

Dorling, D. and Lee, C. (2016) Why Geography? Profile Books Blog, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, <https://profilebooks.com/blog/cat/news/post/why-geography-danny-dorling-new-book/>

## WHY GEOGRAPHY?

*Geography is the latest book in our Ideas in Profile series of short introductions. Danny Dorling, author and Professor of Geography at the University of Oxford, and Carl Lee, geography tutor at the University of Sheffield, share why geography is of vital importance to us all.*



*The world drawn proportionally to food production – map by Benjamin D. Hennig*

Without geography you can't explain the world around you. Geography is all around us. Nothing lies outside the purview of geography because everything is connected to everything else.

Geography is about the planet we inhabit, from the water that gives it life to its extensive biodiversity. But crucially it is about the energy that courses through its myriad of environmental systems.

Without an understanding of energy you cannot understand geography. This is the energy that builds mountains and then destroys mountains. It is energy that flows through our atmosphere daily bringing us our weather, and in the longer term the energy fluctuations that alter our climate.

It is the energy that gives us the food to sustain ourselves. It is energy, stored in fossil fuels formed from the decomposition of prehistoric plants and animals, which has enabled us to put the spark of electricity into our lives. Geography helps

explain how all of this energy has transformed who we are and how we impact upon our environment and how our environment impacts upon us.

Geographers have a tradition of being curious explorers both of places and ideas. Where does that highway go to? Who lives in this big house, and why? How did we arrive at where we are? When are we going to learn to live together? Can you really consume more and more and does it really make you feel better? Is there something nagging away at you every day – a splinter in your mind – a thought that somehow there must be a better way to live?

"What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad." Morpheus / *The Matrix*

Geographical questions are never stand-alone. All the questions we ask lead to other questions. Often the answers are elusive. Geography is about joining up the dots that help make up the big picture. Connections are everywhere. The distinction between human and physical geography is often a false schism: they are intimately connected, the unifying factor being the energy that flows through all that we do, see and know.

Geographers need to know a little biology and chemistry, sociology and politics, and some mathematics and economics. A few languages can come in handy too and languages also tend to be quite geographical. But geography specializes in doing something no other academic subject does so well – it looks forward.

What has propelled geographical knowledge into the forefront of thinking about the future is the acknowledgement that we, humanity, have pushed our planet to the edge of an environmental catastrophe and that we have achieved this in a relatively short space of time. To some this may seem bold; to us this is increasingly evident from the answers we get from the questions we ask.

For more questions and free colour versions of this map and many others, visit [Danny Dorling's website](#)

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