Feature: Historical Geographies of Moral Regulation

Moral regulation: historical geography and scale

Stephen Legg, and Michael Brown

School of Geography, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, United Kingdom
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.

Keywords: Moral; Regulation; Scale; Conduct; Geography

[These 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.]

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. This statement is often cited as an example of protest against the continental rule of colonial difference. 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...
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. 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 (analytical ethics); a span which takes us from meta-, through normative, to descriptive ethics. This work charts the wide-ranging concern over ethics in the discipline: from care and consumption, cosmopolitan responsibility, non-representational theory and national frames of prescriptive reasoning, to ‘continental’ and ‘analytical’ approaches to reason and normativity.

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), 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. Moral codes geographically emerge relative to: the conditions and temptations of the communities or anonymity 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 citizens, 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. 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. 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.

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 “moralties” are made and remade across space.’ 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, and his later work on moral sciences, 1930–40s citizenship, and landscapes of leisure.

Most historical works on moral geographies had, however, urban and nineteenth-century foci. They have explored ‘moral locations’ for soldiers and sailors in nineteenth-century Portsmouth; the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Houses and Mals (1852–54); mid-nineteenth-century New York fashions

---

12 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, *Geoforum* 65 (2006) 103–111.
and attempts to regulate gender and consumption; the mobility of, and concerns about, the American ‘tramp’; and moral panics around cinema in progressive era United States of America. More recently, moral regulation around gender and sexuality has come to the fore. The explicitly moral geographies of hetero-normativity have been highlighted, including: the assumption that to be straight is to be more moral; the spatialities of moral panics; and the normative moral landscapes of the ideal happy family.

Various strands of moral geography research have focused on sexuality and race, the most common scalar frame for which being that of Empire. Postcolonial geographies of sexuality in the British Empire have considered debates over age of consent, homosexuality and prostitution. The latter have included studies of the regulation of prostitution in the long nineteenth century across a range of sites, from Cambridge and the port towns mentioned in the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s, to Ireland, Gibraltar, and Hong Kong.

Paramount here was the balance between the British urge to be seen as moralising, and the need to keep the military strong and healthy, which demanded a focus on the specific needs of place rather than a universalising and aspatial civilising mission (as discussed by Philip Howell in the concluding paper of this special issue). This work has been followed through by research focusing on the debate over the segregation of prostitutes in colonial India. The definition of what was ‘moral’ was adapted to: changes in medical understanding; relations between the military and politicians; and the emergence of international accords relating to trafficking and prostitution. Regulation presented solutions, but also created geographies of scandal that undermined its own existence, highlighting the dense ties between conceptions of prostitution, sodomy, and age of consent. While archives shedding light on the experiences of prostitutes are rare, there may be more resources to explore the individual moral concerns and campaigns of reformers, and the tensions between class, race and sexual identities (inter alia) that these campaigners for moral regulation brought forth.

The concept of moral regulation is one that has received attention outside geography and raises several issues which we take up in this collection, namely, the definition of regulation, and the influence of thinkers who inform, explicitly or not, our writings.

**Moral regulation**

While some work beyond geography had framed moral regulation in Marxist terms, via Gramsci and Williams, early geographical discussions were informed by thinkers ranging from Immanuel Kant to Erving Goffman, Melanie Klein and Michel Foucault. Marx and Foucault have been particularly important in the wider debate about regulation. In addition to Emile Durkheim (as noted in Philip Howell’s afterword), they were fundamental to Corrigan and Sayer’s classic analysis of moral regulation as the means for normalising and rendering as natural the social order of the British state. Reflecting on this work, Mariana Valverde argued that the emphasis on Foucault led to a lack of attentiveness to economic processes and suggested that we think of moral regulation as productive of moral capital, alongside the forms of economic and social capital identified by Bourdieu.

Within geography, to date, Valverde’s plea for a Bourdieu-inflected consideration of class has been less influential than Mitchell Dean’s Foucauldian commentary. Dean used Foucault’s governmentality work to criticise the separation of material and representation in Corrigan and Sayer’s approach to ‘culture’, their over-unified view of the state, and the failure to consider moral agents beyond this state. For Dean, moral regulation is the normalisation and naturalisation of a specific social order that legitimates certain forms of identity and not others. Drawing upon Durkheim, but also from Friedrich Nietzsche, Dean argued that codes of morality are practical not theoretical categories, which Nietzsche argued were less significant than practices of self-formation, termed ethics: ‘...moralit as it codifies and is inscribed within and modified by ethical practices’. Dean suggested that Foucault’s work on governmentality (after his turn to Nietzsche in the 1970s) presents us with two avenues of study: governmental self-formation, or the ways in which authorities and agents seek to conduct the conduct of individuals; and ethical self-formation, or the government of self by self. The former is familiar to historical geographers, the latter less so.

Alan Hunt’s *Governing Morals* drew on all the debates above, before turning to empirical material relating to health, feminism and prostitution in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain and...
America. Against Valverde, Hunt insists that moral regulation should not be thought through the lens of class, but in terms of moralisation rather than morality, targeting conduct and subjectivity rather than thought and principles alone. Hunt squarely locates his interests in what Dean termed governmental self-formation, but stressed that this also involved ethical self-locates his interests in what Dean termed governmental self-moralisation rather than morality, targeting conduct and subjectivity.40 This work, and Foucault’s writings on representation, was used to examine how human–environment relations structured aesthetics, morality and selfhood. While without an explicit framing in terms of moral geography or Foucault, follow-up work has examined the individual motivations and self-formations of landscaper Marietta Pallis. While Foucault’s work on regulation, rather than ethics, has been more influential within geography, increasing attention on this later work presents exciting avenues for investigation of moral geographies.

The Government of Self and Others lectures (1982–83) explain how Foucault’s previous interest in governmental rationalities related to his emergent focus on self-formation. He located his lectures on the ancient world at the point where forms of knowledge, normative frames of behaviour, and potential modes of subject existence were linked together.41 Within the larger context of a history of ‘sexual morality’, the aim was to ‘see how and through what concrete forms of the relation to self the individual was called upon to constitute him or herself as the moral subject of his or her sexual conduct’.42 Foucault’s turn to morals and ethics was explicitly positioned as part of his career-long attempt to overturn objects of study and taken-for-granted ways of studying history; from histories of knowledge to studies of veridiction (truth-telling); from histories of domination to analyses of the procedures of governmentality; and from theories of the subject to analyses of subjectification, and practices of the self.

Both Dean and Hunt’s work on moral regulation drew on a series of interviews Foucault gave in English during the early 1980s, which hinted at the thorough work he was doing at the Collège de France.43 In ‘On the genealogy of ethics’ (1983) Foucault explored classical Stoic ethics as a relation to self.44 Positing this ethical interest in the self as the culmination of his life’s work, Foucault reviewed his previous works in relation to three possible domains of genealogical analysis, which pursued historical ontologies of truth, or ourselves as subjects of knowledge (as in Birth of the Clinic or The Order of Things45); power, or ourselves as subjects acting on others (Discipline

46 S. Legg, Governmental, congestion and calculation in colonial Delhi, Social and Cultural Geography 7 (2006) 709–729; Brown, Public health as urban politics, urban geography (note 25).
47 Oudin, Cinema des milieux (note 24), 57.
50 Matless, Moral geography in Broadland (note 17), 129.
53 Foucault, The Government of Self and Others (note 52), 5.
54 For a commentary on the geographies of these lecture courses see C. Philo, A ‘new Foucault’ with lively implications — or ‘the crawfish advances sideways’, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 37 (2012) 496–514.
56 All three themes were said to feature in M. Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, London, Sydney, 1967. The full version of the original French was published as M. Foucault, History of Madness, London, 2005. See also Foucault, On the genealogy of ethics (note 55), 262.
and Punish), and ethics, or ourselves constituted as moral agents (The History of Sexuality). Anticipating the analysis in Use of Pleasure, a history of morals necessarily had to distinguish ‘acts’, the behaviour of people in relation to ‘codes’ which are ‘imposed’ on them and which lead to ‘ethics’, or the relationship to oneself. This ethics was itself said to have four dimensions:

a) Substance: what aspects of the self are concerned with moral conduct (such as feelings, desires or intentions)?  
b) Mode of subjectification: how are people invited or incited to recognise their moral obligation, as for example through divine or natural law, or social censure?  
c) Self-formation: how should we moderate our acts or decipher what we are?  
d) Aim: what kind of being do we want to become?

These themes were taken up the following year in an interview considering early Christian ethics in relation to freedom. Here Foucault returned to a study of power relations between free subjects (the ‘play on freedoms’ explored in his earlier analyses of the art of government and [neo] liberal governmentalities)

I am saying that ‘governmentality’ implies the relationship of the self to itself, and I intend this concept of ‘governmentality’ to cover the whole range of practices that constitute, define, organize, and instrumentize the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other...I believe that the concept of governmentality makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others—which constitutes the very stuff [matière] of ethics.

What we see here is Foucault at his most expansive, using micro-analyses of the body and ethics to explain macro-change in religious and political systems. These insights are expanded upon by the contributors to this special issue, who all draw on Foucault to differing extents, taking in both moral regulation and ethical self-formation. In terms of the former, Beckingham addresses scalar governmentalities extents, taking in both moral regulation and ethical self-formation. In analyses of the body and ethics to explain macro-change in religious and Punish, transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Aldershot, 2011, B. Anderson, Affect and biopower: towards a politics of life, elements of government and [neo] liberal governmentalities)

jects (the

Foucault returned to a study of power relations between free sub-

The moral geography work summarised above has paid some attention to issues of scale, but usually as an offshoot from a particular spatial methodology. We have had, therefore, mentions of the scope and sites of justice, the scalar spread of institutions, a framing of moral geographies within the scales of the global and territoriality, evolution of ancient morality in relation to the subsumption of the Greek polis within Hellenistic and then Roman empires, the scale of the city and sexual morality, the region as a scale of moral geography, descending scales of morality, from national defences against western decadence, to threatening sites of performance and embodiments of degenerate musical cultures, national frames for moral capital, and an analysis of moral regulation from ‘above’, the ‘middle’ and ‘below’. Avoiding the latter’s vertical ontologies, Olund has explicitly paid attention to ‘networks at multiple scales’ and the USA’s multi-scalar sovereignty. Whitehead has provided the most thoroughly scalar moral geography to date, suggesting that the scale (rather than the space) of a region can contain moral codes of socio-ecological conduct that guide actions and locational decisions. The political struggles over

Scale and moral regulation

The moral geography work summarised above has paid some attention to issues of scale, but usually as an offshoot from a particular spatial methodology. We have had, therefore, mentions of the scope and sites of justice, the scalar spread of institutions, a framing of moral geographies within the scales of the global and territoriality, evolution of ancient morality in relation to the subsumption of the Greek polis within Hellenistic and then Roman empires, the scale of the city and sexual morality, the region as a scale of moral geography, descending scales of morality, from national defences against western decadence, to threatening sites of performance and embodiments of degenerate musical cultures, national frames for moral capital, and an analysis of moral regulation from ‘above’, the ‘middle’ and ‘below’. Avoiding the latter’s vertical ontologies, Olund has explicitly paid attention to ‘networks at multiple scales’ and the USA’s multi-scalar sovereignty. Whitehead has provided the most thoroughly scalar moral geography to date, suggesting that the scale (rather than the space) of a region can contain moral codes of socio-ecological conduct that guide actions and locational decisions. The political struggles over

62 Foucault, The ethics of the concern for self as a practice of freedom (note 60), 300.  
66 Driver, Moral geographies (note 14), 277.  
68 Smith, Moral Geographies (note 11), 29.  
69 Hubbard, Desire/disgust (note 26).  
70 Matless, Moral geography in Broadland (note 17).  
71 Kong, Music and moral geographies (note 12), 110.  
72 Valverde, Moral capital (note 37).  
73 Hunt, Governing Morals (note 40), 5.  
74 Olund, Cinema’s milieux (note 24), 61.
scales are suggested to have three moral aspects: the moral representations of certain scales; the control of scales via moral reasoning; and the relational moralities of scale. Others have examined the role of metaphor in structuring scales of experience and moral regulation, or the connection of international debates about sexuality and abuse with local and intimate negotiations and moral code-formations. Such arguments inform and are extended by the papers in this special issue.

In his article on the moral regulation of children and parenting undertaken by local protective societies in Victorian Liverpool and Scotland, David Beckham argues that a sensitivity to the scalar dimensions of governance reveals two points of conflict: a discursive one where the welfare of the social body clashed with the welfare of the child's body and a more material one wherein the welfare of all the nation's (and even the empire's) youth extends from original concerns with particular, problematic children. He documents how sociospatial distances between rich and poor were identified in explicitly scaled arguments of reformers, as well as scalar- relational arguments behind new legislation allowing state regulation and removal of children from immoral homes. These clashes, he further holds, reconstituted the ontologies of the scales (what was a moral child, a moral parent, and a moral nation and empire) themselves—especially as the society's brief grew in scope from local and regional to national. Thus his work exemplifies the relational moralities of scale as well as how moral representations and materialities produce certain scales.

The question of where the suffering tuberculosis patient ought to be cared for—in the sanatoria or in the home—occupied England around the turn of the twentieth century. Graham Mooney's article theorises that debate as one about the relation between scale and morality. This article considers a rise in the invention and sale of commodities designed to allow homecare such as the 'Presto Thermometer', the 'Beb Bath', and the 'DumbNurse', which enabled the consumptive patient to be treated comfortably and effectively at home. These goods were marketed through representations of the consumer as a highly moral agent. They also worked through arguments about the home (and the self) as a morally and hygienic superior location for care over the sanatorium—so long as these commodities were purchased. This sort of care of the self in the home was celebrated as a morally superior form of hygiene from a public health optic that suspiciously imagined it was combating immoral working class behaviour that spread disease. Yet it simultaneously imagined a rather middle-class domestic environment. In stressing the relational moralities of scale, Mooney thus situates consumption in a series of scaled processes that complicated any attempts to compartmentalise spatial shifts in moral geography.

Ted Rutland's article on Canada's Halifax Council of Women (HCW) continues the theme of middle-class morality being over-generalised onto working class bodies and spaces. By deploying relational moralities of scale the elite middle-class women who comprised the HCW reconfigured the 'separate spheres' ideology into an argument justifying its efforts to morally regulate children of the whole city in order for women's domestic moral responsibilities to be met. Women's presumed primary moral obligation was to inculcate morality into her children, thus the HCW focused its moral geographies onto their homes, streets and schools. Attributing moral failure to conditions of inequality and deprivation, the group sparked conflict with working mothers at a time of increasing material inequality. In so doing these white middle-class women exerted control over the local scale by redefining it from previous imaginations as outside women's domestic purview.

Cecilia Chu explores the colonial governmentality at work in early twentieth-century discourses of good government in Hong Kong. She interprets them as both political legitimation strategies and a form of moral regulation using two case studies of public health governance in the colony. The first involved a plague-prevention campaign. The second was an investigation into corruption in the public health administration. The moral constructs of 'benevolent government' and 'good citizens' linked (at least partially) local moral imaginations with imperial ones. They exemplified the relational moralities of scale while serving to legitimate the power of Chinese elites and British officials. In the former, we can also see the control over scale via moral representation, as residents were taught to self-discipline to prevent plague in a manner that equated public virtues with proper sanitation. In the latter we see the moral superiority of public stewardship undergirding arguments for reform and positioning Hong Kong as a virtuous and model colony.

Finally in his afterword, Philip Howell reflects on all the papers in order to make the case for historical researchers interested in moral regulation to stretch their geographical imaginations in scalar ways. And in so doing he eloquently explains what is at stake in this special issue. In particular, he argues for an appreciation of the 'negotiated and contested' ontologies of scale rather than presuming they are a priori fixed. And this is true of their production and institutionalisation as well as of their resistances. Howell stresses the perpetual dynamics of scale in social processes in order to convey that quality of contingency appreciated in all of the papers in this special issue. It is especially difficult work in part because moral regulation so fixes, divides, and orders scales from each other.

This special issue, we suggest, has three implications for historical geographers. The first, of course, is to renew the case for geographical work on moral regulation. Secondly, while each paper draws on Foucault and his governmentality work to differing extents, these papers foreground and extend these concerns into moral geography. We hope this special issue prompts geographers interested in morality, ethics and regulation to realise the importance of an historical—geographical perspective on these questions. Finally, we hope that this special issue energises historical geographers of identities, empire, and health to ruminate on the dimensions of moral regulation perhaps as yet unconceived in their own work.

Acknowledgements

This special issue is based on three sessions entitled 'Scaled and Networked Historical Geographies of Moral Regulation' at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the AAG at Seattle. Besides the papers here collected, additional presentations were given by Michael Brown, Ruth Craggs, Stephen Legg, Charlotte Jones, Kate Lynch and Eric Olund. Thanks are due to the referees for their comments on this introduction.