began with F K Schaefer's paper titled "Exceptionalism in Geography: A Methodological Examination" published in the Annals of the Association of American Geographers in September 1953. Schaefer's articles were published posthumously, and the debate continues as Richard Hartshorne published his comment (caveat) in the same journal in 1954, followed by an elaborate article titled "Exceptionalism in Geography Re-examined" published in the same journal in September 1955. Richard Hartshorne also published another article in the same journal in June 1958 titled "The Concept of Geography as a Science of Space, from Kant and Humboldt to Hettner." Drawing from the research articles mentioned above the debate on the methodological position of Geography that arose in the academic circles of the United States in the 1950s may be charted out.

II. Exceptionalism in Geography: In the early Nineteen fifties, the geographers in the United States were influenced by the regional paradigm as the chosen methodological frame for pursuing geographical research. The most celebrated proponent of the Regional paradigm was Richard Hartshorne also from the United States and Hartshorne's seminal monograph named "The Nature of Geography" which appeared in the Annals and later was published in the form of a monograph by the Association of American Geographers. Though Hartshorne's paradigm of regional geography was well received, there arose disillusionment and discontent in accepting regional paradigm as the most accepted way of doing geography among certain sections of geographers in the United States.

F K Schaefer was trained as an economist and later pursued Geography. Schaefer was associated with the Department of Geography at the University of Iowa and he had migrated to the United States to escape the Nazi persecution that was taking place in the then Germany.

F K Schaefer took it upon himself to clarify the position of Geography within the broad arrangement of various schemes of knowledge systems; the sciences and the social sciences. His motive was to refute the pre-eminence given to Regional Paradigm of Geography as the only mode of conducting geographical research and

for that, he re-interpreted the works of scholars whom Richard Hartshorne had used in his monograph.

F K Schaefer's rebuttal to the Hartshornean tradition of Regional paradigm came in the form of a research article published posthumously in 1953 by the Annals of the Association of American Geographers.

It is in this paper that he takes up the cause of systematic geography while rejecting the claim of Exceptionalism of Geography.

The claim for Exceptionalism in geography emerged from the notion that the core focus of geography should be areal differentiation. Geography should be studied as a science that explains the realities of areal differentiation that appears on the surface of the earth. The differences between these regions need the attention of geographers as well as the combination of all aspects present on those spaces and how they are different from other places. In this manner, Geographical research would be able to put forward an "accurate, orderly and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth's surface."

The aim of geographical research according to Hartshorne is to gain a complete understanding of the areal differentiation of the earth. For that, geography must focus on the synthesis of all phenomenon occurring in a particular region. The region too would get its identity from the synthesis of the various phenomenon present in the region.

Hartshorne also leans on the Kantian tradition and draws an analogy between history and geography, saying that as history divides time into sections so does Geography divides space into sections. Geography thus studies the world and describes and interprets different regions as they appear in a particular time. What other disciplines study as a heterogeneous phenomenon, geography studies that entire phenomenon in combination. By doing this geography puts together the aspects which other disciplines study in isolation.

For looking at the phenomenon in combination, geography must use descriptive mode of analysis For Hartshorne the *raison d'être* of Geography is the study of areal differentiation, so it can be best expressed through regional geography.

Regions are categorized into 'formal regions' and 'functional regions'. Formal regions are those where the entire region has a homogeneous phenomenon and Functional regions are those where the unity of the region depends on the node which controls the flow of the phenomenon across space thus carving out a functional region.

Regional paradigm this acquired the status of the most feasible methodology of conducting geographical research; as regional geography brought together various aspects of spatial character which are dealt separately in topical geography. This method of bringing together of the phenomenon and their interaction with each other to give a special character to a region was analyzed in geographical research.

Even within topical specializations, the study of regions had an important role to offer. If we take the example of relating Economics with Economic Geography and applying the theories and laws of Economics to Geography, the focus of the Geographer as distinguished from the Economist would be his application of the economic theories over and within regions.

Hartshorne also elicited the enquiry of 'generic problems' rather than 'causal relationships' while undertaking geographical research. He was keener on the functional representation of phenomenon on the earth's surface rather than how each phenomenon leaves its imprint on the surface of the earth.

With the focus on the organization and arrangement of the phenomenon on the surface of the earth as the primary research objective of Geography, enquiring into the causality of the assemblage of phenomenon took a backseat.

III. Challenging the Claim for Exceptionalism in Geography

The descriptive methodology for doing Geographical Research met with resistance among those practitioners of the discipline who were of the opinion that geography should also be a law making discipline and not remain as a discipline dealing with only descriptive methods.

F K Schaefer became the voice of the discontented Geographers and took it upon himself to write an article challenging the 'Exceptionalist' claim for Geography and urging geographers to adopt the methods used by Positivist School of research which may help elevate the discipline to the status of a law making social science.

Schaefer's thoroughly well-researched article attempts to dispel the confusion on the nature of the discipline of geography as attempted by earlier geographers whom Hartshorne referred to while upholding regionalism as the method to be followed by geographers. Schaefer contested treating all historical accounts of the development of the discipline as a method of teaching the same. Methodology deals with the position of the discipline vis a vis the systems of knowledge and methodology undergo constant evolution and change with the passage of time. The scope and content of geography as viewed by geographers have been apologetic and is always eager to justify the very existence of the discipline by offering it the status of 'integrating science'. It has been agreed that the progress of geography has been slower compared to other social sciences like economics, but yet it is undoubtedly an important discipline.

In the nineteenth century, the growth of the natural sciences elicited the fact that mere descriptive study would not elevate a discipline to the status of science. The laws that geography may come up with are mostly about the formation of patterns which are spatial in nature.

Humboldt and Ritter too accepted the fact that all spatial patterns are governed by laws including those created by natural phenomenon and man.

Schaefer looks into the works of Viktor Kraft that geography is a science trying to discover laws that are related to the surface of the earth. With this Schaefer brings in the case for systematic geography where spatial relations of two or more phenomenon is studied over the entire earth's surface to arrive at a generalization or law. He blames the lack of clarity on the relative role and importance of regional and systematic geography to the differential preference given to the two methods at different phases of the development of the discipline. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Physical Geography applied systematic method while at the beginning of the twentieth century the shift occurred towards research in human and social geography and since not much of social science-based laws had developed during that period, the systematic method floundered. Generalization was found unpractical and the practitioners of geography aligned themselves with the opponents of the scientific method.

Schaefer then quotes Hettner and dispels misconception on his use of the word 'dualism' for Geography. According to Schaefer, dualism was not used to emphasize that Geography is a methodologically unique discipline, nor is the complexity a regional geographer face is facile.

Schaefer also delves into the historical roots of this uniqueness of Geography which he terms as 'exceptionalism' here. He calls Immanuel Kant as the father of exceptionalism but terms him as a poor geographer of the eighteenth century when compared to Varenus. Kant claimed Exceptionalism not only for Geography but also for History. Kant categorizes History and Geography both as descriptions with History is a description according to time while Geography is that of space. This distinction according to Schaefer is untenable as no systematic discipline can ignore the coordinates of time and space. Secondly, simply because Kant says that both the disciplines are descriptive, that there exist no laws in the two disciplines. Humboldt too in his celebrated publication 'Kosmos' explains that all sciences search for laws and are 'nomothetic'. Schaefer also accuses use of Hettner's great prestige to create more confusion around the exceptionalist claim by drawing spurious similarities between History and Geography. It is through Hartshorne that the American geographers have been acquainted with Hettner's work but Schaefer feels Hettner's work can equally be supportive of a nomothetic method for geography. But the impact of Exceptionalism on geography has been deep and it needs the dispelling of the misconceptions around it. One way Geography is different from other sciences is that sciences progress towards the formulation of laws, but geography is essentially morphological so often the time factor is ignored. The breakdown of 'causality' in geographical research led to its failure as a discipline. The morphological character is often represented by maps as a tool and maps are selective since only certain features that are of interest to the researcher is mapped and also help in correlating

phenomenon spatially. This method is termed as comparative geography but is, in reality, systematic geography.

Quoting Palander, Schaefer also tells that the notion of regions explains nothing and is no substitute for a spatial law. By rejecting the formulation of scientific laws, the possibility of prediction is compromised by a discipline. Laws of geography can be categorized into three classes. Laws of physical geography fall in the first category, the laws of economic geography in the second category and the non-morphological laws come under the third category. Mature social sciences look for 'process laws'. If geographers do not pursue systematic method and strive to formulate laws, it might lead to geographical isolationism among other disciplines as the search for laws can occur only with cooperation with other social sciences. Schaefer recommends pursuing systematic method for enhancing the prospects of the discipline. He casts his doubts on the future of geographical research if geographers restrict themselves to search for regions and not align themselves with other systematic sciences.

IV. Exceptionalism in Geography – Re-examined

Richard Hartshorne expressed his reaction to Schaefer's paper in the form of his articles at the same journal *Annals of the Association of the American Geographers* in the years 1955 and 1958. In 1954 a brief comment was published by him which was a caveat to the geographers to critically look into Schaefer's paper and that he would publish the clarifications on his work 'The Nature of Geography'.

In his article titled 'Exceptionalism in Geography – Re-examined' published in 1955, calls it a correction to the false representations and accusations made by F K Schaefer in the 1953 article. He also admits, that his paper does not deal with the only negative purpose of claiming all that Schaefer has written is false but he too in the process of writing the clarifications learned a lot on the type of methodology suitable for geographical research. As Schaefer noted that methodological discussions are dialectical, knowledge may be derived from mutual discussion and debate. He also notes down the rules for Methodological Writing in this paper.

The need for Re-examination of the Exceptionalist Claim for geography arises according to Hartshorne since the article by Schaefer remains in the *Annals* for future students to get misguided, it's important for the clarifications. Hartshorne writes that methodological studies on Geography have been most influential in Germany who have altered their view from the earlier Geographers. He names Hettener; and also Kraft and Humboldt saying that the writing of Humboldt mentioned by Schaefer does not have any methodological topics and Kraft's essay has been mentioned yet not considered. Most other important authors like Richtofen, Mackinder, Valaux or Sauer have not been mentioned by Schaefer.

The students thus may be led to 'almost devastating' conclusions.

He also claims that the basic purpose of the essay written by Schaefer is unclear to him and leads to another major issue of 'exceptionalism' which in reality does not exist. The major thrust of the essay is that geography must be a science, a science that searches for laws and no new arguments have been presented.

Texts which reject Scientific Determinism like that of Hettener has been attacked as well as Hartshorne's own 'The Nature of Geography'.

The article exposes 'defective scholarship' assertions without supporting evidence. By organizing the paragraphs and arguments in a rather confusing way the readers are brought into having the same opinion as for the critic. The major targets of Schaefer's essay are the writings of Hettener and Hartshorne. Certain views about a few authors have also been proven as wrong directly or by implication. Even false translations have been used in the essay to present false impressions of the original work of the writers. The falsification and fabrication of the facts had been deliberately made and writings have been distorted to generate an opposing opinion of the readers.

Hartshorne's sharper critique of Schaefer's work came in the form of his 1959 monograph titled 'Perspective on the Nature of Geography'.

In this monograph, Hartshorne defines the discipline of Geography as one which "seeks to describe and interpret the variable character of from place to place of the earth as the world of man". According to Hartshorne, the physical and the human aspects of an area need not be dealt with separately but as an assemblage of the interaction between the human aspects with the physical factors. The reliance on the previous paradigm of Environmental Determinism shapes the understanding of the way the human aspects in a region would adapt and respond to the physical aspects of the region.

He also considers the division of Geography into Physical and Human aspects as unfortunate. By splitting the subject matter into two; geographers lose out on integrating both the aspects (physical and human) while undertaking research.

Hartshorne also clarified the difference between 'exploratory description' and 'explanatory description' while adopting the descriptive science methodology in research. Hartshorne warns that explanatory description of the former geographies or assemblages should not be given pre-eminence while doing geographical research. In his account, Historical geography should be undertaken not to ascertain origins of the phenomenon, but to offer a better understanding of the present phenomenon in the light of the past.

Hartshorne, however, accepted that there is a possibility of collaboration across the spectrum of methodologies of regional and systematic geography. He said that those researchers who are engaged in organizing areal differentiation of elementary complexes in large scale like the entire world can be linked with those researchers who are involved in deciphering complex relationships of a phenomenon over small-scale regions. He calls them topical studies and regional studies respectively.

Geographical studies apply both the methods while conducting research, and no one method can be called more important than the other. Integration of both the methods is also possible.

Schaefer tried to raise another important issue regarding Geography being Idiographic or Nomothetic discipline. Schaefer asked whether geography should formulate scientific laws or indulge in the descriptive analysis of individual cases. Hartshorne was of the opinion that since scientific laws require abundance of cases to prove itself, and that geographical research limits itself to limited numbers of observations; so geographers should refrain themselves from formulating scientific research. He also said that scientific laws are best tested in the laboratories and geographers are usually not in the position to conduct their experiments in the laboratory. Hartshorne also opined that the interpretation of the scientific laws requires training in systematic sciences which the geographers lack and may not be in the position to offer the right interpretation of the phenomenon. Hartshorne also said that scientific laws also rely on some form of determinism. When conducting research on human subjects such determinism appears 'inappropriate' as the difference in human ideas lead to landscape variations. For the reasons mentioned above, Hartshorne suggests that geographers should stay away from searching laws in geography.

Hartshorne also reiterated his support to Hettener's classification of geography as chorological science and history as chronological science bringing back Kantian ideas of history divides knowledge through time and geography through space.

Geographers in their research have also tried to integrate topical and regional aspects within demarcated areas of research thereby often integrating both the methodologies. Hartshorne's ideas regarding Geography were based on how Geography as a research area was shaping up during his times in the United States. Schaefer, on the contrary, wrote about what geography was not. By that Schaefer wanted geography to incorporate aspects of research the discipline was neglecting and how Geography could claim its lawful place within the realm of social science research.

V. Conclusion

The debate that ensued between F K Schaefer and R Hartshorne was one of the rare exchanges one finds in the discussion on the methodological aspect to be adopted in the discipline of Geography. During the mid-twentieth century, many schools of Geography in the United States were of tired of the regional paradigm and were willing to adopt a more rigorous paradigm for doing research. With this debate spreading across academia, the gradual change towards topical specialism as a methodology was witnessed in geography.