

HYPOTHESES

IMAGINE a very large town, at the centre of a fertile plain which is crossed by no navigable river or canal. Throughout the plain the soil is capable of cultivation and of the same fertility. Far from the town, the plain turns into an uncultivated wilderness which cuts off all communication between this State and the outside world.

There are no other towns on the plain. The central town must therefore supply the rural areas with all manufactured products, and in return it will obtain all its provisions from the surrounding countryside.

The mines that provide the State with salt and metals are near the central town which, as it is the only one, we shall in future call simply "the Town".

CHAPTER 2

THE PROBLEM

THE problem we want to solve is this: What pattern of cultivation will take shape in these conditions?; and how will the farming system of the different districts be affected by their distance from the Town? We assume throughout that farming is conducted absolutely rationally.¹

It is on the whole obvious that near the Town will be grown those products which are heavy or bulky in relation to their value and hence so expensive to transport that the remoter districts are unable to supply them. Here too we shall find the highly perishable products, which must be used very quickly. With increasing distance from the Town, the land will progressively be given up to products cheap to transport in relation to their value.

For this reason alone, fairly sharply differentiated concentric rings² or belts will form around the Town, each with its own particular staple product.

From ring to ring the staple product, and with it the entire farming system, will change; and in the various rings we shall find completely different farming systems.

Johann Heinrich von Thünen, *Der Isolierte Staat* (1826),
Von Thünen's Isolated State, translated by Carla M.
Wartenberg, edited by Peter Hall (Oxford: Pergamon, 1966).

