1

Introduction: Geographies of Morality and Moralities of Geography

Roger Lee and David M. Smith

That geography and morality are strongly interconnected may not be immediately apparent. Human geographers have become familiar, over the years, with the subject matter of such disciplines as economics, politics and sociology, with culture also looming large. On the physical side, geology was once an essential foundation for the field, now linked to a range of other environmental sciences. But morality has not attracted anything like the same attention. Indeed, there have been periods in the history of geography when a yearning for scientific status has generated reverence for supposedly value-free objectivity, with any normative inclinations yielding to positivism. Such was the case during the 'quantitative revolution' and the era of human geography as 'spatial science', which preoccupied much of the 1960s and 1970s. And when, some years ago, the then Secretary of State for Education in a British Conservative government (Kenneth Clark) pronounced that geography should be about facts and not opinions, he was reflecting a common understanding of the field as essentially descriptive, as well as perhaps suspicion of the subversive nature of some of the opinions that geographers might hold.

However, as soon as we raise issues like spatial inequality and its social, economic and political consequences, the normative dimension becomes clear. Universal ideals of development and justice may, for example, be reduced to a concern for economic growth, with its attendant problems for those left behind. There is also the more critical issue of normative ethics: to what extent are uneven development and social inequality just? The resolutions of such questions are both reflected in, and constitutive of, the moral values of particular people in particular places. And these particularities both reflect local circumstances and practices and condition the ways in which these have been formed and transformed over time by the mutually interactive relations between 'local' and 'non-local' influences

and norms. Thus the reference to pluralities of 'geographies' and 'moralities' in our title expresses the spatial and temporal path dependence, variation and difference in what we mean by geography and morality. Furthermore, a recognition that there are 'moralities of geography', as well as 'geographies of morality', adds to our concerns the normativity of the practice of geography, and of geographers, customarily referred to as professional ethics. What is 'good geography' or a 'good geographer' is not merely a matter of technical virtuosity, theoretical refinement or disciplinary integrity; moral values, such as social relevance and political purchase, are always involved.

As the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' tend to be used rather indiscriminately, often interchangeably, let us be clear about our own understandings at the outset. Put as simply as possible, we distinguish between ethics as moral theory, and morality as practical action (see, for example, Rauche, 1985, pp. 252–3). Thus ethics, as the subject of moral philosophy, involves reflection on moral values, their origin, meaning and justification. Morality refers to what people believe and what they do in pursuit of, or merely as a reflection of, their own conceptions of the right and the good. This distinction would not be endorsed by all moral philosophers, and some of our contributors may work from different understandings. However, it helps to highlight a further aspect of geographical variability: while ethics might claim a broader reach than morality, both can be specific to place (as well as to time), and have to be understood in this context. They are, in short, social constructs.

The Social Construction of Morality in and between Places

The motto of the co-educational grammar school near Manchester, north-west England, in which one of us (Roger Lee) received an education in the latter half of the 1950s and early 1960s was 'manners maketh the man'. In what was a geographically very significant manoeuvre, the motto had been borrowed from William of Wykeham (1324–1404), Bishop of Winchester and founder of Winchester College. This joint derivation – from the discourse of Christianity, often assumed to be centrally concerned with morality, as well as from an ancient and esteemed southern English public school – must have done wonders for the missionary instincts of those who chose the motto. Unfortunately, it seemed to pass by the northern industrial youths, female and male, to whom it was directed, at this particular place and time. Other (im)moral influences tended to prevail.

Nevertheless, Wykeham's motto begins to suggest the significance not merely of moral engagement for social life but also of the geographies and politics through which this is formulated and practised. First, the motto

implies that manners are pre-existing things, to be achieved by 'man'. And yet manners, and the morality that they represent, are made by people situated in place and time, and so are geographically and historically constituted. To take a trivial example: for some in France it is rude to sit at the dining table with hands held in laps, whereas in (parts of middle-class) England sitting with elbows on the table is more than likely to be censored. While alternative table manners may appear insignificant compared with, say, differences over human rights or conceptions of social justice, they are aspects of the common concern for a morality in shaping both self-image and attitudes towards others. The behavioural distinctions relate to a culturally differentiated historical geography about which, nevertheless, conversations are possible around the commonalities. The practices reflecting such differences may be criticized, but the right to articulate them is to be defended and the purpose of democratic politics is to enable their free expression as well as debate.

Secondly, the story of the school motto points to a normative notion of moralizing: of defining norms to which individuals, aspiring to be good or right, should conform. It points, in short, to the very process of social construction exemplified by questions of etiquette such as table manners. One reading of such moralizing would be dismissive, reducing it to preferred patterns of socialization to which the moralizers would wish to subject the masses, whether school children or the population at large. However, while extra-terrestrial authority may sometimes be imputed, morals are socially constructed and, as such, are constituted in the geographies through which they take place. They may chime with the aspirations of people in particular places, or they may be challenged, rejected and replaced. Supposedly universal notions of morality, like those sometimes associated with development and justice, are constantly reshaped on the stubborn anvil of geographical practice and particularity.

Thirdly, the story raises the question of the relationship between moralities and human being. The capacities to think normatively and to imagine are widely regarded as distinguishing humans from other forms of animate life (and from its electronic competitors, clever at dynamic and responsive learning though they may be). The questioning as well as the practice of what are intrinsically contested moral values is an inescapable part of being human. This is why a state of a-morality is so difficult to imagine. Moral thought is both pervasive, even if often only implicitly, and overriding, or frequently taken to be – at least in defence of social action. Further, the existence and constant transformation of geographies and temporalities of moralities reveals less a form of moral relativism than the universality of the profound influence of geography and time on how human beings understand their lives, and what they make of them. That the ethics devised in the process can itself be time- and place-specific is illustrated by such expressions as 'ancient' and 'Enlightenment' ethics, and in the distinction

sometimes made between 'Anglo-American' and 'continental' philosophy. This specificity is also revealed in the great ethical traditions featured in Blackwell's *A Companion to Ethics* (Singer, 1991), for example, which include Indian and Chinese ethics as well as those associated with Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam – all of which have their own distinctive geography.

Reasserting the Normative

As the final decade of the twentieth century dawned, Francis Fukuyama (1992) famously pronounced 'the end of history', with the demise of socialism leaving liberal capitalism triumphant. But in a world in which some see the contingencies of geography as well as of history finally resolved, through neoliberal economic and political practice and the un-problematic effects of globalization, issues of morality and ethics become increasingly significant. Capitalist social relations are indeed becoming universalized, but there is no equivalent universalization of development and justice beyond those embedded in capitalism, declarations of universal human rights notwithstanding. The reality is of an increasingly differenti-ated world, in the sense of unequal life chances at the local, national and global scales, and of growing fragmentation into sharply divided peoples and places.

There are at least two broad and related implications of this increasing significance of normative issues. One is the question of politics. If all the world really is becoming the same, and human life individualized, what is the basis for political engagement rather than disillusionment with politics? Connected to this is the problematic construction of political-economic difference in a world allegedly converging on a universally accepted set of norms, and the consequent appeal to such reputedly timeless values as community and family, and to identity – often defined in terms of brands, for example, and capable of construction through market transactions. And yet, questions of difference still give rise to major social and geo-political conflicts whilst, paradoxically, morality and ethics are often utilized as unproblematic (i.e. given, unquestioned and universally agreed) in certain forms of political rhetoric, whereas they are both highly contextualized social constructs. For Chantal Mouffe (1998) these issues of difference and of unproblematic ethics and moralities are related. She argues that antagonism is inherent in social relations and so, even if the world has been geographically flattened or historically 'ended', politics is still concerned primarily with conflict. There can be no 'third way'.

The second question is that of universalism vs particularism. Is cultural difference still a justification for the differentiation of moral norms, or are

some kinds of behaviour beyond the pale anywhere and everywhere? We may accept distinctive table manners and certain other customs as part of a local or national culture, but hardly the torture of prisoners or the exclusion of women from public life. And, again relatedly, how is the increasing material significance of moral or ethical evaluation, and of inequality, connected to the resolution of questions of economic organization, reproduction and development, and political-economic practice? The relationships between universalism and particularism have, in one guise or another, teased geography and geographers throughout the intellectual history of the discipline. But the distinction is inescapable for consideration of ethical and moral issues – as it is in all attempts to understand social relations – because it refers to the extent to which the differences between human beings should enter into moral judgements by them, and about them, and into the practices to which these judgements give rise.

The truth of descriptive ethical relativism or particularism – that moral values vary from place to place, as well as from time to time – is too obvious to require much illustration. Taking a topical British example, some people in the countryside approve of fox-hunting, while others elsewhere find it morally objectionable. Bull-fighting is part of Spanish culture, but torturing animals to death for public entertainment strikes people in many other countries as wrong. More generally, such frequently asserted human rights as free speech and freedom from hunger are taken more seriously in some countries than others. The different emphasis given to different moral values is reflected in institutional arrangements. Thus, the United States has a Bill of Rights upholding individual liberty, which some would like Britain to emulate, but it has no welfare state; Britain still has a National Health Service available to all irrespective of ability to pay, which is envied by some Americans but stigmatized by others as 'socialized medicine'.

However, some moral values might appear to be universal. Such human virtues as honesty, courage and care are valued in all societies. Their particular manifestations may vary from place to place and time to time, but it is hard to imagine a society functioning for long if its people were dishonest, cowardly and uncaring. A version of the so-called 'Golden Rule' of treating others as one would wish to be treated is found in virtually all the world's major ethico-religious traditions. But even this requires a context, a process of people coming to terms with living together in mutually supportive social relations, theologians or philosophers capable of systematizing and propagating such a rule, and a politics and set of institutions able to translate these social ideas into practice. As Jürgen Habermas (1990, p. 208) explains, moral universalism is itself 'a historical result'. We might add that it also arose in a particular geographical context, of an expanding 'known' world carrying unequal power relations, in which parochial partiality no longer provided an adequate ethical basis for social relations

involving ever more distant and different others. More topically, population movement within the expanding European Community will test to the limit universalist expectations of the right to seek work and social security. The right to change one's place by crossing international borders is fiercely contested in the contemporary world of sharply differentiated life chances and rising national chauvinism; it remains the right we are not ready for (Nett, 1971). Again, both geography and history are involved, in the discourse which has turned the once welcomed political 'asylum seeker' into a pariah.

Geography's Moralities

The implications of these kind of features of moral discourse and construction for such social practices as development and justice are the prime subject matter of this book. The disciplinary context within which we write is that of a strong (re)engagement of geography with normative issues in recent years, involving what has been referred to as a 'moral turn' (Smith, 1997). The first substantial challenges to geography's prevailing positivist orientation came in the aftermath of the quantitative revolution, most powerfully in the exploration of social justice by David Harvey (1973) and of values in geography by Annette Buttimer (1974). A resurgence of the humanist tradition brought further contributions, notably treatments of morality and the good life by Yi-Fu Tuan (1986, 1989). The revitalization of cultural and social geography has had a distinctively normative tone, including arguments for the application of a 'moral lens' to human geography and for (re)connecting its inquiries to moral philosophy (Philo, 1991). The notion of 'moral geographies' ('landscapes' or 'locations') as a rubric for a distinctive kind of thick descriptive ethics has subsequently attracted much attention (Smith, 2000, pp. 45-53). The 1990s saw the return of social justice to the geographical agenda (Smith, 1994; Harvey, 1996), while Robert Sack (1997) has made morality central to his exposition of *homo geographicus* and to his understanding of place (Sack, 2003).

Philo's injunction to engage moral philosophy was given substance by the first edited collection of papers exploring the interface of geography and ethics (Proctor and Smith, 1999). This was followed by one of these editors' book examining some of the implications for ethics of the geographer's world of difference, considering the moral significance of those familiar geographical concepts of landscape, location and place, proximity and distance, space and territory, along with justice, development and nature (Smith, 2000). Links between geography and political philosophy were explicit in discussions of development ethics (e.g. Corbridge, 1998). Connections were also made with environmental ethics (Light and Smith,

1997). These and other concerns have also been reflected in, for example, the content of the journal *Ethics, Place and Environment*, as well as in longer-established periodicals (see, for example, reviews in *Progress in Human Geography*).

Of course, geography did not discover ethics in intellectual isolation. There has been a normative turn in the social sciences at large (Sayer and Storper, 1997), impacting on economics, political science and sociology, as well as in such hybrid fields as cultural, urban and development studies. This itself reflects a growing range of issues challenging the contemporary world, in which the pace of technical innovations seems constantly to be outstripping advances in the ethical understanding required, literally, to evaluate humankind's increasingly complex interaction with nature as well as changing social relations. Talk of moral crisis hardly seems exaggerated. That geography is central to so many contemporary concerns crying out for fresh ethical thinking with a sharp critical edge is part of the motivation for this book.

Geographies and Moralities

Through the medium of a series of studies drawn from across the broad field of human geography, and from an international range of local contexts, this book addresses a number of issues related to development, justice and place.

1 If moralities are inescapable, distinctions like those between positive and normative thought start to look distinctly chaotic. Even the choice of subjects for such thoughts are exposed to moral pressures emanating from a variety of sources: cultural, economic, political and social. It was not chance or whim which shifted the attention of human geographers from location theory to social justice in the era of so-called 'radical geography', and to such issues as race, gender, disability and sexuality more recently. Similarly, the increasing importance of qualitative as opposed to quantitative research methods has an ethical dimension

2 Moralities are profoundly geographical products of the uneven development of social relations among people and between people and nature. Such differentiations, the distinctions that they both reflect and induce, and the tensions that are created through them, together constitute the very source of moralities. Moralities are, in short, constructed through geographically articulated social interaction. The interesting questions which arise here concern not so much the distinction between the 'moral' and the 'immoral', but how 'moral' and 'immoral' come to be defined, practised and reproduced in distinctive ways across space and time. Thus the transcendence of, or retreat towards, forms of nationalism or more local

partiality (e.g. ethnic chauvinism) raises profoundly geographical questions about the nature of human being and how it may be constructed.

3 The ways in which moralities are both constituted through economic, political and social processes and shape the nature of such processes raise questions around the complex and multifaceted nature of these influences upon social life and how they are themselves formatively related to each other. The growing realization, within the social and natural sciences and the humanities, that the economic, the social, the cultural and the natural are inseparable extends even more forcefully and formatively to include the moral and the ethical. Nevertheless, these various domains of human action cannot be reduced completely to each other. There is, therefore, an important issue here of the extent and nature of over-determination in understanding the complex and mutually formative relationships between the 'economic' and the 'cultural', for example, or between the ethical and the social.

4 The transformation of issues of social (in)justice into matters of social exclusion implies an unquestioned norm (the condition from which exclusion is sustained), rather than a contested process which may be judged by certain criteria to be just or unjust. A discourse of social exclusion, which posits as a universal a set of circumstances and relationships that are in fact a highly particular form of social life, serves to sustain and enhance existing inequalities of power around what are represented as unproblematic norms. For example, the reminder by Michael Walzer (1983, p. 105) of Lee Rainwater's axiom that money buys membership of industrial society invites reflection on the normativity as well as the sociology of the kind of commodity fetishism which inevitably excludes people lacking, literally, purchasing power. And the generalization of social exclusion that puts paid to other forms of alterity is a wider implication of the unproblematic normalization of the increasingly insistent ethics of neoliberalism (see, for example, Leyshon, Lee and Williams, 2003).

Debates and conflicts over questions of morality and ethics are not a mere product of millennial angst. Rather, they inform the very nature of the human condition. Furthermore, as argued above, the nature of morality and ethics is itself profoundly related to geography and difference. This book, written by an international range of authors working in and on five continents, sets out to explore ways in which geographically shaped questions of ethics, morality and justice infuse social interaction and development in a variety of contexts. As such, it is concerned less with arguing the case for the inclusion of moral and ethical considerations in the scholarly understanding of spatial relations (not least as such a case has been made elsewhere: Proctor and Smith, 1999; Smith, 2000), than with demonstrating the inseparability of ethics, morals and geography in a variety of situations.

Specifically, the individual chapters are, in their own contexts of moralities and geographies, intended to allow a focus on the specifics of circumstance. In this way, they may address the complex issues involved in the interplay between the constraints of relations of power in the constructions of moralities, and the tensions between intrinsic notions of morality – with associated claims of universality – and human difference. Each chapter is written by an author who has been obliged to engage with moral and ethical issues in the substantive work in which she or he is engaged. This raises issues of both personal and professional ethics, not as incidental but as central to the reflexive practice of scholarship.

Structure of the Text

Within the framework outlined above, the contributors have exercised freedom to address aspects of development, justice and place as they wished. Each chapter is quite capable of standing on its own, and speaking for itself. While we have hesitated to impose our own editorial structure on the contributions as written, the arrangement of chapters under five broad headings indicates our sense of their coherence, further drawn out in short introductions to each part of the book. The sequence runs through the central issues of development, justice and place (Parts I, II and III), on to the conduct of research (Part IV), and concludes with the moral context of professional practice (Part V).

Part I provides illustrations of moral geographies of uneven development, at different geographical scales – global, European, national and intra-national. Peter Dicken points to the complex, interrelated forces determining 'who gets what *where* and how' in the changing global economic map, resulting in uneven development at the international scale and within countries. Nigel Spence explores contradictions between uneven development among national and regional economies in the European Union (EU) and the policy urge for convergence and cohesion; eastward expansion of the EU raises important moral issues, concerned with what the new Europe should be like. In the first of two contributions from Eastern Europe, Bolesław Domański criticizes the image of East-Central Europe as a morally, culturally and politically inferior periphery of Western Europe, pointing to some fallacies in research on post-socialist societies and arguing that the periphery should be included in a common European future. Grzegorz Węcławowicz draws on Polish experience to consider uneven development at the regional and intra-urban scale, in conditions of societal transformation; he asks whether Poland's accession to European integration will enhance social and spatial justice, in the sense of smoothing rather than further sharpening disparities in living conditions.

Part II moves on to issues of distribution: social justice, welfare and human rights. Sarah Curtis considers the relationship between social exclusion, health and health care, in the context of the National Health Service (NHS) in England, elaborating the problems posed by inequalities involving particular population groups. Susan Smith and Donna Easterlow challenge neoliberal critics of welfare, pointing out that the tendency for welfare-state solutions to poverty to be replaced by market-based policies is leading to more unequal societies. Moving on to rights, Rex Honey uses Nigeria as an illustration of cultural struggles over human rights and the question of scale in moral geography, against a background of colonial rule, post-colonial military government and contemporary forces of globalization. Avery Kolers explains that rights to land, or the just distribution of territory, require approaches which recognize how people relate to land in ways which defy the crude calculations of the market. Shlomo Hasson provides an illustration of conflict over space, in the city of Jerusalem, where the problem is how to resolve apparently irreconcilable moral-political claims to the same territory. Brij Maharaj considers rights to land in South Africa, following dispossession on a racial basis under apartheid. He argues that land restitution is an opportunity to heal scars from the past.

Part III provides cases of moral practice deeply embedded in particular places, their culture and material conditions. Stuart Corbridge takes queueing (or waiting in line) as a quintessentially geographical phenomenon ordering time and space; cultural differences may be observed in the practice of queue-jumping, but he prefers an interpretation which recognizes the production of scarcity in the economic and political realms. Gill Valentine discusses the role of the school as a place in which young people learn about sexuality; she goes on to examine the attempt of the Scottish parliament to repeal legislation which bans the promotion of homosexuality in schools, showing how protagonists have drawn on different moral discourses about Scottishness to argue their cases. Jean Hillier challenges traditional theoretical approaches to local land-use planning, which suggest that officers make technical recommendations to elected representatives who take neutral decisions; evidence from Western Australia reveals the local communicative behaviours involved in planning decision-making practice.

Part IV addresses issues of research method and practice which arise when geography engages with ethics. We deliberately juxtapose two rather different contributions, one theoretical and the other applied, connected by recognition of the significance and demands of qualitative research. William Lynn explains that causal explanation in human geography cannot depend on models and measurement alone; it must apprehend the meanings embodied in human agency, which requires qualitative inquiry.

He argues that this is an indispensable element of the metatheoretical rationale for ethics as an internal and legitimate endeavour of geography. Priscilla Cunnan provides an illustration of ethically informed research, involving methods which required carefully considered interaction with people whose lives she wished to understand, consistent with an underlying ethic of concern and respect for them.

In Part V, two concluding chapters consider moral context and professional practice. Ron Johnston explains that David Smith's career as a professional geographer covers four turbulent decades during which the nature of the discipline was the subject of much debate and contestation. David's own career trajectory mirrors these, and an evaluation of the influence of external forces on him, and of his influence on the discipline, provides insight into these events. Finally, David Smith himself considers his journey, from location theory to moral philosophy. If there is anything to give this coherence, it is an abiding concern with the normative, with the role of scholarship in seeking to identify and to create a better world; hence the focus of this volume.

REFERENCES

Buttimer, A. (1974) *Values in Geography*, Commission on College Geography, Resource Paper 24, Washington, DC: Association of American Geographers.

Corbridge, S. (1998) 'Development ethics: distance, difference, plausibility', *Ethics, Place and Environment* 1, 35–53.

Fukuyma, F. (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*, London: Penguin Books.

Habermas, J. (1990) *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (trans. C. Lenhardt and S. W. Nicholsen), Cambridge: Polity Press.

Harvey, D. (1973) *Social Justice and the City*, London: Edward Arnold.

Harvey, D. (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Leyshon, A., Lee, R. and Williams, C. (eds) (2003) *Alternative Economic Spaces*, London: Sage.

Light, A. and Smith, J. M. (eds) (1997) *Space, Place, and Environmental Ethics*, *Philosophy and Geography* 1, London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Mouffe, C. (1998) 'The radical centre: a politics without adversary', *Soundings* 9, 11–23.

Nett, R. (1971) 'The civil right we are not ready for: the right of free movement of people on the face of the earth', *Ethics* 81, 212–27.

Philo, C. (compiler) (1991) *New Words, New Worlds: Reconceptualising Social and Cultural Geography*, Lampeter: Department of Geography, St David's University College.

Proctor, J. D. and Smith, D. M. (eds) (1999) *Geography and Ethics: Journeys in a Moral Terrain*, London: Routledge.

Rauche, G. V. (1985) *Theory and Practice in Philosophical Argument*, Durban: Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Durban-Westville.

Sack, R. D. (1997) *Homo Geographicus: A Framework for Action, Awareness, and Moral Concern*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Sack, R. D. (2003) *A Geographical Guide to the Real and the Good*, New York and London: Routledge.

Sayer, A. and Storper, M. (1997) 'Ethics unbound: for a normative turn in social theory', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 15, 1–17.

Singer, P. (ed.) (1991) *A Companion to Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Smith, D. M. (1994) *Geography and Social Justice*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Smith, D. M. (1997) 'Geography and ethics: a moral turn?', *Progress in Human Geography* 21, 583–90.

Smith, D. M. (2000) *Moral Geographies: Ethics in a World of Difference*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Tuan, Y-F. (1986) *The Good Life*, Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.

Tuan Y-F. (1989) *Morality and Imagination: Paradoxes of Progress*, Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.

Walzer, M. (1983) *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality*, Oxford: Blackwell.