

THE SPACES OF BEING IN-COMMON: ETHICS AND SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY

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Social life—that is, we, not I—is the normal form of life. It is life itself ... In that constant, everpresent identification of the unit with the whole, lies the origin of all ethics, the germ out of which all the subsequent conceptions of justice, and the still higher conceptions of morality, evolved. Petr Kropotkin (1968: 60-61).

That Being is being-with, absolutely, this is what we must think. Jean-Luc Nancy (2000: 61)

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade or so, the discipline of geography has gone through something of an ‘ethical turn’. It is now commonplace to find mention of ethics in a wide range of geographical discussions, from environmental issues to geopolitics, from what we buy to what we eat. It is difficult to say whether this trend has developed out of an increased societal concern for the well-being of others, or because of mounting

evidence that such concern is decidedly lacking. In either case, it would appear that our troubled twenty-first century world can use all the help it can get, and that a geographically-attuned ethical sensibility is something that is in need of cultivation. Indeed, David Smith goes so far as to suggest that it may be vital: ‘The interface with ethics is one of the final disciplinary frontiers inviting geographical exploration, the outcome of which could be crucial to the wisdom required to address issues on which the very survival of a decent and sustainable form of human life on Earth may depend’ (Smith, 2004: 197).

Central to this project is a more careful consideration of just what a ‘decent form of life’ can and should look like, and how we might collectively organize our communities, our institutions, and our political forms in such a way as to bring it about. Here is perhaps where ethical concerns intersect most saliently with the tasks of social geography.

Chris Philo has suggested that ‘the story of social geography is very much the story of changing (and arguably enlarging and enriching) conceptions of “the social” being drawn into human geography more generally’ (Philo, 1991: 4). If this is so, then it will also be a story about how ‘the social’ itself is conceptualized, how it is lived and negotiated in various contexts, and how it may sustain, enhance or inhibit forms of human solidarity and mutual regard. To state the matter in this fashion is to paint social geography with a fairly broad brush, and indeed in what follows I take an expansive view—both conceptually and historically—of the field. Topically, I am interested in the intersection between ethical or moral questions and geography’s investigation of the social, whether

by self-identified social geographers or not. And while explicit consideration of moral and ethical questions within geography is a relatively recent phenomenon, I also cast a glance back in time, to consider some of the precursors to contemporary socio-ethical investigations.

Among geographers, concepts such as morality, ethics and justice are open to a significant degree of interpretation, and there is a good deal of overlap in their definitions and usage. Although I make no attempt in this chapter to adhere to strict definitions, the following comments may be useful to set the stage. I take justice to be an evaluative frame for considering the extent to which socioeconomic, political, and/or environmental relations and institutions can be said to be fair or just, conventionally underpinned by an aspiration toward greater social equality and respect. ‘Geographies of justice’, therefore, would concern the extent to which our territorial arrangements approach the ideals of fairness or equity, as well as the movements and struggles to achieve these ideals by marginalized or disadvantaged groups in specific locales. Because this topic is covered in a separate chapter in this volume, I will have relatively less to say about justice, and will instead focus attention on moral and ethical geographies.

I use morality to describe commonsense conventions about what is good, virtuous, suitable or proper, especially in describing conduct or behavior. To speak of ‘moral geographies’ then, is to inquire about the emergence of such notions, and the ways that they are variously performed, policed and contested in particular geographical contexts. The idea of a ‘moral landscape’ may be used to indicate how particular moral or

normative understandings both influence and reflect the meanings that we ascribe both to natural landscapes and the built environment.

By ethics, I understand a field of inquiry opened up by concerns about the nature of our interactions with, and responsibilities toward, both human and non-human others. To speak of ethical geographies, then, is to consider the nature and extent of these responsibilities, both empirically and theoretically, as well as the ways in which our actions and dispositions toward others tend to fulfill or abrogate them within particular contexts or institutional arrangements.

Clearly, each of these concepts bears an intimate relation to our understanding of the social. The premise of this chapter is that our notions about what society is, as well as the ways in which the social is constituted and enacted within particular spatial contexts, are underpinned by a complex set of understandings about what is good or proper (morality), and about the nature, scope and geographical scale of our obligations and responsibilities toward various others (ethics). Note that this distinction—between a moral sphere of individual conduct and an ethical realm of responsibility and solidarity—is itself an ethical matter, and the outcome of cultural and political negotiation. Indeed, we might view the history of thinking on the social to consist in a kind of tug-of-war between individual and collective notions of responsibility, and the associated ideals of liberty and equality, and of independence and interdependence, with which they are implicated. If contemporary neoliberal discourse has tended to champion the former at the expense of the latter, this is all the more reason to insist upon a view of the social in which moral and

ethical matters are foregrounded. At the intersection of ethics and social geography then, lies a project to reclaim the social as a site of collective ethical responsibility, to expose the ways in which contemporary social institutions and political-economic relations militate against our dispositions to act on that responsibility, and thereby to facilitate a more generalized expression of solidarity and regard.

As we will see, many currents of contemporary geographic theory are making a contribution toward this aim. Before surveying the field, however, I turn to examine some of the ways that moral or ethical questions have figured in the historical development of social geography.

GEOGRAPHY'S EARLY VIEWS ON THE ETHICAL

Geography's engagement with questions of an ethical or moral nature extends at least as far back as Kant, who considered 'moral geography' to be one of five discrete branches of the discipline. For Kant, however, moral geography was little more than a descriptive anthropology, consisting of an empirical catalogue of 'the diverse customs and characteristics of people in different regions'(quoted in May, 1970: 263). As David Harvey (2000) has pointed out, such descriptions were suffused with racialized stereotypes and folk myths in ways that blunt the force of Kant's broader philosophical ethics.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Kant's empirical-descriptive legacy was filtered through the explanatory framework of environmental determinism, and in particular what Livingstone (1991) has called the 'moral discourse of climate.' Under the sway of essentially evolutionary understandings, it was a short step from geographical descriptions of 'customs and characteristics' to more or less normative pronouncements about spatial patterns of moral degeneracy caused by environmental controls. Thus, Ellsworth Huntington could proclaim that 'the hard conditions of climate have steadily forced the Arabs to frame a moral code which condones violence' (Huntington, 1925: 122) and Ellen Churchill Semple could meditate upon the relationships between ethics and geographical isolation: 'The morals of the [Kentucky] mountain people lend strong evidence for the development theory of ethics ... the same conditions that have kept their ethnic type pure have kept the social phenomena primitive, with their natural concomitants of primitive ethics and primitive modes of social control' (Semple, 1901: 616).

This kind of thinking, of course, helped to legitimate colonialism as a 'civilizing enterprise' (Peet, 1985). It also advanced an essentially descriptive view of ethics as a set of locally- and culturally-specific customs or norms as opposed to a more abstract set of normative principles or an overarching philosophy. Interestingly, however, a very different sense of ethics was being articulated around the same time, by anarchist geographers such as Petr Kropotkin and Elysée Reclus. Both Kropotkin and Reclus sought to transcend the local particularities of cultural and ethnic difference, by

articulating a larger moral vision of humanity. In so doing, they anticipated some of the more important contemporary currents of thought regarding the socio-ethical.

The anarchist vision was influenced by Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid, which he viewed as a driving motor of evolution. In contrast to prevailing social Darwinist interpretations, Kropotkin emphasized the importance of cooperation over competition in the maintenance of both human and animal communities. 'The social instinct,' he argued, 'is the common source out of which all morality originates' (Kropotkin, 1968: 37). For both Kropotkin and Reclus, this cooperative social instinct is expressed materially in collective labor, a notion that is also fundamental to Karl Marx's early philosophical writings. In describing the development of cities and towns, for example, Kropotkin notes that 'the civilization of the town, its industry, its special characteristics, have slowly grown and ripened through the cooperation of generations of its inhabitants before it could become what it is today ...' (Kropotkin, 1972: 44). This legacy of accumulated, cooperative labor instantiates the social as an essentially collective achievement, and provides the grounds for a critique of existing inequalities: 'There is not even a thought, or an invention, which is not common property, born of the past and the present ... By what right then can any one whatever appropriate the least morsel of this immense whole and say—This is mine, not yours?' (Kropotkin, 1972: 44, 46).

In addition to this historical perspective, anarchist thought also sought to promote a more spatially expansive view of the social, and an essentially global vision for social geography. 'The essence of human progress,' argued Reclus, 'consists of the discovery

of the totality of interests and wills common to all peoples; it is identical with solidarity' (in Clark and Martin, 2004: 239). For Reclus in particular, this solidarity extended even beyond the human community, to encompass a broader responsibility toward the natural world. Indeed, Reclus was a staunch vegetarian, and was one of the first commentators to critique the inhumane treatment of domesticated animals used for food (Clark and Martin, 2004).

It is noteworthy, I think, that both men saw the advancement of geographical knowledge as a means to cultivate the kind of solidarity they were calling for. In an essay entitled 'What Geography Ought to Be', Kropotkin argued forcefully that an understanding of geography was crucial to the development of a wider sense of collective responsibility. 'Geography ... must teach us, from our earliest childhood, that we are all brethren, whatever our nationality' he argued, '[it] must be ... a means of dissipating ... prejudices and of creating other feelings more worthy of humanity' (1996: 141).

Ethics and morality, then, were not for Kropotkin or Reclus cultural features to be described, but rather part and parcel of a project to be realized, through the advancement of knowledge that would instill a commitment to solidarity, mutual respect and harmonious relationships with nature. As Kropotkin put it, '[if man] desires to have a life in which all his forces, physical, intellectual, and emotional, may find a full exercise, he must once and for ever abandon the idea that such a life is attainable on the path of disregard for others' (Kropotkin, 1968: 25). Instead, anarchist geographers sought to cultivate what Reclus called an 'anarchist morality': 'we must ... act in ways that respect

the rights and interests of our comrades. Only then can one become a truly moral being and awaken to a feeling of responsibility' (in Clark and Martin, 2004: 138).

Above all, then, anarchist geographers proposed a theory of ethics that was also a theory of society, one which emphasized the inherent, even necessary, sensibilities of cooperation, mutual regard and collective responsibility: 'Social life—that is, we, not I—is the normal form of life', wrote Kropotkin, 'It is life itself ... In that constant, everpresent identification of the unit with the whole, lies the origin of all ethics, the germ out of which all the subsequent conceptions of justice, and the still higher conceptions of morality, evolved' (Kropotkin, 1968: 60-61).

Although this kind of communal and socialist sensibility could vie for political space in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, it would wane significantly into the twentieth. Instead, conceptions of social ethics moved increasingly toward the individual as the site of agency and responsibility, a view fostered by both the ascendancy of liberal individualism and the more objective quantitative epistemology that eventually took hold within the social sciences. A century later, as I will suggest below, the anarchist legacy, and the social ethics they sought to develop, are worth revisiting.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY

Prior to the 1960s, the term social geography was used chiefly as a synonym for human regional geography. It was considered to be, in the words of Wreford Watson (1951: 482), 'the regional differentiation of social characteristics'. This generally entailed the empirical description of things like population and settlement, communications and public services, and sometimes cultural features such as language, religion and customs in specific regions. Discussion of these latter features at times included consideration of moral or ethical norms, and although most authors had by now jettisoned the more unpalatable aspects of environmental determinism, the broad evolutionary perspective that underlay it remained.

By the 1960s, this approach to social geography withered under the more general critique of regional geography put forward by advocates of a more scientific and nomothetic form of geographic inquiry. As much of the discipline turned toward a more positivist 'science of space', the banner of social geography was taken up by human geographers working in the tradition of human ecology, articulated earlier by Barrows (1923) and subsequently developed within the so-called Chicago School of urban sociology. Such work examined urban residential patterns through the ecological metaphor of 'natural areas', formed through processes such as competition, dominance, invasion and succession (Park, 1936). The city was viewed as a mosaic of 'different cultural areas representing different mores, attitudes, and degrees of civic interest' (McKenzie, 1924: 301).

As with the earlier regional studies, the existence of localized cultural differences lent themselves to a descriptive moral geography, but now of urban neighborhoods rather than regions. Urban communities, wrote Wreford Watson ‘are bounded by no other frontiers than by those where their particular association of daily interactions comes to an end. The spatial pattern is, in the last instance, a reflection of the moral order’ (1951: 475). This Chicago School legacy laid the foundations for a generation of urban-based investigation that largely supplanted region-based inquiries in claiming the mantle of ‘social geography’. Textbooks and edited collections focused on topics such as residential mobility, housing, social deviance, welfare, collective consumption, poverty and ageing. Many of these investigations brought on board the prevailing interest in quantitative methods, and for the most part ethical concerns remained in the background.

This focus began to change in the 1970s, as US and British geographers reacted against a series of social and political crises, as well as to the perceived inability of quantitative methodologies to effectively address them. The decade of the 1960s had brought with it in the United States the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, and urban unrest within a number of cities. For many who trained their eye on the subject matter of social geography, it became increasingly clear that ‘the social’ was strained if not downright broken (Smith, 1971; Peet, 1980). ‘What shall it profit a profession,’ asked Gilbert White in 1972, ‘if it fabricate a nifty discipline about the world while that world and the human spirit are degraded?’ (White, 1972: 104).

The responses came from two different directions, each of which made contributions to geographical understandings of ethics. The humanist response attempted to develop an enhanced understanding of, and appreciation for, the human spirit of which White spoke. Drawing upon a diverse range of philosophical traditions, particularly phenomenology, humanist geographers focused attention on the social as lived and experienced by people, and on ‘the importance of place as a center of meaning’ (Entrikin, 1976: 626). Against the objectivist epistemology favored by spatial science, humanists promoted a view that emphasized human agency and social interactions in the construction of meaning. For David Ley, the neglect of human agency in positivist approaches was a ‘moral error’, in which ‘ethical and moral issues are themselves appropriated into the domain of the technical’ (Ley, 1996: 208). Ley called instead for an approach emphasizing ‘intersubjectivity ... [as] the basis for a social model of man’ (Ley 1977, 509).

Although ethics was seldom an explicit element in these discussions, they pointed toward the ways in which social life is dependent upon empathy and regard toward others, and laid the groundwork for contemporary examinations of affect and emotion. Yi Fu Tuan, for example, examined the ways in which ‘human beings establish fields of care, networks of interpersonal concern, in a physical setting (1996: 451, also Tuan, 1989). And Anne Buttimer, in similar fashion, suggested that a phenomenology of the lifeworld could help to develop a deeper appreciation of human experience, and ‘could elicit a heightened self-awareness and identity and enable one to empathize with the worlds of other people’ (Buttimer, 1976: 281).

If the disaffection sparked by both disciplinary and societal changes led humanists to advocate more introspective approaches, others reacted to the same events with calls for a more activist stance. Radical geographers, many drawing explicitly from Marxist theory, called for not only a rethinking of geography's aims and methods, but also a more explicit concern with ethical issues than had previously been the case. As David Harvey recalls: 'it seemed absurd to be writing when the world was collapsing in chaos around me and cities were going up in flames ... I felt a crying need to retool myself again, to take up ... moral and ethical questions ... and try to bring them closer to the ground of everyday political life' (Harvey, 2002: 168).

The founding of *Antipode* in 1969 reflected the growing sense that geography was lacking in ethical commitment, and much of the content of the journal's early issues reflected a specific concern with social geography. Research focused on topics such as inner city poverty and crime, 'black ghettos' and racial inequality, housing and other service provision, and the causes of hunger. The watchword for much of this work was what Harvey termed 'territorial distributive justice' (1973) or, as David Smith once put it, 'who gets what, *where*' (1974, also Smith, 1994). As attention was increasingly drawn to social-geographic inequalities, so too did radical geographers call for a rethinking of geographic inquiry. William Bunge's urban expeditions, in particular, served as a model for activist research (Merrifield, 1995), as well as the ethical commitment to work against racism and inequality, or what David Harvey referred to as 'the moral obligation of geographers' (Harvey, 1974: 23).

In seeking to expand geography's moral imagination, a number of radical geographers found inspiration in the earlier tradition of anarchist geography (Antipode, 1978-79). Richard Peet, for one, described anarchist principles as a 'politics of human liberation' emphasizing decentralization, collective decision-making, and a new form of ethics. Such an ethics, he argued, 'must come from the deepest source, which is the necessary way we relate to each other and the earth' (Peet, 1978-79: 129).

Despite this and other attempts to engage with Marxist and anarchist theory, the most salient ethical legacy of the radical intervention is really its insistent reminder to consider the social and political relevance of our work (Stoddart 1981, Mitchell and Draper, 1982). Debates about such issues continue into the present, and the need to address our most pressing social issues is clearly a motivating factor for many who express a concern with ethics. Nevertheless, and despite radical geography's welcome sense of outrage, its ethical orientation was never made explicit. If there was a need, as Peet suggested, to 'relate to each other and the earth' in new and different ways, there was as yet little attempt to think through the precise nature of our ethical responsibilities, or to theorize the social as a site of collective ethical responsibility.

Theorizing the social: the postmodern challenge

The implicit ethical stance of the 1970s began to change with geography's increasing engagement with broader debates within philosophy and social theory beginning in the

1980s, and in particular what Dear (1988) labeled ‘the postmodern challenge’ (also Dear and Flusty, 2002). Among the widespread changes induced by these debates, two are worth noting here in particular.

First, the influence of social theory altered the traditional subject matter of social geography. The turn to postmodern theory led to a new, more open, epistemology of society and space, one that placed increasing emphasis on social difference and the nature of socio-spatial exclusion. Second, and related to this, there was a rethinking of the nature of power and resistance, with greater attention paid to the ways in which social and cultural meanings become normalized and contested in and through space. These insights led in turn to a reexamination of political agency and strategy. The righteous indignation of earlier Marxist approaches gave way to more hopeful strategies of prizing open the social to cultivate moments of resistance, of recovering lost or subaltern voices, and of fostering a plurality of transformative projects in lieu of a singular vision of social change.

These theoretical developments provided the resources for a richer conception of, and a more robust conversation about, social and geographical ethics (see Kobayashi and Proctor, 2003; Smith, 2003). A few early interventions set the stage for this exploration, including Buttimer’s (1974) exploration of values in geography, Susan Smith’s (1984) discussion of pragmatism and Clark’s (1986) consideration of John Rawls’ theory of justice. But it wasn’t until the mid-1990s that geography underwent what Sayer and Stoper called a ‘reawakening of normative theory’ (1997: 14). In large measure, this

reawakening is due to the work of David Smith. Beginning with his groundbreaking work on territorial justice in the 1970s, Smith has championed the need to consider the ethical implication of both the work that geographers do and the geographical patterns and institutions that form our subject matter. Smith's work has staged a series of conversation between the traditional concerns of geographic theory—territoriality, development, landscape, place and community—and theories of ethics and morality. Most prominent among these have been a series of interventions in the journal *Progress in Human Geography* (Smith 1998, 2000a) culminating in Smith's definitive *Moral Geographies* (2000b). Sparked by the pioneering work of Smith and others, the last decade or so has witnessed a proliferation of work at the intersection of moral or ethical theory and a broadly conceived social geography (Birdsall, 1996; Proctor, 1998; Proctor and Smith, 1999; Lee and Smith, 2004).

If recent commentators agree on the importance of normative theory, however, they are far from agreement on the best way to get there (see Bridge, 2000). Even as the postmodern turn offered resources for a rethinking of ethics, it also prompted its critics to clarify their own normative commitments and assumptions. David Harvey, for one, has argued that the postmodern condition inhibits our ability to make moral or ethical judgments: 'The experience of time and space has changed, the confidence in the association between scientific and moral judgments has collapsed, aesthetics has triumphed over ethics as a prime focus of social and intellectual concern ... [and] ephemerality and fragmentation take precedence over eternal truths and unified politics' (1989: 328)

Stuart Corbridge and David Smith have argued similarly. Thus Corbridge (1994: 97) defends a revitalized Marxist approach against ‘an amoral politics of indifference’ and Smith calls for what he calls a ‘context sensitive universalism’ (2004: 201) that might provide a ‘way out of the postmodern moral maze’ (Smith, 2000c: 1160). ‘There are natural facts about human sameness,’ David Smith avers, ‘from which moral conclusions can be drawn’ (Smith, 2000c: 1160).

On the other side of the fence stand those, like David Slater (1997) and Sarah Whatmore (1997), who have attempted to describe a more contingent, relational or intersubjective form of ethics. I have previously advocated this kind of position as well (Popke, 2003, 2004). Indeed, my own engagement with ethical thought was spurred by a desire to develop a theoretically grounded defense of poststructuralist epistemology, not in order to deny any form of human commonality, but rather to suggest that the contours of political or ethical responsibility cannot be predetermined.

Despite my prior intervention into these debates, I do not attempt in what follows to police the boundaries of ethical thinking, and while I believe that some critics paint a highly misleading picture of postmodern thought, my sense is that the positions are in fact not as far apart as they sometimes appear. Without wishing to diminish important differences in philosophical approach, then, I want to suggest a set of common projects around which we might focus our investigations at the intersection of ethics and social geography.

CONTEMPORARY ETHICS AND SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY: THINKING THROUGH THE IN-COMMON

Let us begin with the social, for one of the incontrovertible ‘facts of human sameness’ (in Smith’s words) is that all humans exist in society, and therefore in community with others. This proposition has been a central tenet of various strands of socialist thought, and has more recently figured prominently in the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy. For Nancy, the essence of Being should be regarded as ‘being-with’, the sharing of being with co-present others in space and time. This being-in-common is more than a banal empirical observation, it represents what Nancy calls ‘an originary or ontological sociality’ (1991a: 28). If our collective being-together can be accepted as an ontological proposition, however, this does not tell us much about the ways in which our sociality is constituted or experienced. What we deem to be ‘the social’ should thus be seen as an agonistic space of negotiation over the very meaning and contours of the in-common.

Here, then, we can identify a set of investigations that we might place under the banner of social geography. First, how do we understand the construction of the in-common as a spatial or geographical phenomenon, what Nancy calls ‘the taking-place of the in-common’ (Nancy, 1991b: 11)? And second, how is the space of the in-common figured as a site of ethical responsibility? Here, I would follow Antonio Negri’s simple assertion that ‘ethics is the responsibility for the common’ (2003: 183). If this is so, then it should

lead us to consider the ways in which our field of collective responsibility is variously enlarged or circumscribed in ways that bear upon the construction of the in-common. This is, on the one hand, a theoretical or philosophical project, aimed at better understanding the space of the in-common as a site of ethical engagement and regard. But it is also, I would argue, an urgent political one, to defend—and where possible expand—our collective responsibilities in the face of contemporary political and economic restructuring. As we know, one of the hallmarks of neoliberal discourse has been the enshrinement of the autonomous individual subject as the site of responsibility, as suggested by Margaret Thatcher’s famous quip that ‘there is no such thing as society’. Indeed, one might say that within neoliberalism, the truly ethical subject is one who opts out from society, who manages to disregard the ontological condition of being-together in favor of individual self-cultivation, such that she or he makes no claims to be an object of responsibility for anyone else. One of social geography’s major contributions to ethical thinking would be to challenge this narrowing of ethical responsibility, and to reclaim the kind of broad and expansive view of the social that was in evidence more than a century ago in anarchist thought.

With this vision in hand, then, I want to consider in the remainder of this chapter some contemporary perspectives on the relationship between ethics and social space. I want to explore two kinds of questions, in particular. First, how do we understand the nature of community, and the attendant responsibilities that it might entail? And second, how do we broaden our conception of that community across space, and thereby extend our responsibilities to both distant and different others?

Constructing and enlarging community

One task of social geography then, is to understand the nature and scope of our responsibilities toward those human and nonhuman other with whom we must share our worlds. This kind of project would suggest the need to investigate the construction and maintenance of our sense of community or fraternity, and the processes of inclusion and exclusion through which social alterity is produced and regulated.

In some ways, these kinds of questions were addressed in the early work of urban social ecologists who, as we have seen, tended to view various neighborhood communities as ‘moral orders’ through which social and cultural norms were maintained and reproduced across generations. Recent scholarship, though, has gone further to suggest some of the specific mechanisms through which such norms, in both urban and rural settings, retain their performative force. In the urban arena, as Felix Driver (1988) has shown, attention to the city’s moral geographies dates back to the Victorian era, and reflected societal concerns about improper urban conduct, such as delinquency, drunkenness, crime and pauperism, concerns that have resonated throughout the traditions of urban planning and design (Smith, 2001). Assumptions about the proper moral order, in other words, have tended to reflect a modern penchant to order and control the social and spatial contours of the city as much as any direct concern with specific behaviors and activities. Rural areas, too, have been examined as moral landscapes, reflecting societal norms about human interactions with land and nature, and the particular aesthetics and practices constitutive of the rural (Matless, 1994; Enticott, 2003; Setten, 2004).

What is notable about this work for thinking about ethics and responsibility is that conceptions of moral space often rely upon the discursive constitution of community in and through space, such that the in-common of the 'we' is maintained against various spatialized 'others'. This in turn can be related to notions about who 'belongs' in particular spaces, and who is 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996). Thus, social geographers have been concerned to examine the ways in which the other has been subject to discourses of spatial exclusion based upon a wide range of socio-cultural identifiers, particularly race (Anderson, 2000, Dwyer and Jones, 2000) and sexuality (Hubbard, 2000).

Psychoanalytic approaches have added an important dimension to this work, showing how discourses about racialized or sexualized others can be viewed not only as attempts to order or purify urban spaces, but also a means of maintaining a stable subject position within a social order. Thus, for example, common concerns about hygiene, sanitation and disease were frequently projected onto defiled or abject nonwhite bodies and spaces, thus symbolically rendering 'our' spaces and subject positions pure and secure (Sibley, 1995; Wilton, 1998; Craddock, 2000). This is an important insight for thinking about ethics, for it suggests that our attempts to expand our sense of responsibility must come to grips with the ways in which the social may be riven by unconscious fears and desires, such that the recognition and acknowledgement of our intersubjectivity, and the extension of ethical regard that might follow from it, may be an unsettling proposition.

If investigations of moral geographies generally examine the delimitation of our field of concern, a different body of work focuses on how this concern is articulated and, at least potentially, widened in scope. Perhaps the most influential entry point for such work has been the notion of care. Derived largely from feminist scholarship, discussions of care within geography have highlighted the diverse social sites, motivations and emotions that are implicated in our everyday caring activities and relationships (see Popke, 2006). More than simply a landscape of institutions and familial practices, care has also been theorized as a particular form of social ethics, one based in a collective concern for the well-being of others. As Victoria Lawson has put it, 'care ethics begins with a social ontology of connection, foregrounding social relationships of mutuality and trust' (Lawson, 2007: 3).

Care is, in this sense, what we might call a communal project. It is also, as a number of commentators have argued, an important political one for reasons I have already discussed. Thus, a number of social geographers have called on us to question a political economy that produces the need for extensive care, and also to challenge the contemporary neoliberal move in the industrialized West to privatize carework while undermining networks of collective welfare and security (Haylett, 2003; Smith, 2005).

Affect and the in-common

The mundane, day-to-day activities involved in care should alert us to the fact that the nature of our responsibilities toward others is often unacknowledged or implicit. Even so, concern or regard for others nevertheless shapes our daily practices in quite significant ways. Consumption provides a widely discussed example (Barnett et al., 2005a). Thus, Barnett and colleagues have considered what they call the ‘ordinary ethics’ of consumption. ‘Ordinary consumption,’ they insist, ‘is already shaped in all sorts of ways by values of caring for other people, and sometimes by quite explicit moral values’ (Barnett et al., 2005b: 3). This understanding of ethics as an everyday or mundane disposition suggests that we should pay attention to the ways in which our commonplace inclinations toward empathy or concern may be mobilized, for example, in attempts by charitable organizations to instill a sense of generosity or guilt in order to elicit donations (Cloke et al., 2005).

More generally, there is an important role here for a consideration of emotion, affect and spirituality, and the manner in which they help to structure our relations of care and obligation. In this regard, Anderson and Smith’s call for ‘a geographical agenda sensitive to the emotional dimensions of living in the world’ (Anderson and Smith, 2001: 8), has been at least partially answered. In recent accounts, emotion as been depicted as a relational and intersubjective accomplishment (Conradson, 2003; Colls, 2004; Bondi, 2005), one that is tied to our experiences of particular places (Davidson and Milligan, 2004). Although this work is not explicitly concerned with ethics, it has much to

contribute to 'the goal ... of discovering an emotional, connected and committed sense for the other' (Cloke, 2002: 594).

Additional resources for thinking through the ethics of the social are provided by so-called non-representational theory, a label used to describe a diverse set of approaches united by their broad concern with what we might call the 'actuality' of the social, and the way it is embodied, performed and lived through practical daily experience. As Lorimer describes it, 'the focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions' (2005: 84).

The question of ethics within this kind of approach is less about diagnosing or proscribing (which in any case reflects a certain hubris on the part of social science) than it is about creating new kinds of affective experience. As McCormack (2003: 502) puts it, 'if one begins attending to and through affect, one also shifts the burden of the ethical away from the effort to do justice to individual subjects, and towards a commitment to develop a fidelity to the event as that through which new spaces of thinking and moving may come into being'.

This commitment to develop 'new spaces of thinking and moving' draws attention to new kinds of performance and experimentation, such as dance or music, which may be

capable of producing new kinds of encounter, of heightening our sense of the possible, by 'being open to the eventhood of the world' (Dewsbury, 2003: 1930).

What remains at issue in this work, I think, is the extent to which such spaces of encounter may be considered a collective project. There is a latent individualism in some non-representational depictions of social space, and my inclination would be to move the considerable insights of this work in the direction of thinking about how to heighten those sensibilities and affective orientations that construct and maintain the in-common as a collective ethical project. Nigel Thrift, one of most vocal advocates of the non-representational approach, offers some suggestive hints of what this kind of approach might look like. As a political project, he proposes, non-representational theory asks us to rethink our notions about the kind of encounter that counts as knowledge. We need 'to search for modes of disclosure of, intervention in, and extension of what we are capable of that are co-produced ... it requires practices and ethics of listening, talking, metaphorising and contemplating which can produce a feeling of being in a situation together' (2004: 84). These 'everyday moments of encounter,' he proposes, 'can be cultivated to build an ethics of generosity' (2004: 93) or to 'inject more kindness and compassion into everyday interaction' (Thrift, 2005: 144). There is much to admire in such a stance, but the ethical question remains how to move from a sense of the co-produced to a broader responsibility toward our collective being-in-common, in a way that expands the net of ethical agency beyond the immediacy of individual experience.

Materiality, autonomy and cooperative labor

I want to change tack here slightly, and approach the in-common from the essential materiality of collective life, to consider the social as a site not only of affective encounters, but also, in a Marxist or anarchist sense, of material production and cooperative labor. The work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri is extremely productive in this regard. Drawing from Marx, Hardt and Negri have developed a materialist philosophy grounded in the human transformation of the world through cooperative living labor. As Negri puts it, ‘the theme proposed by Marx is that of the all-expansive creativity of living labor. Living labor constitutes the world, by creatively modeling, ex novo, the materials that it touches’ (Negri, 1999: 326). Importantly, this labor, for Hardt and Negri as for Marx, is collective and cooperative. It constructs our being-in-common, and is thus also the basis for a sense of solidarity and responsibility: ‘labor immediately involves social interaction and cooperation ... in the expression of its own creative energies, immaterial labor thus seems to provide the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 294).

Hardt and Negri, then, picture the social through a kind of spontaneous materialism, in which the construction of, and responsibility for, the common emerges through the cooperative activity of social subjects. I find this a productive line of thinking for social geography, but I also wish to register a concern about Hardt and Negri’s approach. Although I share their basic sense of collective agency, I am less certain about their somewhat passive optimism about the ‘spontaneous’ nature of the construction of community. Here I would suggest that it is important not only to theorize the existence

of ethics and cooperation, but to try to cultivate them, through representational strategies aimed at making visible the social relations and connections through which ethical responsibility might flow.

Within geography, this kind of project is best exemplified by the recent work of J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006), who endeavor to highlight the specific ways in which our collective labors create the economic as a field of ethical interdependence and decision. Through their writing, and in a series of ‘action research projects’, Gibson-Graham attempt to bring into being what they call the ‘community economy’, in which ethical decisions and orientations of care are foregrounded. Their aim is to highlight what they call, following Nancy, our ‘economic being-in-common’ and to reinscribe the economy as an essentially social space, within which new collective subjectivities and solidarities might emerge: ‘resocializing (and repoliticizing) the economy involves making explicit the sociality that is always present, and thus constituting the various forms and practices of interdependence as matters for reflection, discussion, negotiation and action’ (2006: 88).

A similar kind of sentiment, and commitment to practice, is evident in recent geographical discussions of autonomous geographies (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). The concept of autonomy has many diverse antecedents, including the anarchist tradition and Antonio Negri’s early writings arising from the Italian Marxist tradition. What these and other intellectual currents share is an open-ended sense of experimentation and engagement with others to build collective projects of solidarity and resistance. They

entail, in this sense, ‘an obligation to recognize co-existence, negotiations and conflict’ which must inevitably characterize our attempts to construct and expand the affective and material spaces of the in-common (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 736). The ethical stakes at issue in all of this work is what Gibson-Graham describe as ‘a truly salient distinction, between whether interdependence is recognized and acted upon or whether it is obscured or perhaps denied’ (2006: 84).

EXTENDING THE SCOPE OF CONCERN

Attempts to theorize the social as an ethical space of interdependence, affect and care beg crucial, and fundamentally geographical, questions regarding the spatial extent of ethical responsibility, or what David Smith (1998) has so eloquently called ‘the spatial scope of beneficence.’ In addition to thinking through the social geographies comprising the in-common of community, then, social geography can also play a role in widening our geographical and ethical horizons in order to develop a wider ambit of responsibility.

Such a project was undertaken, of course, by none other than Immanuel Kant. Even while Kant was depicting a geographical landscape of locally variant moral norms, he was also putting forth a much wider form of cosmopolitan ethics, necessitated by the increasing interconnection, through trade and exploration (and, it should be said, conquest) of the different regions on the world. Kant hinted at the ways in which our ethical responsibilities transcend distance, noting that ‘the growing prevalence of a

(narrower or wider) community among the peoples of the earth has reached a point at which the violation of right at any *one* place on the earth is felt in *all* places' (Kant, 2006: 84).

If Kant could envision a cosmopolitan ethos in the late eighteenth century, we are undoubtedly even more aware of its urgent need in a world in which the suffering of others is so evidently visible. But the availability to our senses of the pain and distress of others is not in and of itself a motivation for ethical action, nor does it provide a guide toward what such action should entail in any particular circumstance. The geographical question, then, is how to think the in-common in more ethically expansive and cosmopolitan ways (see Popke, 2007). How, in other words, can we rethink the social as a space of cosmopolitan responsibility?

Most commentators on cosmopolitan ethics take the city as their object of inquiry, for it is the urban that most clearly illustrates the diversity and interconnection characteristic of our contemporary global condition. In the words of Ash Amin (2006: 1012), 'the "being-together" of life in urban space has to be recognized, demanding attendance to the politics of living together.' The social-geographic questions at stake in this have to do with the spatial extent and negotiation of the in-common, including the hospitality (or lack thereof) offered to foreigners, migrants and refugees, as well as ethical determinations about whether such 'outsiders' have what Henri Lefebvre once called a 'right to the city' (Mitchell, 2003; Purcell, 2003). It also means, as Doreen Massey has so elegantly argued, that we need to re-imagine our sense of place in a more open and

relational way, to pay heed to the existence of spatial interconnections as a precursor to cultivating a more 'global sense of place' (see Massey, 1997, 2004; Amin 2004).

If an ethic of hospitality can be said to foster an inclusive and open conception of community, however, it remains a rather passive means of conceptualizing responsibility at a distance, and questions remain about the ways in which we can conceptualize a sense of obligation toward distant others with whom we may never interact. Putting it somewhat simply, we can identify two different perspectives on this question. The first is a theoretical argument, suggesting that the nature of our engagement and responsibility transcends context and is something universal, either an outcome of mutually-agreed upon norms, or else an essential feature of what it means to be human. The latter view is perhaps best exemplified by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, for whom ethical responsibility for a singular other is an unconditional injunction irrespective of specific historical or geographical circumstances, a demand that would appear difficult to enact in practice (Barnett, 2005).

Another kind of theoretical argument, championed by David Smith, begins from the inherent 'randomness' or contingency involved in our geographical location. Because our life chances are to a great extent determined by what Smith calls 'the place of good fortune', there is no justification for the existence of the massive material inequalities that exist from place to place. In common parlance, this kind of perspective is perhaps best exemplified by the exhortation to 'put yourself in someone else's shoes' or the saying 'there but for the grace of God go I' (Smith 2000c; also Corbridge, 1993).

Again, however, such theoretical motivations may be difficult to put into practice. There may very well be a generalizable human capacity for empathy and concern that transcends distance, but that does not ensure that it is translated into ethical action. There are questions here about how our dispositions to care about distant others are mobilized through appeals, charitable campaigns, media images, and the like, concerns which obviously link up with the affective and emotional geographies discussed above (Silk, 1998).

But another concern may be added here as well, for the obverse is equally, if not more, ethically important, particularly in the age of ‘the war of terror’: how is it that some human or non-human subjects are made to exist outside of the ambit of responsibility, in what we can call, following Agamben (2005), ‘spaces of exception’? How is it, in other words, that some lives may be made to matter less than others, or in certain cases, not to matter at all (see Pratt, 2005; Gregory, 2006)?

Our Entanglements with Distant Others

Beyond these more abstract theorizations, there is also an empirical claim to be made, that our late modern globalizing world has multiplied the webs of connection between ourselves and distant others, with implications for thinking about both the social and the nature of responsibility. Beck and Sznajder, for example, have argued

that contemporary sociological investigation must account for a new cosmopolitan condition arising from our increased sense of global interconnection: ‘Under conditions of an interdependent global world ... every act of production and consumption and every act of everyday life links actors to millions of unseen others ... it creates the moral horizon for a newly conceived form of at times banal, and, at times, moral cosmopolitanism’ (Beck and Sznaider, 2006: 22).

This changing reality, suggests Beck, requires nothing less than a new cosmopolitan social science capable of coming to grips with the nature of our transnational connections and experiences (Beck, 2006).

A different kind of methodology of connection is represented by actor-network theory (ANT), which has gained significant influence within geography. ANT describes the world from a relational ontology of actor-networks, comprised of heterogeneous associations of things and materials. As Murdoch explains it, ‘actor-network theorists seek to investigate ... the means by which associations come into existence and how the roles and functions of subjects and objects, actors and intermediaries, humans and nonhumans are attributed and stabilized’ (Murdoch, 1997: 331).

It is not possible here to do justice to the full complexity of ANT, but two points are worth emphasizing. The first is that, within the network ontology of ANT, nonhuman actants are granted the possibility of agency. Not only is the social, then, refigured as an effect of relational networks, but the very boundaries of the social are expanded to encompass a broader materiality, one that is attentive to what Whatmore calls ‘the more

heterogenous company of the “non-human” (2005: 845). Second, this suggests in turn a broader relational notion of ethical responsibility, one that ‘emphasizes the affective relationships between heterogeneous actants’ and thereby extends ‘the promise of a more than human ethical praxis’ (Whatmore, 2002: 160).

To date, this is a promise that remains largely unfulfilled, and I believe that a more extensive engagement between actor-network theory and geographical conceptions of ethics is warranted. If actor network perspectives are to assist in making sense of our responsibilities toward the in-common, however, they will need to overcome a kind of radical empiricism, or epistemological agnosticism, that abjures strong forms of judgment. As Kirsch and Mitchell have argued, questions of power—and, I would add, of justice and responsibility—are often underplayed in ANT analyses. Ethically, then, we need to view the heterogenous associations that comprise the social as also sites of actual or potential collective responsibility, to recognize, as Kirsch and Mitchell put it, that ‘some actor-networks are more equal than others’ (2004: 690).

A relational understanding of contemporary forms of global interconnection, in other words, should work to highlight the specific linkages or networks within which we are embedded in ways that can engender a greater sense of responsibility. If we are, as Beck contends, linked to millions of unseen others, then this suggest that we may be, in quite concrete and specific ways, culpable for the fate of distant strangers. This argument has been made forcefully by Stuart Corbridge, who reasons as follows: ‘to the extent that we can show that our lives are radically entwined with the lives of distant strangers—through

studies of colonialism, of flows of capital and commodities, of modern telecommunications, and so on—we can argue more powerfully for change within the global system’ (1994: 105). Cloke suggest something similar in deploying Hannah Arendt’s notion of ‘trespass’ a form of what Cloke calls a ‘more ordinary evil ... the lack of thought about the unanticipated/invisible/distant effects our actions may have on others’ (2002: 598).

We can usefully return here to the realm of consumption, because it is perhaps the most visible and widely studied practice that illustrates our geographical entanglements with distant peoples and places (see Popke, 2006). The unmasking of these entanglements can in one sense be viewed as an updated version of Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, that is, an attempt to reclaim the inherent sociality of the labor that went into making the commodity (Miller, 2003). But the more germane question for the current discussion is, as Noel Castree asks, ‘where ... does the unseen sociality of commodities actually lie?’ (2001: 1522). At least partial answers to this question can be found in recent work on commodity chains and circuits of ethical consumption, which has illustrated through empirical case studies the ways in which our consumption habits, as well as various codes and standards for so-called fair-trade goods, impact directly upon the lives of distant producers (Goodman, 2004; Hughes, 2005).

An exclusive focus on trade and commodity chains, however, has its limits, for it tends to put forth a view of the social that separates the location of production from that of consumption, in order to highlight the essential inequalities between the global North and

South. Although such a project is vital for cultivating a greater sense of responsibility across distance, we might also do well to theorized forms of connection and interaction that are more collective, even cooperative. That is, we might benefit from thinking responsibility to the in-common as a global project constituted through trans-boundary networks of labor, communication, affect and practice.

This, in essence, is Hardt and Negri's argument in proposing 'the multitude' as the new revolutionary subject within contemporary forms of global capitalism and empire (2000; 2004). Linked together by transnational circuits of cooperation, interaction and movement, the multitude actively creates the in-common as a global phenomenon, and thereby extends the skein of responsibility. As Hardt and Negri put it, "the spatial dimension of ontology today is demonstrated through the multitude's concrete processes of the globalization, or really the making common, of the desire for human community" (2000: 362). In the multitude, then, we have a theory of the social writ large, a sense of community and solidarity that transcends borders, and thus perhaps a sense of ethics that is appropriate for these global and neoliberal times.

Postcolonial ethics the social geography

Rather than leave the final word to the multitude, however, I want to close with a reminder about the importance of taking account of history and power in thinking through the nature of our global ethical responsibility. For what Hardt and Negri refer to as the 'making common' of the social can easily become a kind of epistemological

violence if it seeks to promulgate as universal a particular, Occidental conception of the social and of the kind of ethics that might logically follow. Indeed, the articulation of a particular conception of the social was central to the project of European colonization, and continues to be a central pillar of contemporary neoliberal interventions in places like Afghanistan and Iraq (Gregory, 2004). This suggests that our views of the social—and of the specific modalities of responsibility and obligation that that are constitutive of it—are born of a material history toward which our debts are not yet settled.

There is an important role here for could be termed a postcolonial ethics, or what Deborah Bird Rose (2004) has called an ‘ethics for decolonisation’. The aim of such an ethics would be to reinscribe the social as a site of plurality and difference, to develop a subaltern sense of space and community, and to learn from the very different conceptions of the social that exist within the world’s diverse cultural and spiritual traditions. We must be attentive to the rich and creative variations in how the in-common is enacted and maintained in everyday spaces of community, and the ways in which ethical responsibility is lived and narrated. This may also mean continuing to rethink the boundaries between the social and the natural, in order to grant agency to the non-human, and to widen the scope of the in-common to encompass both material and spiritual worlds. ‘Indigenous ethics speaks to a world of sentient living beings whose passion for life is sustained in connection,’ says Rose, ‘a dialogical approach to connection impels one to work to realize the well-being of others’ (Rose, 1999: 185).

The good news is that this kind of sentiment is increasingly in evidence across a wide range of social experiments and ethical projects. From the diverse forms of resistance embodied in the so-called anti-globalization movement to the more local autonomous practice perhaps best exemplified by the Zapatista movement in Mexico, communities are being constructed around the social geographies of being-in-common, and in ways that respect local difference and autonomy. The goal for the twenty-first century, perhaps, is to provide the space for the expansion of such projects, and to support the proliferation of new ones, not in order to decide in advance the contours of the in-common, but rather to construct, in the well-known phrase of Subcomandante Marcos, ‘a world where many worlds will fit.’

CONCLUSION

‘To want to say “we” is not at all sentimental, not at all familial or “communitarian.” It is existence reclaiming its due or its condition: coexistence’ (2000: 42)

- Jean-Luc Nancy

I have tried in this chapter to suggest some of the dimensions of social geography’s ethical project. It is a project that has been underway for nearly a century, at least since Petr Kropotkin’s exhortation that ‘social life—that is, we, not I—is the normal form of

life.’ In the intervening decades, geographers have made significant contributions to better understanding the nature of this collective social life and its spatial manifestations. From inquiries into territorial social justice to explorations of our intersubjective lifeworlds, geographical scholarship has illuminated the social as a site of political negotiation, contested meaning, and collective praxis. What unites these disparate approaches in my view, and what has characterized much recent geographical inquiry, is a concern to theorize the social as a space of responsibility, within which we contribute in our own small ways to weaving and tending the bonds of our being-together. In the face of continuing neoliberal attempts to evacuate the social, this notion is worthy of our defense.

Contemporary explorations of ethics and social geography are assisting in this defense, by drawing attention to our entanglements with others in a wide variety of contexts, and by shedding light on our dispositions toward care and concern, our affective and embodied encounters, and our historical and material geographies of assemblage and interconnection. Ethics, as Negri reminds us, is the responsibility for the common. It is also, he notes elsewhere, ‘the terrain of possibility, of action, of hope’ (1996:170 also Anderson, 2006). And in a world beset by ethical lapses and failures of responsibility, this too is worth defending. If the future trajectory of social geography remains faithful to its past, geographical scholarship will have much to contribute.

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