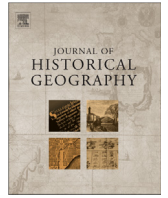


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Feature: Moral Regulation

## Moral regulation: historical geography and scale

Stephen Legg<sup>a,\*</sup> and Michael Brown<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> School of Geography, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, United Kingdom<sup>b</sup> Department of Geography, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-3550, USA

## Abstract

This paper introduces a special issue on the historical geography of moral regulation and scale. The paper examines the rich and varied work of geographers on moral geographies before looking at wider work on moral regulation influenced by Michel Foucault. Highlighting the significance of the neglected dimension of scale, the paper introduces the themes examined in the subsequent papers.

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[T]hese Gentlemen have formed a plan of Geographic morality, by which the duties of men in public and in private situations are not to be governed by their relations to the Great Governor of the Universe, or by their relations to men, but by climates, degrees of longitude and latitude, parallels not of life but of latitudes.<sup>1</sup>

The above statement was made by Edmund Burke in 1788 during the parliamentary trial of Warren Hastings. Pursuing corruption and abuse in the East India Company, Burke condemned what Nicolas Dirks has called the ‘cultural relativism’ by which the Company had adopted one code of conduct for Britain, and another for India.<sup>2</sup> This statement is often cited as an example of protest against the continental rule of colonial difference.<sup>3</sup> But it also hints at the quotidian importance of spatial scale in moral regulation: from the theological universal, to the globally geometric and the regionally climatic, to public–private divides and the relations between ‘men’. The trial was as much about economics and politics as it was about right and wrong, but whatever else Burke’s argument does, it surely calls our attention to how epistemologically and ontologically vital spatial scale is to understanding the formation, prosecution and contestation of moral regulation. While

certainly geographers have long been interested in morality and ethics (not to mention regulation), often with an implicit interest in spatial scale, we argue through this paper, and the special feature which follows, that geographies of moral regulation can be both intellectually and empirically extended by work that carefully traces the temporal and spatial scales of moral regulation. In this introduction we stake this claim by foregrounding the latent possibilities that Foucauldian theory offers for exposing the scalar networks of moral regulation. We hold that his work calls our attention to both the importance of scale in tracing out the networks of power relations at work in a given time and place, as well as the scaled links (or ruptures) between the governance of a population and self-governance. Such regulatory regimes, we will show, are often forged through moral discourses.

Substantively the contributors to this special issue provide a rich historical–geographical elaboration of these points in a variety of contexts: David Beckingham on child protection efforts in the Victorian era, Graham Mooney on the marketing of homecare for the Edwardian consumptive patient, Ted Rutland on a women’s moral-reform effort in Halifax, Celia Chu on the moral discourses of government reform in colonial Hong Kong and Philip Howell in an afterword which considers the theme of moral regulation and scale in more general terms. We would like to set the scene by introducing

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [Stephen.legg@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Stephen.legg@nottingham.ac.uk), [michaelb@uw.edu](mailto:michaelb@uw.edu).<sup>1</sup> E. Burke, Speech on opening of impeachment: 16 February 1788, in: P.J. Marshall (Ed.), *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Vol. VI. *India: The Launching of the Hastings Impeachment, 1786–1788*, Oxford, [1788] 1991, 312–373, 346.<sup>2</sup> N. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*, Cambridge, MA, London, 2006, 197.<sup>3</sup> P. Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy*, Columbia, NY, 2011, 5.

the rich and varied work of geographers on moral geographies before considering the theme of moral regulation in wider terms, and then returning to the neglected dimension of scale.

### Moral geographies

Geographers have grappled with the question of morals and morality from a host of different theoretical perspectives. One approach has used analytic philosophy to situate these terms relative to ethics and values.<sup>4</sup> While values have been conceived of as things (not processes) that guide actions, morality has been described as the standard of conduct by which humans are judged, whether in absolute (right/wrong) or relative (better/worse) terms. Here, ethics represents a reflection on morality in general (theoretical ethics) or on specific moral concerns in particular (applied ethics); a span which takes us from meta-, through normative, to descriptive ethics.<sup>5</sup> This work charts the wide-ranging concern over ethics in the discipline: from care and consumption,<sup>6</sup> cosmopolitan responsibility,<sup>7</sup> non-representational theory<sup>8</sup> and national frames of prescriptive reasoning,<sup>9</sup> to 'continental' and 'analytical' approaches to reason and normativity.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to that approach, we draw upon an alternative tradition which argues for the centrality of morality to geographical work. Differentiating ethics as moral theory from morality as practical action (a scalar division that is the opposite of Michel Foucault's ethical relation of self to self and others, as explored later),<sup>11</sup> David M. Smith has emphasised the historical geographies of morals and ethics themselves, though admitting that such existing research is mostly confined to western societies.<sup>12</sup> Moral codes geographically emerge relative to: the conditions and temptations of the communities or anonymities of their cities; the obligations and geographical imaginaries of their empires; the rhythms and intimacies of their social networks; the freedoms and liberties of their states and citizenries, or; in relation to modernity and its dreams of moral universalism. In his thoroughgoing survey volume *Moral Geographies*, Smith presses the need to consider morality's spatial dimensions such as proximity, distance, territory, distribution, development, and nature, after considering the moral

orders of landscape, location and place. Central to these moral orders is what he terms a thick, descriptive ethics, which considers moral differences in space, behavioural responses to moral environments, and power relations. These are the concerns that preoccupy the contributors to this special issue, though they are viewed through the frame of historical geography, not analytical philosophy.

### *A moral compass? Directing conduct*

The majority of work claiming the title of 'moral geography' focuses on codes of conduct and the regulation of human behaviour through spatial relations.<sup>13</sup> While earlier work had considered the moral ordering of cities and the theories about those cities, the field owes much to Felix Driver's 1988 paper on social science and the urban environment.<sup>14</sup> His examination of social and moral organisation in ethnology, medical geography, sanitary science and moral statistics, in reaction to the threat of the Victorian city, was a forerunner of his later, more explicit and far-reaching claims about the inherent moral concerns of human and social sciences.<sup>15</sup>

In his introduction to the proceedings of a 1990 conference of social and cultural geographers, Chris Philo laid out the claims for geographers considering the moral positions that they and other people take in and towards their lives, without becoming moralisers themselves. He concluded that: 'what we would then insist is that all of the "moral" questions are ones demanding a geographical sensitivity to how "moralities" are made and remade across space'.<sup>16</sup> Many of the contributors to the conference took this agenda forward in the following years. For instance, David Matless offered a corrective to the urban focus of much moral geographical work through his focus on moral geographies of 'land use' in eastern England's rural 'Broadland' in the mid-twentieth century,<sup>17</sup> and his later work on moral sciences, 1930–40s citizenship, and landscapes of leisure.<sup>18</sup>

Most historical works on moral geographies had, however, urban and nineteenth-century foci.<sup>19</sup> They have explored 'moral locations' for soldiers and sailors in nineteenth-century Portsmouth<sup>20</sup>; the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Houses and Morals (1852–54)<sup>21</sup>; mid-nineteenth-century New York fashions

<sup>4</sup> J.D. Proctor, Introduction: overlapping terrains, in: J.D. Proctor, D.M. Smith (Eds), *Geography and Ethics: Journeys in a Moral Terrain*, London, 1999, 1–16.

<sup>5</sup> J.D. Proctor, Ethics in geography: giving moral form to the geographical imagination, *Area* 30 (1998) 8–18.

<sup>6</sup> J. Popke, Geography and ethics: everyday mediations through care and consumption, *Progress in Human Geography* 30 (2006) 504–512.

<sup>7</sup> J. Popke, Geography and ethics: spaces of cosmopolitan responsibility, *Progress in Human Geography* 31 (2007) 509–518.

<sup>8</sup> J. Popke, Geography and ethics: non-representational encounters, collective responsibility and economic difference, *Progress in Human Geography* 33 (2009) 81–90; H. MacPherson, Navigating a nonrepresentational research landscape and representing underrepresented groups, *Social and Cultural Geography* 12 (2011) 544–548.

<sup>9</sup> C. Barnett, Geography and ethics: justice unbound, *Progress in Human Geography* 35 (2011) 246–255.

<sup>10</sup> C. Barnett, Geography and ethics, *Progress in Human Geography* 36 (2012) 379–388.

<sup>11</sup> D.M. Smith, *Moral Geographies: Ethics in a World of Difference*, Edinburgh, 2000, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Cecilia Chu's paper in this collection breaks this tradition. Also see L. Kong, Music and moral geographies: constructions of 'nation' and identity in Singapore, *GeoJournal* 65 (2006) 103–111.

<sup>13</sup> For overviews see T. Cresswell, Moral geographies, in: D. Atkinson, et al. (Eds), *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, London, 2005, 128–134; D. Matless, Moral geographies and Moral landscapes, in: D. Gregory, R. Johnston, G. Pratt, M. Watts and S. Whatmore (Eds), *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 5th Edition, Oxford, 2009, 478–480; G. Setten and K.M. Brown, Moral landscapes, in: R. Kitchen, N. Thrift (Eds), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, Vol. 7, Oxford, 2009, 191–195.

<sup>14</sup> P. Jackson, Social disorganization and moral order in the city, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 9 (1984) 168–180; F. Driver, Moral geographies: social science and the urban environment in mid-nineteenth century England, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 13 (1988) 275–287.

<sup>15</sup> F. Driver, Morality, politics, geography: brave new worlds, in: C. Philo (Ed.), *New Words, New Worlds: Reconceptualising Social and Cultural Geography*, Aberystwyth, 1991, 61–64.

<sup>16</sup> C. Philo, De-limiting human geography: new social and cultural perspectives, in: C. Philo (Ed.), *New Words, New Worlds: Reconceptualising Social and Cultural Geography*, Aberystwyth, 1991, 26.

<sup>17</sup> D. Matless, Moral geography in Broadland, *Cultural Geographies* 1 (1994) 127–155.

<sup>18</sup> D. Matless, Moral geographies of English landscape, *Landscape Research* 22 (1997) 141–155. A similar period and the scale of the region are considered in M. Whitehead, From moral space to the morality of scale: the case of the sustainable region, *Ethics, Place & Environment* 6 (2003) 235–257.

<sup>19</sup> For a rare exception linking the beneficial moral effects of the countryside on city dwellers see T. Ploszajska, Down to earth? Geography fieldwork in English schools, 1870–1944, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16 (1998) 757–774.

<sup>20</sup> M. Ogborn and C. Philo, Soldiers, sailors and moral locations in nineteenth-century Portsmouth, *Area* 26 (1994) 221–231. On exclusion and location more broadly see D. Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West*, London, New York, 1995.

<sup>21</sup> J. Kneale, 'A problem of supervision': moral geographies of the nineteenth-century British public house, *Journal of Historical Geography* 25 (1999) 333–348. Also see D. Beckingham, Gender, space, and drunkenness: Liverpool's licensed premises, 1860–1914, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102 (2013) 647–666.

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