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## ETHICS IN GEOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHY IN ETHICS

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### Abstract

The present paper focuses on the place of ethics in Geography as well as place of Geography in ethics. Hence, ethical dimension in relation to Geography and Geographical dimension in relation to ethics and values are studied in this particular paper. Here an attempt made to study ethics in relation to the geography; especially it is a study of Moral Geography. Moral values and ethics are key component of the Moral Geography. Values have been noted for some time to be as much a part of geography as facts; as a rigorous analysis of values, ethics can enrich this discussion. This paper suggests both the potentially fruitful relationship between geography and ethics, and the need to build a more concerted and systematic effort in this area, in order to touch the themes basic to the geographical imagination that can help join these rather disparate interests. Finally, some questions are raised in this paper which should be determining the place of Geography in ethics and vice versa.

### Introduction

The realm of ethics or moral philosophy is a very fascinating and eminently important area of philosophy, which recently forays by geographers. In the last half-decade, reviews of sub-disciplinary efforts suggest that there has been remarkable increase in geographical publications attending to normative issues in general, and ethics in particular (Driver 1996). This emphasis is not entirely new: it builds in many ways upon a broader interest in values, dating from the 1970s among geographers (Buttimer 1974), involving both the professional issue of values inherent in the practice of geography, and the substantive issue of values inherent in the subject-matter of geography. The interest was engendered principally in response to the professed value-neutrality of the burgeoning quantitative approach in geography, with its emphasis on objectivist spatial analysis (Billinge *et al.* 1984). Values, then, have been noted for some time to be as much a part of geography as facts; as a rigorous analysis of values, ethics can enrich this discussion.

### What is Moral Geography?

Moral Geography is a key aspect of Cultural Geography, which is "the idea that certain people, things and practices belong in certain spaces, places and landscapes and not in others" (Creswell 2005). The focus on moral landscapes aims



to determining "the association of particular landscapes with schemes of moral value" (Matless, 1994).

### **Ethical enquiry in Geography**

Geographers have published few books offering sustained attention to ethics; those in existence have been rather specifically delimited to topics such as the ethics of geographical research (Mitchell and Draper 1982). Indeed, most reviews suggest that current work is not spread throughout the discipline, nor throughout the spectrum of moral philosophy, being largely confined to specific topical and theoretical clusters within human geography (Ley 1994), and focusing much more on descriptive than normative ethics, and much more on both than meta-ethics. In an upcoming review, David Smith discusses a number of geographically relevant questions related to meta-ethics, but finds few geographers to cite in this area to date; by contrast, work by geographers on 'moral geographies', what could loosely be called a form of thick descriptive ethics, is profuse (Smith, 1998). There are other clusters of interest by geographers as well, including, for example, the geography ethics of geographical research, the ethics of GIS, and social justice. Within each cluster of current interest, work is proceeding fruitfully; yet there is little conversation between these existing clusters, and emerging clusters of interest are far more difficult to identify.

In short, the current literature suggests both the potentially fruitful relationship between geography and ethics, and the need to build a more concerted and systematic effort in this area, in order to touch the themes basic to the geographical imagination that can help join these rather disparate interests.

### **Ethical Dimension**

There are problems with this rubric, however. For instance, the growing literature among geographers on moral geographies is somewhat trivialized when classified under the category of descriptive ethics—a category generally dismissed by philosophers as unphilosophical. Additionally, work by geographers on themes of normative ethics, such as social justice, or meta-ethics, such as the possibility of universals, often approaches these questions from a grounded, contextualized and often concrete perspective, which is quite unlike the style of much philosophical literature in these two categories of ethics (Proctor, 1997).

A final limitation in relying solely on this threefold rubric is that some of the areas of geographical interest noted above are related more to professional than substantive ethics, and thus do not fit well into this rubric, as they are primarily devoted to a gaze inward at the practice of the discipline versus outward at the



world. The relationship between professional and substantive ethics has been less worked out for geographers; indeed, Smith's review noted above does not engage with professional ethics in geography.

### **Geographical Dimension**

Geography, of course, accomplishes an epistemological process: knowledge of space, place and nature do not arise from thin air. This is the manner in which professional and substantive ethics in geography are connected, since without process and product, context and content are not comprehensible without the other. Yet the epistemological process of geography is far broader than what is typically subsumed under the category of 'professional ethics'. Minimally, this process involves a set of guiding concepts, implemented via research and analytical techniques to generate knowledge, which has a certain form of representation and leads to specific social implications. Guiding concepts include the metaphors of reality play an important general role in the constitution and reconstitution of geography's identity and thus provide a delimited range of appropriate enquiry in geographical research. Guiding concepts also include philosophical commitments as to how knowledge is to be produced and what kind of knowledge is worth producing—other important components of the constitution of geography. Research and analytical techniques are more specific, and include methods of data collection and analysis, such as qualitative interviews, field reconnaissance, GIS-based spatial modelling and so forth. Representation of research results by geographers commonly includes mapping and writing, though other forms of representation are possible as well. Implications, whether intentional or unintentional, follow from the production of geographical knowledge; these may touch upon social, environmental, political, intellectual and other worlds (ibid, 1997).

### **Ethics in geography and Geography in Ethics**

Geographers have employed normative concepts, whether wittingly or not, in many ways (Hay 1995). Yet, contemporary geography is a vital intellectual and practical force, due precisely to the willingness of geographers to engage with issues raised outside the discipline, and their ability to offer a distinct perspective on these issues. There is arguably no more important set of issues for geographers to Ethics in geography 15 address today than that dealing with complex and contested matters of ethics. The contribution of the geographical imagination has been significant to date, but much more work remains to be done. In so doing, geographers will have the opportunity to ask once again some of the many moral questions that have circulated through the discipline for at least the last few



decades. Ultimately, a more systematic exploration of the overlapping terrain of geography and ethics will yield valuable benefits to the discipline, and to those outside the discipline for whom questions of ethics matter deeply.

There are so many geographers could apply their intellectual efforts in ethics in geography and geography in ethics. These can be organized under two main Themes: the place of ethical reflection in geographical theory and practice, and the potential role geography could play in the arena of ethics. All these efforts, accordingly, raise bunch of question in anyone's mind.

#### **What is the place of ethics in geography?**

- What kinds of values have implicitly or explicitly accompanied the practice of geography in its recent history? In which areas of geography has explicit moral or normative enquiry been embraced or shunned, and why? Is it appropriate for only a subgroup of geographers to be intellectually concerned with ethics, or does ethics pertain to all geographers?
- What kinds of values and moral issues loom large in the major fields of contemporary geographical research? How might geographers go about addressing ethical problems in their substantive work?
- What role should moral theory (eg concepts of social justice) play in geographical research? What areas of moral theory are most appropriate for inclusion in the agenda of geographical enquiry?
- Should geography be conceived as (at least in part) a normative practice? What implications would exist for concepts central to geographical analysis? How might this preconception help or hinder research in geography?
- To what extent is ethical conduct desirable, definable and/or enforceable in the practice of geography?

#### **What is the place of geography in ethics?**

How might geography help explain the historical development of political, social, environmental and other forms of ethics?

In what ways do the dimensions of reality elucidated by physical and human geographers (eg space, place, biophysical nature) matter in the case of ethics? How might moral theory be reconceived in light of these elements?

To what extent are substantive questions of ethics beyond geography's intellectual grasp and/or topical or methodological bounds-that is, beyond the geographical imagination? Should geographical education be reconceived, so that geographers are better equipped to make contributions toward these questions?

What are the major descriptive, normative and meta-ethical areas in which geographers can make the greatest contribution in ethics? How, for instance, might geographers' inclination toward place-based description and theory be channelled toward resolution of larger normative and metaethical questions, such as the tension between ethical universalism and particularism or relativism?

It is questions such as these that await further extension of the geographical imagination. Understanding ethics as an inextricable part of geography's ontological project and epistemological process is the first step in this direction.

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