This principle is as follows: That the significance of basic, physical, geographic elements as conditioners of political, economic, social, and cultural groups is a function of the attitudes, objectives, and technical skills of people. That means that you cannot talk about physical features as having any permanent influence on what people do.

Take for example the case of a barrier. It says in the Correspondence Course, which I have just looked at briefly, that mountains constitute barriers, that steep slopes constitute barriers, and therefore you identify the steep slopes and you know you have a barrier. This is not true.

In the history of Latin America, for example, the major barriers to movement up until the middle of the 19th century were dense forests, not slopes. The Portuguese and Spaniards made no bones whatsoever about riding their mules up the steepest slopes. Slopes meant nothing, but forests were barriers. They stayed away from broad areas of dense forests. They didn't like forests or know how to operate in them.

When the railroad came in this changed the picture. Forests meant nothing to railroad engineers but slopes took on a new meaning.

Or take the case of agricultural capacity of a country. In Brazil it has been estimated that something like 90 percent of Brazil is arable, meaning it can be cultivated. Now, this is true, as long as you cultivate Brazil with a hoe. They cultivate slopes up to 35 degrees with a hoe. But, when you change from the hoe to the plow, you can no longer cultivate a slope that is more than about 10 or 11 degrees. Consequently, the