

DAVID HOOSON

## Reply

The valuable commentaries by Professor Vardys and Miss Sheehy, naturally following their particular interests, have served to turn the spotlight on the question of the non-Russian nationalities, notably of the Baltic and Middle Asia respectively. My original decision not to plunge into the "nationalities question" per se in this particular article certainly did not mean to deny its perennial importance in the life and character and problems of certain regions of the Soviet Union. I find little to take issue with in Miss Sheehy's contribution, which amplifies in a most interesting and authoritative way some of the trends and problems I had briefly noted with respect to Middle Asia, and introduces further insights. I intend therefore to devote the limited space at my disposal here to respond chiefly to Professor Vardys, who takes careful issue with certain aspects of my methods of regionalization and in particular the place accorded to various nationalities.

By "geographical values" I mean simply the cumulative preferences and valuations put upon a region by its inhabitants over time, as expressed implicitly by the settlement process and the way in which people select, recognize, and organize their living space. Nothing teleological is implied here, and certainly no suggestion of environmental determinism (I am afraid, incidentally, that I have never—"informally" or otherwise—heard of the term "geographyism," which Professor Vardys mentions). My regions are essentially functional (rather than "formal," which would be based on the distribution of one feature, such as climate or an ethnic group), and they attempt to define a measure of order and homogeneity in the complex welter of phenomena occurring in a particular area. Ideally such regional constructs aim at embodying the most satisfactory combination of interpretive statements that an individual geographer can make at a particular time about the functional coherence and the distinctiveness of character of a section of the earth. Of course they are imprecise and subjective to a greater or less degree and exist, if at all, as fluid or open systems which may be seen primarily as integral parts of a relatively closed one—the Soviet state. They are distinguished from each other not only in such things as relative levels of growth, development, and urbanization, or their economic specialization, but also by ethno-cultural distinctiveness and regional consciousness, as I outlined at the outset of my article.

Few Soviet regions show as clear a coincidence of distinctive ethnic, natural, and economic characteristics as Middle Asia, with its insulating belts

of empty deserts and unresponsive international boundaries. Even if the northern part of the Kazakh Republic still had a majority of Kazakhs, however, the fundamental dichotomy between its landscape, "circulation," and economy and that of the southern part would, in my opinion, outweigh any formal ethnic pretext which might be made for including the whole republic in the Middle Asian geographical region. On the other hand, the fact that the Kuban area of the North Caucasus is ethnically and historically, as well as physically, akin to the Ukraine would seem to justify their inclusion in the same region, leaving the markedly different eastern part of the North Caucasus as in many respects more akin to the eastern Transcaucasus and the Caspian. In short, I feel that while ethnic factors obviously loom large in many peripheral regions of the Soviet Union, they *alone* are rarely sufficient to determine the outlines of functional regions of the all-pervading type which I have attempted to define.

However, I must confess to feeling not entirely comfortable about my Baltic region, and respect Professor Vardys's opinions about it, as an expert on the area. I remember that when I first presented this tentative scheme of Soviet regions at an international congress in 1964, this particular region was the only one to which serious objections were raised by the Soviet geographers present, notably to the inclusion of Leningrad. I would now like to point out, by way of partial justification, some rules of thumb under which this kind of effort at regionalization operates. First there is the practical matter of a manageable scale. A round figure of ten units of the Soviet Union lies somewhere between the gross national or "West-East" units and a confusing superfluity of small, local regions. The familiar divisions of the United States, arrived at in a comparable exercise, such as the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, or New England, would, incidentally, amount to about the same number, and it is this sort of scale which regional geographers generally find most convenient in dealing with part of a large modern country.

Thus the three Baltic republics, although unquestionably distinct ethnically from Russia (if also notably distinct from each other in language and religion), do not quite come up to the scalar threshold for this kind of regionalization. There is also the practical, if a little absurd, matter of what is left after more straightforward adjacent regional divisions have been marked off. The nodal Moscow-dominated region, the coherent and rich Greater Ukrainian region, and the empty Northlands (beyond the fringe of close permanent settlement)—each has a different but compelling regional logic, and together they surround and isolate a region whose parts all range about and toward the Baltic. The "marchland," somewhat Westward-oriented character of this region, coupled with certain natural common denominators, including a poverty of natural resources (say *vis-à-vis* the Ukraine), seems to justify such a grouping. The fact that it inevitably breaks down on analysis into at least three subregions

—the Baltic states, Belorussia, and Leningrad—should not necessarily invalidate the larger grouping, provided it is recognized as a fairly loose one of convenience.

It seems that there may be a basic methodological divergence between Professor Vardys and myself in our approaches to such regionalization. He seems to assume that taxonomic units (such as ethnic groups) possess an integrity which makes them not susceptible to aggregation with neighboring areas except by “doing violence” to basic principles. In my regionalization the process of analysis by breakdown, from nation through “worlds” to subregions, inevitably calls for a measure of flexibility, catholicity, and compromise, looking for a minimum of functional unities among the obvious diversity. In this process, I recognize the powerful—possibly growing—significance of nationalisms in the Soviet Union, but only as one facet of a larger regional consciousness formed out of prolonged interaction between people and places. Although it may have seemed to languish at times recently, interpretive synthesis of the many-sided character of distinctive regions of the humanized world continues to lie close to the heart of geography and its ways of thought.