

University of North
Carolina Department
of Geography

Spring 2016

Geographic Thought:
Seminar in the History and Philosophy of Geography
M 3:30—6:30pm Carolina Hall 321

John Pickles, Earl N Phillips Distinguished Professor of International Studies

The purpose of this course is to examine the historical and philosophical development of modern geography and geographical knowledge. We focus mainly on geography from the early nineteenth century to the present. The course explores the key discourses, debates, and controversies which shaped the modern discipline, and also raises questions about how developments seemingly internal to the discipline have related to broader dynamics in science and society. Each week students will be introduced to four aspects of these disciplinary histories: (i) the historical/political/social context within which claims about science and geography emerged; (ii) philosophical arguments that emerged as central to definitions of science, explanation, understanding, and geography; (iii) sites within which such knowledge was produced (e.g., laboratory, the field, museums, botanical gardens, etc.); and (iv) selected individuals and groups that have played important roles in defining how we understand the world geographically. The seminar concludes with a survey of contemporary approaches in geography, and in discussion of the relations between natural and social sciences in geographic thought and practice.

When we are finished, students should understand:

1. The theoretical and practical concerns that have molded contemporary Geography.
2. How geographers have variously understood the relationship between geographical knowledge and practice.
3. The broader epistemological and social contexts and conditions that underpin basic concepts and keywords in the discipline (nature, landscape, exploration, mapping, physical/human, determinism, diffusion, culture, space, place, positivism, eurocentricism, planetary science, empiricism, etc.).
4. The place your own research in disciplinary context.

Graduate students from other programs and advanced undergraduate majors in Geography who like to read and discuss the readings are welcome with instructor's permission. jpickles@unc.edu