Notes on Mental Maps

Learning the world around us starts when we are very young and continues throughout our lives.

Process of: sensory data >> abstraction/categories >> representation/symbols

Cognitive Mapping: gathering of environmental knowledge via our senses and direct experience of the environment

Initially things are understood from an egocentric perspective

Egocentric: self-centered; things in relation to us (we are the center)
As our experience of the environment grows we develop a set of locations in relation to our home and paths between those locations.

What is important is that:
- There is some kind of map in our heads
- And it is based on direct experience, egocentrism, and locations and paths

We still use this basic process of mental mapping when in unfamiliar places
Our mental maps seldom stay simple
- Larger areas are incorporated as we travel (more direct experience)
- We begin to annotate our direct experience with indirect experience
- Change from an egocentric to a geocentric understanding of environment

Geocentric: orienting ourselves to the external environment
Why does this geocentric mental map develop?
- Developmental and cognitive psychology
- Cultural/social factors

Our mental maps – whether inborn or culturally determined – is enhanced by the use of an established spatial frame of reference, which we learn from and can use with other people.
- Mental Maps are not like printed paper maps with accurate directions and distances.
  BUT…despite this mental maps often work just fine, no matter how warped they are.

Geographical biases: what you know depends on where you live!
Mental Map Maze

The purpose of this assignment is to improve your mental picture of what the world is like. In other words, we want you to create a mental atlas of the world in your head. Why is this important? Simply, it is more convenient and useful to carry around a good mental atlas in your head than a real one you only use some of the time.

Directions:

In the maze below is a map of the entire world. Your job is to shade in the continents of the world as they appear to you. I will give you some help in getting started. The continents are smaller than you may think and Africa is right in the middle. Shade in the continents using a pencil because you will probably screw up a lot. Just use your mental to help you, until I give you permission to use your atlas.