

21. A. A. Grigor'yev, "The theoretical foundations of modern physical geography," in the volume Vzaimodeystviye nauk., op. cit [Ref. 18].

ON THE CONTENT OF THE CONCEPT "GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT" AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT ON SOCIETY

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Abstract: The author traces the evolution of the environmentalist concept through Marxist philosophy and analyzes the influence on the geographical environment on society. He adduces a number of examples to demonstrate the significance of the environmental factor in various historical contexts. For another discussion on the same subject, the reader is referred to Ian M. Matley, "The Marxist approach to the geographical environment," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 56, No. 1, March 1966, pp. 97-111.

The Concept of the "Geographical Environment"

For a long time, discussions in geography virtually ignored the problem of the geographical environment. The dialectic of the evolution of science has now brought forth new views on the subject and has placed the concept of the geographical environment at the center of philosophical discussions in geography. At the same time, previous attempts to link a definition of the geographical environment with the purpose and object of geography itself have assumed a new, purely professional timeliness for geographers.

There is no doubt that the problem of the environment is part of the more general problem of the man-nature relationship. In some cases no distinction is made in the literature between "nature" and the "geographical environment." In the book Markistsko-leninskaya filosfiya [Marxist-Leninist Philosophy; Ref. 1, p. 310], for example, we find the statement: "Nature, i.e., the geographical environment, is the natural prerequisite for the history of man." Similar views were once expressed by geographers. S. L. Lutskiy, for example, in stressing that productive forces are not limited to the earth's geographic envelope and may extend beyond, wrote: "The geographical environment of human society is not limited in space just as there are no limits to nature, to our gaining knowledge about nature or our practical utilization of nature" [Ref. 2, p. 436]. Such an interpretation, as was noted by I. M. Zabelin [Ref. 3, p. 237], actually renders the concept of a geographical environment superfluous since it is thus deprived of any specific properties.



Yet, the elimination of this concept could hardly be justified. As Yu. G. Saushkin pointed out [Ref. 4, p. 67], it was introduced into the literature by Elisée Reclus, L. I. Mechnikov, and other geographers who understood it to mean nature drawn into the process of labor or nature altered by human activity. The term subsequently acquired a philosophical meaning. There are undoubtedly grounds for distinguishing the spatially limited surface of the earth, the specific part of nature in which the man-nature relationship takes place, as a separate category. Moreover, an important quality of the geographical environment (reflected in the semantics of the concept, namely, its areal differentiation), not only is of special interest to geographers, but makes it possible to study the influence of spatial natural differences on the development of society, which is an extremely important problem for philosophers and sociologists.

Marxist philosophy, in dealing with the man-nature problem, rejects attempts to explain events in the life of society directly in terms of the influence of the natural environment, as was done by Charles Montesquieu, Henry Thomas Buckle, and other exponents of geographical determinism. But, at the same time, Marxism has overcome the metaphysical opposition of nature and society, affirmed in particular by Emmanuel Kant, the German philosopher. Lenin has said that "according to Kant, knowledge sets off (separates) nature and man; actually it tends to unite them" [Ref. 5, p. 83].

We would like to dwell on this aspect because many geographers have long tended to stress the qualitative differences between nature and society without giving proper attention to the philosophical problem of the relationship and the interplay between the two. B. N. Semevskiy, for example, has said that "the laws of nature affect man as a biological individuum, but they do not affect human society" [Ref. 6, p. 367]. The objection is that since man is unthinkable outside society, the biological properties of man cannot but be reflected in society, even though these properties are, of course, not determinant for society. For example, a rough equality in the number of males and females in society, resulting from a constant biological regularity (106 males born for every 100 females), was one of the prerequisites for the institution of monogamy. The effect of biological laws in society is also evident, in our view, in the wartime phenomenon (still to be fully explained) in which the male births in belligerent countries tend to be 1 to 2.5 percent above the norm during and after long wars.

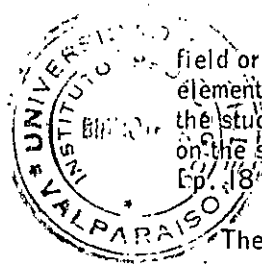
The traditional views of Soviet geographers about the geographical environment stemmed from an assessment of the environment as a purely natural category associated with the sphere of interaction and interpenetration of the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and the organic world. Regardless of certain discrepancies in the definition of its spatial limits and of its content, the geographical environment was usually equated with such geographical concepts as the "geographical envelope," the "landscape envelope" and the "biogenosphere." According to this interpretation, the geographical environment was often viewed as the study object of physical geography [Ref. 7, pp. 139, 198].

A somewhat different definition was offered in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia: "...the concept 'geographical environment' includes only the phenomena and processes of nature that affect the life of society. The evolution of society tends to alter and to expand the group of natural phenomena that affect the material life of society" [Ref. 8, p. 452]. That definition stressed the historical variability of the content of the concept of the "geographical environments." I. M. Zabelin pointed out that such a definition makes "the geographical environment a part of nature that, at a particular historical moment, enters directly into the conditions of the material life of society, i.e., a social-historical concept that cannot be separated from productive forces.... From that point of view, the geographical environment would be simply a random set of natural phenomena and one could not speak of any kind of natural process of development of the environment, especially since the volume of that set in space would change literally from year to year" [Ref. 3, pp. 238-239].

These views about the geographical environment, which were developed most actively among philosophers by I. I. Ivanov-Omskiy [Ref. 9], represented a legitimate link in the evolution of the concept. A common feature of all these definitions was the affirmation of the purely natural content of the geographical environment and the view that it was developing slowly over time. The understanding was that, in practice, man-altered nature had only a limited effect on the social historical process. As for the actual mechanism of the man-nature relationship, which would undergo changes even in a relatively stable environment because of shifts in the needs of society and because of progress in resource use and in our knowledge about the environment, that mechanism was virtually ignored in the analysis.

V. A. Anuchin was apparently one of the first geographers to point out that the geographical environment, being under the constant and growing influence of society, cannot be regarded purely as a natural phenomenon. True, his early definitions tended to overextend the framework of the geographical environment and, on that ground, were properly criticized. But, having eliminated the shortcomings of that first definition of the environment (as a "combination of both natural and social conditions that exist and continue to develop on the earth's surface" [Ref. 10, p. 50]), and having developed his initial idea in greater depth, V. A. Anuchin posed the problem of the unity of the material elements of society and the environment, asserting that the geographical environment "is external nature altered by man's purposeful activity and saturated by the results of his labor" [Ref. 11, p. 41].

A basically similar view was expressed by Academician F. V. Konstantinov [a philosopher] at the Fourth Congress of the Geographical Society USSR: "It was only with the formation of society that a part of nature became its geographical environment by being drawn into the sphere of interaction with society.... Therefore the geographical environment is nature more or less transformed by man, or "humanized nature" [Ref. 12, p. 16]. And further on: "Natural bodies that are affected by society and are adapted to its needs continue to remain elements of the transformed geographical environment: a cropped



field or a fruit orchard is both a component of the productive forces and an element of the geographical environment. They may be in various contexts the study object of both the social and the natural sciences. It all depends on the system of objective relationships in which the particular object occurs" [p. 18].

The problem about research on the geographical environment is that it requires analysis of two-way relationships between nature and society. The complexity of the interplay in that dyadic system, which is increasingly attracting attention in various disciplines, was well stated by A. Ya. Gurevich, the historian: "...the problem is, of course, not the influence of natural conditions on man and society; its key aspect is man's influence on the natural geographical environment included (*italics mine* -- V.P.) in the social historical process [Ref. 13, p. 19]. Such "inclusion" of natural objects and phenomena in the process of historical development is evidently possible only because, in the course of man's productive activity, they acquire certain qualitatively new properties and functions that warrant their inclusion in a system of social relationships. This is also pointed out by A. I. Ignatov in this volume.

The elaboration of these new concepts required the eradication of previous views, which turned out to be highly persistent among geographers, as in the case of B. N. Semevskiy. He wrote: "Nature (here again it is being equated with the geographical environment -- V.P.) does not and cannot contain any 'social elements'; a canal dug by man, land cultivated by man, vegetation planted by man, and so forth, are not 'social elements' because they are not part of human society and their development follows natural rather than social laws" [Ref. 6, p. 368].

The concept "geographical environment" and "nature," just as "nature" and "natural resources" (as well as "physical conditions") are not interchangeable and there are therefore no grounds for equating changes in one to changes in the other. We can assume that "nature" in the USSR, as S. V. Kalesnik contends, has not changed (or, to be more precise, has changed relatively little -- V.P.) even though society has become socialist [Ref. 14, p. 21]. But the "geographical environment" has undergone substantial change as a result of the construction of dams, of irrigation systems, navigable canals, the plowing up of virgin lands, the amelioration of lands, etc. and, what is no less important, our knowledge about the geographical environment has been fundamentally enriched.

This notion can be illustrated by the case of Kuwait. Are we to assume that the exploration of huge oil deposits in Kuwait has seriously affected our ideas about nature in that country? Hardly. The discovery of new eolian landforms and local deserts would have been much more significant in terms of our knowledge about nature in Kuwait. But our assessment of natural resources has thoroughly changed and there is no doubt that the entire problem of the geographical environment of Kuwait now appears in a new light. This example suggests the sharply defined boundary between an absolute category, such as nature, and a relative category, such as geographical environment.

Thanks to the recent collaboration between philosophers, sociologists and geographers, a new thesis can now be advanced about the relationship between a number of key concepts: "...although society is a component of the geographic envelope (since it exists on the surface of the earth), it represents at the same time a substantially distinct factor opposed to the envelope (which in this context becomes the geographical environment) and to nature as a whole (the natural environment)" [Ref. 15, p. 111]. It seems to us, however, that the complex problem about the concrete material content of the geographical environment, i.e., the set of objects it includes, still requires solution.

In particular, an excessively broad interpretation of the concept "geographical environment" was offered by Yu. G. Saushkin [Ref. 4, pp. 69-70], who suggested that the entire material and technological foundation of mankind entered into the geographical environment, constituting a qualitatively distinct part. A similar view was offered by V. A. Anuchin [Ref. 11], who attributes to the geographical environment the kind of content that would make it a legitimate study object for all the principal geographical disciplines. This attempt to redefine the subject of geography through the intermediary concept of the geographical environment creates the same difficulties and misunderstandings that occurred in similar previous attempts.

Unfortunately, definitions of various geographical disciplines, especially economic geography, make excessive use of concepts worked out by other disciplines. For example, a definition of economic geography through the categories of productive forces and productive relationships is justified if economic geography is regarded as an economic science, but is not justified if it is viewed as a separate social science. That is precisely why V. A. Anuchin found himself engaged in a protracted and often scholastic argument on whether productive forces could be a study object without the productive relationships. If V. A. Anuchin had been able to avoid the use of terminology borrowed from political economy (which, in fact, would have been in keeping with his interpretation of economic geography), there would not have been any grounds for argument.

We hold that the geographical environment should contain those man-made elements that have not been "torn away," to use Marx's words [Ref. 16, p. 189] from their direct link to the earth or the natural environment. Although this criterion is somewhat arbitrary, it is sufficiently definite to permit a certain breakdown of categories.

The assumption that geographical environment cannot be viewed as a purely natural category poses the problem of laws of development. Yu. G. Saushkin [Ref. 4, pp. 72-73] clearly formulated this problem, previously touched upon by V. A. Anuchin [Ref. 17, pp. 142-46], and drew attention to a key aspect: can the process of change of the environment as a result of man's activities be regarded as a process of development of the environment? Saushkin emphasized that the geographical environment was both a natural and an historical category, with individual elements of the environment affected by their

own distinctive laws. Although such reasoning contains rational kernels, it still leaves unresolved the basic question of the laws of development of the geographical environment as a specific entity.

Our knowledge about the phenomena and objects found on the boundary between such complex and all-embracing concepts as nature and society is still not adequate to enable us to work out sound hypotheses. But the idea recently advanced by A. G. Doskach, Yu. P. Trusov, and Ye. T. Faddeyev is of interest. They said: "The man-nature relationship involves both nature and society as well as the human intellect in all their interpenetrations and mutual influences. Consequently the laws guiding this process as a whole should in a certain sense be more general than the laws of development of each component taken separately. . . . We assume that such laws could be considered laws of a philosophical order even though they would not be as general as the laws of the dialectic; that is, they would apply only if, when, and where society becomes a factor" [Ref. 15, p. 106].

The Influence of the Geographical Environment on Society

The problem of the influence of the geographical environment on social development includes a number of aspects which must be carefully distinguished in any fruitful study of the problem. The old thesis that the geographical environment affects society by either accelerating or retarding its development does not cover all the diversities of the problem. What is also needed here is fuller discussion of the concept of the "determining factor," which would vary with the particular aspect under analysis: the actual possibility of development, or the direction of such development, or, finally, the rate of development.

The specific quality of society accounts for the fact that it develops according to its internal laws. This is also the meaning of the statement that the geographical environment cannot be a cause determining changes in the life of society. The geographical environment influences society mainly through the system of social production that relates such fundamentally different things as nature and society. The mechanism of that influence is rather complex.

We know that changes in the mode of production determine the development of society; these changes derive from contradictions between the more mobile and revolutionary aspect of the mode of production, namely the productive forces, and the productive relations. However, an analysis of just the duality "productive forces -- productive relations" is inadequate to uncover the mechanism of the constant development of social production. We know that productive relations often retard the development of productive forces, that the latter nevertheless do not remain stable and continue to undergo steady, even though slower, development. One of the factors that promote that steady development is the continuity of the process of interaction between society and nature (i.e., the geographical environment). (Inadequate attention given to this fact resulted in the early 1950s in the widespread view that economic growth and technical

progress would ultimately cease in the capitalist world because capitalist productive relations would prove too strong a brake on the development of productive forces.) The geographical environment thus has a serious indirect effect on the development of society. But that effect can in no way be regarded as ultimately decisive, as G. V. Plekhanov thought [Ref. 18, p. 689], because the active aspect in this process is not represented by nature, but by man, influencing nature in different ways at various stages in history.

We cannot agree, however, with the view expressed by I. I. Ivanov-Omskiy [Ref. 9, p. 47] that Plekhanov's environmentalist approach stemmed from a lack of understanding of the principle in historical materialism concerning the feedback effect of productive relations on the development of productive forces. Plekhanov, in fact, understood this perfectly well when he said: "Once certain social relationships have arisen, their further development follows their own internal laws, which either accelerate or retard the development of productive forces that accounts for the historical progress of mankind" [Ref. 18, p. 689]. Plekhanov erred in his thesis that "the development of productive forces is itself determined by the properties of man's geographical environment" [Ref. 18, p. 689]. [Editor's note, S.G.: for a more detailed discussion of Plekhanov's views on the geographical environment and their place in the evolution of Marxist thinking, see Ian M. Matley, "The Marxist approach to the geographical environment," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 56, No. 1, March 1966, pp. 97-111.]

The geographical environment is a universal object of human labor and the material foundation for the process of production and, in that capacity, plays a significant role in affecting the direction and rate of development of productive forces and, consequently, social production. Such periods in the history of mankind as the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age became possible only because nature provided reserves of silica, copper, and iron ores. The history of society would have been in many ways different if, say, no metals or fuel resources existed on earth, although even then it would surely have followed social laws. This idea is well illustrated by Yu. G. Saushkin in the case of Polynesia: "The Polynesian islands have a large number of ancient monuments that suggest a highly developed early culture, but that culture was achieved entirely through the use of stone tools. These stone tools existed on these islands for thousands of years and, as long as the islands led an isolated existence, their residents used neither bronze nor iron because coral atolls and volcanic islands do not contain metals in their subsoil. The main occupations of the population of these islands were cropgrowing and fishing. The Polynesians were not hunters because there was nothing to hunt" [Ref. 19, p. 125].

N. N. Baranskiy drew attention to the need for distinguishing two very different questions. "One question," he said, "concerns the influence of the natural environment on the development of human society, i.e., on changes in social formations, the transition from one formation to the next, etc.... The other question concerns the influence of differences in the natural

environment on differences in economic activities from place to place within a particular social formation, whose character as a whole also determines the character of the use of the natural environment" [Ref. 20, p. 36]. The second question, which is purely geographic and the simpler one in its general form, has been thoroughly analyzed in the geographical literature.

As for the first question, there again we can distinguish two aspects. One is the influence of the geographical environment on the character and content of social relationships. As we have already stressed, the development of social relationships stems from immanent causes and the effect of the geographical environment is relatively modest as a general rule, even though it must, of course, be taken into account. This is clear from Engels' well-known letter to W. Borgius (once assumed to have been addressed to H. Starkenburg [Ref. 21, p. 706], in which Engels said: "The concept of economic relationships also includes the geographical foundation on which these relationships develop" [Ref. 21, p. 174].

True, we have had a good example in recent years to suggest that even this aspect may require further elaboration. We are referring here to the Asian mode of production (the founders of Marxism gave it such a "geographical" designation for what must have been good reason), which was unjustly "forgotten" in the 1930s and has again drawn the attention of Soviet historians and economists only since publication of Ye. Varga's last book [Ref. 22, pp. 358-382]. The Asian mode of production should not be considered entirely a regional phenomenon. Yet there is no doubt that it has been associated primarily with the Orient and the Marxist classics explain this, in particular, in terms of the strong indirect influence of the local geographical environment. Engels put it as follows: "Why did the Oriental peoples never adopt private ownership of the land, or even feudal ownership? It seems to me that this can be explained mainly in terms of the climate and the character of the soil, especially in the great desert zone that extends from the Sahara through Arabia, Persia, India, and Tataria to the highest part of the Asian tableland. The key condition of agriculture there is artificial irrigation, and this can be achieved only by communes, or provinces, or a central government" [Ref. 23, p. 221].

The other aspect is the influence of the geographical environment on the rate of development of society. We cannot in any way agree with Yu. G. Saushkin in the view that "a retarded or accelerated development of society in various countries and regions is least of all (italics mine -- V.P.) related to the geographical environment" [Ref. 4, p. 75]. This can be demonstrated by many historical examples.

There is no doubt that the social system in Europe during the period of the great geographical discoveries was on a higher level of development than the social system of American Indian tribes. Engels explained this as follows: "With the advent of barbarism, we achieved a stage [in cultural development] in which differences in natural conditions between the two continents assumed

greater significance. A characteristic aspect of barbarism was the domestication and raising of animals and the cultivation of plants. The eastern continent, the so-called Old World, possessed almost all the domesticable animals and all the cultivable cereals except one; the western continent, America, on the other hand, had only the llama of all the domesticable animals, and even that only in South America, and only one, even if the best, of the cultivable cereals, namely corn. Because of these differences in natural conditions, the population of each hemisphere has since then developed in separate ways, and the landmarks on the boundaries between levels of development have differed for each hemisphere" [Ref. 24, p. 30].

An underestimation of the influence of the geographical environment on the rate of social progress may make it possible for reactionary foreign sociologists to try to explain uneven social development in terms of racist theories. The question may arise whether these references to the geographical environment are not being used to "justify" the present economic and social backwardness of countries that were long under the colonial yoke. Not at all. Any phenomenon must be viewed in its historical context. When the first European merchants penetrated into Africa, there was already a real difference in the levels of social development in the two continents, and the Europeans cannot be blamed for it. "Not the regions of tropical climate with their luxurious vegetation, but the temperate zone was the home of capitalism," Marx wrote [Ref. 16, p. 522]. But colonial rule retarded the economic and social development of the politically dependent peoples precisely at a time in history when the formation of a single world economic system opened objective prospects for the leveling of differences in social development in various parts of the world. Instead, under the conditions of an antagonistic capitalist society, the gap between the metropolises and the colonies widened, and the natural resources of the colonial countries served the interests of the exploiting classes of the imperialist powers.

It seems to us that it was precisely with the completion of the process of formation of a world market about 1900 that the geographical environment and its various elements began to play a less significant role in retarding or accelerating social development because of the availability of foreign raw-material sources. We need merely recall that the absence of domestic oil reserves in many industrial countries has in no way been a significant barrier to their development.

But here again the historical character of the man-nature relationship must be stressed. The influence of the geographical environment may often be more or less uniform within a particular historical formation or its major subdivisions, and then again the influence of the environment may greatly vary when new demands are made upon it by the production process. Disregard of this principle led I. M. Zabelin to the following smooth but useless play on words: "If we consider the history of mankind as a whole, we find that unfavorable (for what -- V.P.) and diversified natural conditions accelerate the process of social development, and favorable (again, for what? -- V.P.) and uniform conditions

have a retarding effect" [Ref. 3, p. 256]. L. Ye. Iofa [Ref. 25, p. 100] has already drawn attention to the oversimplification and lack of concreteness of this formulation, turning it into a paradox and a play on words.

In conclusion I would like to dwell briefly on the problem whether society is becoming more or less dependent on the geographical environment. In the early stages of history, man was in particular need of the means of subsistence, so that his direct dependence on nature predominated. At later stages of civilization, there arose a growing need for the tools of labor, so that the indirect dependence on nature became decisive. In the past there were far fewer links between society and the geographical environment, but a break in any of these links was sharply felt. Now, with an infinite number of man-nature relationships, these links are probably severed more frequently, but a break in any one link is reflected to a lesser extent in the functioning of social production as a whole.

There is a wide difference of views on the present trend in the man-nature relationship, but in the absence of any criteria for evaluating that relationship, these views are largely intuitive. One might risk the assertion that the relationship remains largely unchanged since man still derives all his material needs from nature, at least as an original source. A more significant conclusion is that the scale of the man-nature relationship is constantly increasing, man's activities are having a tremendous effect on the face of the earth, and careful study of a wide range of aspects is required if we want to avoid irreversible negative phenomena in nature as a resulting of increasing human activity.

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