

University of Anbar

College of Arts

Department of Geography



Lectures for the Academic Year (2024–2025)

Course Instructor: Prof. Dr. Kamal Abdullah Hasan

Course Title: *Geographic Thought*

Academic Stage: *The First Stage*

Title of Lecture 1: *Introduction to Geographical Thought*

Introduction

The subject of *Geographical Thought* is considered one of the fundamental and essential topics for geographers, as it defines the essence of geography as a science, the boundaries of its research, and its relationship with other sciences. Mastery of this topic requires familiarity with the changes and developments that have occurred in geographical knowledge, as well as the theories and ideas that have dominated—and continue to influence—geographical writings across the world throughout history and into the present.

Undoubtedly, the works of Professor Richard Hartshorne, particularly in his books *The Nature of Geography* and *Perspective on the Nature of Geography*, are invaluable for geography students in understanding the evolution of geographical thought during modern times. Geographers' writings reveal diverse perspectives on the field of geography, and no consensus has yet been reached regarding the nature and scope of geographical knowledge.

Although geography has ancient roots that trace back to human existence on Earth, its development as a specialized scientific discipline is relatively modern and primarily attributed to European scholars, especially those from Germany. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote about human behavior and the extent to which it is influenced by environmental conditions, particularly climate. The formal definition of modern geography began with Carl Ritter, who attempted to study the environment and demonstrate its relationship with human beings. His contemporary, Alexander von Humboldt, was another prominent geographer who believed in the dominance of the natural environment. The ideas and writings of these early geographers led to several conclusions about geographical concepts during the 19th century, including:

Geography was seen as the study of spatial variation on the Earth's surface. •

The geographical method relied on two approaches: systematic and regional studies, both emphasizing spatial differences. •

As a result, geography came to be described as a "dual discipline," •
acknowledging the division between physical and human geography.
This division posed a problem that was not resolved until the end of
the 20th century.

The emphasis on studying landforms in geographical research solidified *geomorphology* as a sub-discipline within geography in Germany, the United States, and elsewhere. This focus also led some geographers to exclude certain natural phenomena they deemed irrelevant to geographical inquiry. These geographers began to define geography as the science of the Earth as a planet, rather than just its surface. Others defined it as the study of the relationship between the natural environment and human beings. Some writers emphasized geography as the study of spatial distributions on Earth's surface. Hartshorne later proposed a new definition, describing geography as the study of spatial variation on the Earth's surface.

Throughout history, different groups of geographers have held views that diverged significantly from the mainstream developmental trajectories of the discipline. If geography is to be considered the study of spatial variation across the world, then clear criteria must be established to identify such variation. German geographer Alfred Hettner laid the foundations for these criteria, the most notable of which include:

Features that differ from place to place. •

Diversity that entails systems or subsystems comprising spatial •
groupings of phenomena based on their locations and
interrelationships.

The development of geography has been accompanied by the emergence of several theories resulting from evolving views and understandings of the discipline's essence and scope. These include:

1. The Landscape Theory

This theory originated in Germany but was initially rejected. The emphasis on regions as self-contained entities led to the neglect of a crucial geographic factor—**location**. However, the American geographer Carl Sauer adopted and adapted this theory, addressing it through the interplay between environmental determinism and possibilism and their

relationship with both natural and human phenomena. Sauer identified two types of landscapes:

Cultural Landscape: Altered by human activity and development. •

Natural Landscape: Exists independently of human presence or intervention. •

2. The Theory of Sequential Occupance (by Durant and Telsy)

This theory was proposed in 1929. Later, in 1955, Professor Jones published a book on sequential occupance of regions, following the same approach. Thus, the evolution moved from landscape theory to sequential occupance theory, both grounded in the two main pillars of geography: natural and human phenomena, incorporating the elements of **time and space**.

3. The Theory of Location

Although attributed to Professor Dunkel, Richard Hartshorne noted that the theory's foundation was laid by Professor Friedrich Ratzel in 1877, who described geography as a **science of distribution**, concerned with the study of things and their locations. The core of this theory asserts:

“Geographical phenomena have specific locations, and each phenomenon has a location that distinguishes it from others, even though all phenomena are interconnected.”

References

1. Abd Khaleel Fadheel & Ibrahim Abdul Jabbar Al-Mashhadani, *Geographical Thought*, Dar Al-Hikma Press, Mosul, 1990.