Sociale geografie tussen positivisme en fenomenologie. De brugfunctie van het mensbeeld

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SUMMARY

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY BETWEEN POSITIVISM AND PHENOMENOLOGY

The image of man as point of encounter

Science, and especially the social sciences, has developed tremendously since World War II, not unlike so many other phenomena. One of the most important aspects of the development of the social sciences was the introduction of advanced mathematical computing techniques, through the application of modern calculators. While some social scientists immediately embraced this methodology enthusiastically, others were reluctant to become awestricken by it. They apparently sensed that quantitative techniques could not be applied to all questions in their field, or at any rate, could not answer these questions fully. In short, this group maintained some reservations and did not quite know how to judge the applications of the quantitative approach.

In essence, the social sciences still find themselves in this ambiguous situation. They still face the question of how to evaluate quantification. Should this approach be summarily dismissed, or could it somehow serve a useful function?

Behaviourism can be characterized as a second important aspect of that development in the social sciences. Although behavioural geography can be seen more or less as a form of counterpressure against the quantitative movement in human geography, the former is increasingly criticized. A critical appraisal of both approaches in human geography therefore seems to be justified.

As an aid to this process of establishing a judgement of the quantitative and behavioural approach, this study focuses on the image of man, because in our opinion, the discussion of a number of aspects of this theme could lead to a way out of this dilemma. The selection of the image of man as a focal point should not surprise anyone, because
the existing subject, man, is part and parcel of human geography. This, by the way, does not apply solely to human geography, but also to related disciplines, or, to cover an even wider group, to the whole of the social sciences.

Since our point of departure was the spiritual-physical dual nature of man, we were obliged to limit the scope of this study. We concentrated exclusively on the spiritual component of man. This is the field used by man to gather knowledge about his surrounding life-world, or one could say, by which he practices science.

A first question to appear, and it does so immediately, is:
- How does man gather knowledge? What is his role in the process of accumulating knowledge?

This question touches the epistemological base of the way in which human knowledge is attained. In other words, it concerns man as a knowing subject, as a scientist. As an empirical branch of science, the philosophical basis of human geography has been, and still is, predominantly found in two important schools of philosophy, namely positivism and phenomenology. The first question we posed may now be rephrased as:
- How do these two schools evaluate man's role in the creation of knowledge?

The spiritual component does not only have a role in man's creation of knowledge, but also the authorship of his activities can be partly localized in it.

Furthermore, as a corollary to this question, we have to face another important issue:
- May human acts be considered as phenomena subject to physical laws?
  Do physical chains of events and human activities share a common principle, or are they essentially different?

This question essentially touches man as an acting being, as an object of research therefore.

The basic aim of this study is to analyze the often hidden conception of man in human geography by means of the image of man, an instrument designed for this applies specifically which find their schools of positivi

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designed for this purpose in the first part of this study. This applies specifically to the conception of man held in those approaches which find their epistemological basis in the two philosophical schools of positivism and phenomenology.

An important secondary aim of this analysis is to determine directions which will assist in charting a course for the development of human geography in the near future.

To design our analytical instrument, the first part of our study focuses on a number of epistemological issues of the mentioned philosophical schools. In the light of these philosophical views we will also broaden our sights concerning man as an object of study.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, a recurring question in the history of epistemology was, which one of the two cognitive instruments of our cognitive capacities, namely thinking or sensory observation, should be considered to have primacy in the process of the accumulation of knowledge? Was it thought, with the active cognitive capacity of the rationalists, or should the primary position be left to sensory observation, with a passive mind as propagated by traditional empiricism? Finally, the philosopher Immanuel Kant showed the way out of this epistemological dilemma, by arguing that neither thought nor sensory observation should be granted primacy. Since then, knowledge is no longer considered to be the product of either thought or observation, but it results from a process of interaction of thinking and observing.

Another point of agreement is that the human mind should not be considered as a blank sheet of paper, a passive object inscribed by impressions from observation. On the contrary, man possesses an active cognitive power which imparts meaning to things through an interpretive cognitive act. Still, the process of regarding "the internal" which is essentially abstract as if it was material, may be traced in more recent approaches, though not in the form of a blank sheet of paper, but as a photosensitive plate, a machine or a computer. Use of an analogy can stimulate the formation of a model of the functioning of the human mind. However, negative repercussions may result if the
analogy is taken literally; one then commits the error of reification. In our field of study, this would be the case if the spiritual component were to be viewed exclusively as a mechanical-materialistic entity, a sequence of switches in a mechanical device.

Such a mechanistic-materialistic analogue has another far-reaching consequence; namely that human activities will be interpreted as physical reactions. This makes human activities liable to counting and measurement. Consequently, the human being can be expressed as entity and number, thus becoming susceptible to analysis by means of the Galilean-Cartesian explanation model used in the natural sciences. Given the successes of the natural sciences, this hidden materialism has doubtlessly contributed to the opinion that a social science is only scientific if it calculates, and this is partly the reason for the exaggerated interest in quantitative methods. The essential question that should precede this is, whether or not a human act may be interpreted as a physical reaction. We all agree that the human mind is unlike a computer, because this tool is not creative, cannot think, cannot reason, and so on. Thus it also holds true that a human act, which is in part based on the aforementioned functions and which is stimulated and guided by these, may not be considered as a purely physical reaction.

Research in both the natural and the human sciences has its source in the interpretive cognitive activity, but the research elements of the natural sciences are of a different nature than those of the social sciences. The first group of research elements do not possess an interpretive power, but this is inherent in man as a research element. Man as a research object, in turn, interprets the facts, and so does the social scientist, who tries, through his interpretive power, to distinguish the intentions of his interpreting "objects". Central to social science research is the process of double interpretation, and the facts of social science are double hermeneutic. With its standing on the double hermeneutic nature - or, in other words, the category of intentionality - phenomenology contrasts its image of man with that of positivism or, more generally, with the scientific conception of man. Phenomenology stresses that man may not be considered as a piece of lifeless nature; this would gravely shorten a man and a school in the human sciences by stressing the importance of a human being, and a human act, as a meaningful phenomena. Wherefore, when we look at a human act, we expect a truly human act, and a truly human being. The content of this approach to human activities will be interpreted as a physical reaction. We all agree that the human mind is unlike a computer, because this tool is not creative, cannot think, cannot reason, and so on. Thus it also holds true that a human act, which is in part based on the aforementioned functions and which is stimulated and guided by these, may not be considered as a purely physical reaction.

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shortchange man as a research object by eliminating his intentionality. This school intends to resist the dehumanizing process in the social sciences by stressing that quantification, and behavioural and neo-behavioural influences as well, are absolutely inadequate in terms of understanding the essence of man and human activities.

Closely related to this is the question of how to evaluate synthetic conclusions regarding expressions of human culture. Given the essential difference between one of the reactions studied by the natural sciences and a human act, there must be a different type of evaluation for these phenomena. Whereas the scientific image of man is hopelessly inadequate when we look at past experiences with it, the future seems promising; we expect a truly valuable contribution from the positivist conception of man. The contribution may be found in the mechanistic tendency of this approach to calculate the future as an extrapolation of current trends; thus it can point out desirable or undesirable developments. In this sense, this image of man provides us with a valuable resource to aid our power of reason. This extrapolation of the "metallic interior" gives this approach a definite heuristic importance, which means that it can provide us with a "context of discovery" allowing us to create solutions in order to prevent undesirable developments or to stimulate desirable ones. In this field of tension between retrospection and prospection, the image of man may create a bridge between the positivist and phenomenological approaches. Depending on the research question, it may also be employed as a means of deciding whether or not quantitative techniques should be applied. Hence, the title of our study: HUMAN GEOGRAPHY BETWEEN POSITIVISM AND PHENOMENOLOGY. THE IMAGE OF MAN AS POINT OF ENCOUNTER.

In the second part of the study, we discuss the often hidden image of man that is implicit in human geographical pursuits. Until very recently the epistemological principles of geographical knowledge have been largely overlooked in geographical literature. Man as an acting being has been widely dealt with, although recent reflections on this theme are inadequate and insufficiently profound. To avoid creating the impression that only human geography struggles with its conception of man, we have included a short overview of related fields of science in which this theme is also a burning issue. Subsequently,
the insights generated in part one are employed to illuminate the image of man that is intrinsic to:
quantitative geography;
behavioural and neo-behavioural geography;
and finally, humanistic geography.

Prospective geography is treated in these discussions in accordance with the function of future-oriented geography, as sketched in the first part of the study.

Without a doubt, the aim of behavioural and neo-behavioural geography is to give man due attention. Nonetheless, we have been to some degree unaware of the fact that even these approaches did not do justice to man as he is pictured in humanistic geography. While these approaches were initially intended as an alternative to quantitative geography, with the advantage of hindsight, we may formulate a number of critical comments. The major objection is that they also negate the inner self of man; they consider the inner self to be a black box, or they treat it in a mechanical-materialistic sense. As in part one, this discussion is followed by a treatise on the nature of synthetic derivations, as may be witnessed in geographical literature.

The next chapter presents a review of three specific studies which presumably adopt a phenomenological image of man. The elaborate attention given in this chapter to the phenomenological conception of man is justified by the fact that research in the social sciences commonly trades this image of man and its "Ärgerlichen Tatsachen" (disturbing facts) for the scientific image of man with its "blossen Tatsachen" (bare facts). In addition, this discussion substantiates the idea that the element of prediction, which is commonly considered the trademark of positivism, can certainly be done justice in a phenomenological approach by employing Max Scheler's "Aufweis" (awakening).

Finally, in the concluding chapter some implications for the practice of geography, which result from these reflections, will be reviewed once again.