This is the first chapter of my dissertation, *Goethics: Ethics, Geography and Moral Understanding* (2000). It is also the basis for the first chapter of my book manuscript, *Practical Ethics*. In this version of the chapter, I have edited the language a tad. Please do not quote without permission.

Situating Ethics

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> The science of Geography … is … quite as much as any other science, a concern of the philosopher… [For it] presupposes in the geographer … the man who busies himself with the investigation of the art of life, that is, of happiness.
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> (Strabo 1917-1933, 1.1.1)

Ethics is an inquiry into moral values, an evaluation of the moral norms embodied in our discourse and practice, and a concern for what is good or right in our individual and collective lives. It is an attempt to formulate rules-of-thumb to help us grasp the ends and means of life, providing guidelines and guideposts as we strive for what the ancient Greeks termed *eudaimonia*, what Strabo's translator refers to as happiness, a word we now translate as *flourishing* (Boss 1998, 388-389; MacIntyre 1966, chapter 7). While my home discipline of geography has much to say about space, place, and environment, it is relatively quiet about ethics. When geographers do speak about ethics, it is generally as something external to the 'core' concerns of the field, an extra-disciplinary addition to the study of space, a consequential but not constitutive element to geography. This book is one attempt to end this quietude, recover ethics as part of the geographic tradition, and begin justifying a distinctly geographic account of how we ought to live; all through a distinct perspective on moral understanding I call situated ethics.

Despite the extra-disciplinary outlook on ethics per se, discussions of the moral dimensions of geography are increasing, a trend reflecting the wider engagement with ethics by the human and natural sciences (for example, Bellah et al. 1983; Callahan and Jennings 1983; National Academy of Sciences 1995; National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine 1992). As part of this engagement, geographers are grappling with ethical issues regarding professional conduct, research practice, the environment, and society (for example Hay 1998; Reed and Slaymaker 1993; Smith 1998). Somewhat paradoxically then, geographers are taking a 'moral turn' -- or from another standpoint, a long overdue return -- towards the language and concerns of ethics. From my perspective, this is only fitting since geography is constitutive of ethics, furnishing conceptual and contextual insights that inform ethical theory, method and practice, and in various guises and disguises, moral voices have animated geography throughout its history. I situate this dissertation within this 'prehistory' of geography's moral (re)turn.

Situated ethics merges the horizons of ethics and geography, or more accurately, the horizons of distinct readings of ethics and geography. I approach this merging without assuming that ethics and geography have unique and mutually exclusive identities, nor that one should subsume or subordinate the other. Rather I see ethics and geography as distinct if overlapping traditions of scholarship, intellectual practices sharing a reciprocally informative constellation of interests in ethical knowledge. This constellation includes situated knowledge, contextual interpretation, and

society/nature relations. From this merging, I trace three implications. First, a situated ethic uses geographical insight into the importance of context to avoid the major pitfalls (as I see it) of analytic moral thought -- universalism and anthropocentrism -- while navigating the equally problematic grounds of their binary opposites -- relativism and misanthropism. Second, and in contrast to ethical theories stressing rigourous deduction from unitary moral principles, a situated ethic emphasizes a plurality of moral concepts contextually suited to a moral problem. Third, a situated ethic seeks a moral understanding that values the well-being of animals, humans and the rest of nature, which is to say the community of life in a more-than-human world. I pursue the third implication via a geocentric paradigm that recognizes a plurality of anthropofocused and non-anthropofocused values at multiple scales of existence and analysis.

My intention is for this research to extend our intellectual horizons. Yet to paraphrase Steven Toulmin, I approach this project as a 'geographic tyro', a position that is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, I have benefited from an open-ended conceptual horizon and a wide-range of intellectual influences. Espying thematic order in this sometimes-chaotic milieu has not been easy, but it did discourage rote approaches to moral problems. On the other hand, my chief difficulty is communicating the character of situated ethics with terms and illustrations that are accessible and familiar to academics and popular audiences. Doubtless a more conventional approach, one within the more familiar topics in geography (e.g. spatial science, cartography, political ecology), would have been helpful to many geographers. Be that as it may, that is not the road I chose, and I leave it to others to articulate a geographically informed ethic that suits their version of our disciplinary dialects.

Reflection
Reflexivity, a critical self-reflection on one's personal and theoretical dispositions, is an increasingly important dimension of academic research. Reflexion helps the researcher identify and clarify his or her presuppositions and political commitments, consider how these affect the process of inquiry, and evaluate the impact of his or her findings. It also signals the researcher's awareness that he or she is part of a broader social context. All academics have varying degrees of moral responsibility for the intentions and consequence of their work (Schwandt 1997, 135-136). Unfortunately, ethical discourse is not disposed towards reflexion, at least as it is understood in the aforementioned manner. Indeed, ethicists frequently speak as if they were disembodied spirits discussing purely theoretical situations, the background context for which is never revealed. Take for example, Henry More (1614-1687), an English philosopher who taught at Cambridge University.

> I will take from the storehouse of the soul certain principles which are immediately true and needing no proof, but into which almost all moral doctrine is plainly and easily resolved even as a mathematical demonstration is resolved into common axioms. *Enchiridion Ethicum* (1667, 3:2) (from Toulmin and Jonsen 1988, 375, n 34)

The intellectual and experiential background informing More's conception of ethics is rendered invisible in this account of morality. This is especially unfortunate, since More's training as an English Cleric in the Roman Catholic tradition who was enamoured of Descartes' *Meditations*, certainly affected his conception of ethics as akin to 'mathematical demonstration'. Admittedly, More was not the only cleric so influenced, and thinking of ethics as a form of geometry is a particularly seventeenth century metaphor. Even so, the abstract and acontextual approach this metaphor conveys remains in ethics to this day. Thus a modern ethicist like Alan Gewirth defends the 'principle of generic consistency' as 'entailing correct answers to all the moral questions that can

arise in any set of practical circumstances whatever', an axiomatic approach akin to that of More's (in Toulmin and Jonsen 1988, 395, n. 24). We can also look to more popular literature like newspapers and magazines, where the editorials/letters section is packed with dogmatic advocates of one or another moral positions. Of course, some of this is due to the absurd concision of thought mandated by journalism, but just as often this emerges from the categorical, rule-bound and unsituated manner in which moral concerns are frequently conceived and discussed in our culture.

For example, in May of 1998, Mayor Rudolf Guliani of New York City extended benefits coverage to unmarried domestic partners of city employees, a move intended primarily to benefit gay and lesbian couples. Cardinal John O'Connor of the Archdiocese of New York strongly condemned this act as a moral transgression against 'natural law', and a grave danger to 'traditional' marriage and the family, one more snip in the fraying of America's (and Western Civilization's) moral fabric (*The New York Times*, Monday 25 May 1998, A1). The subsequent letters to the editor ran thick (both pro and con), but Elsie P. Palmer's comments were particularly indicative of the unsituated and rule-bound approach I refer to.

> …I applaud John Cardinal O'Connor's wisdom and courage in assailing legislation that would equate domestic partnership with marriage…. Far from trying to impose his religion on others, the Cardinal is reminding us that marriage (and the family) has been the basic unit of all societies throughout time. (*The New York Times*, 28 May 1998, A28)

That Ms. Palmer seems entirely unconcerned with the anthropological diversity of kin affiliations illustrates my point nicely. Whether she is even aware of this diversity is an important question, but does not alter the force of my point. For her it is a moral truth that her understanding of 'normal' families (however this is determined) should be ubiquitous for all people, everywhere throughout history. Where such families are not to be found, that is a situation not of a human diversity consonant with alternative and morally legitimate ways of life, but with a moral failure in society that should be rectified.

Having said this, I do not want to judge Henry More or Ms. Palmer harshly. All of us understand moral issues with a conceptual map informed by the background context of our lives -- our experiences, education, political commitments, social groups, and the like. This is as true of ethicists as it is of any other person thinking and acting on matters of serious moral import. This does not mean our viewpoints are self-justifying and we must uncritically accept all points of view. Nor does it mean that our viewpoint should remain stagnant and inhospitable to change. There is always room for personal and cultural growth in ethics. What it does mean is that at any one point in time, we have no choice but to see the world as we see it. We do have, however, the choice to deepen our understanding, to change our viewpoint so as to come to a better moral understanding. So before I go much further, I want to reflect on the prior understandings that inform situated ethics, with the intention of allowing readers to assess my presuppositions and assumptions -- my 'prejudices' (for better or worse) as Hans-Georg Gadamer would have it (Gadamer 1987).

Journey
Geography came late to me. After undergraduate studies in political theory at the University of Minnesota, I spent thirteen years as a manual labourer and peace activist. My most significant undergraduate professors -- Mulford Sibley (Political Science), Terence Ball (Political Science) and Robert Ross (Religious Studies) -- were ethicists themselves, and the moral concerns they passed on to me helped motivate my activism. For most of that time, my attention focused on the hideous

prospect of nuclear war, and I participated in the Honeywell Project and other venues of peace activism. With some resistance, I began to consider the well-being of the natural as well as the social world. I eventually saw the threat posed to the earth's community of life by anthropogenic environmental change as being as important as that of cataclysmic war or social oppression. This expanding set of concerns led me to geography. There were several reasons for this. As the elder tradition of environmental studies, I found geography's emphases on interdisciplinarity and human agency a powerful approach for understanding the human relationship to nature. In addition, geography's transdisciplinary history allowed (at least in theory) the simultaneous moral consideration of human and non-human beings, as well as of present and future generations. This was a matter of some concern to me, as my early readings in environmental ethics stressed the incommensurability of environmental and social ethics, for example by dismissing the 'rationality' of the moral standing of future generations (see Feinberg 1981). Another factor was my pre-graduate acquaintance with geography faculty and students through the Geography Reading Group and the Environmental Ethics Reading Group, forums for radical and environmental geographers, respectively. As in so many cases, it was the stimulation and companionship of these two social networks that finalized my commitment to the geographical tradition. Finally, I hoped that geography would prove a more 'practical' pursuit than philosophy. Despite my disposition to think in 'theoretical' terms, I wanted my work to directly improve the well-being of animals, humans and nature. Because of its empirical heritage and policy relevance, I thought geography might be a better locale for 'practical ethics' than philosophy.

I began graduate school intent on investigating 'moral ecology' -- the role of moral norms in cultural ecology. My intended site for fieldwork was with the Haida people on the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia, Canada. As a struggling community on a chain of ancestral islands rich in biological resources, the Haida faced a particularly cruel dilemma. The disruption of their subsistence way of life was nearly complete, and their expectations for their own lives had changed radically as they blended with non-indigenous elements of Canadian culture. Economic activity was dependent on jobs in the forest and tourist industries. Accepting these economic options, however, necessitated odious moral and political choices. To take full advantage of a logging economy, they would have to acquiesce to the clear-cutting by timber companies of a uniquely fecund and evolutionarily distinct midlatitude rainforest. To develop their resources in tourism, they would have to accept the establishment of South Moresby National Park, an act that many of the Haida believed violated their sovereignty as a First Nation in Canada. Neither option was fully compatible with the other, since clear-cut forests drew more protesters than tourists. Moreover, both options offended the Haida's 'moral identity' as a distinct people with a specific sensibility towards their ancestral landscape. Obviously, the situation facing the Haida was complexly fraught with a variety of moral conundrums. These conundrums reflected not only a history of colonialism and racism (raising questions of social justice), but also the changes facing the Haida also meant vast changes in natural diversity (raising questions of animal ethics and environmental ethics).

Much to my surprise, my interest in moral ecology soon conflicted with my graduate experience. Many of my peers reprimanded me for raising questions of ethics. 'Moral and value questions lie outside the purview of geography', I was told, 'If you want to investigate these issues, you should shift your studies to philosophy'. Frankly, I was unprepared for this policing of moral inquiry in the pursuit of value-free science. Where did this moral disaffection come from? This was all the more puzzling given the self-identified commitment to 'social justice' of these same critics. Did they not realize the paradox of condemning an explicit discussion of ethics, while advocating implicitly moral political projects? Slowly, I began to realize that I was in a *disciplinary* milieu that ill-prepared students

to consider the ethical dimensions of geographical inquiry. As a direct consequence of this experience, articulating an ethics-laden alternative to a scientistic geography became the primary focus of my doctoral work.

I originally conceived of this non-scientistic alternative as a species of applied ethics, that is, the application of moral philosophy to geographic inquiry. Plumbing philosophy for its ethical insights, I planned to map these insights over onto geography. Like a conceptual graticule, moral philosophy would provide the intellectual tools with which geographers would take their ethical bearings. This plan changed, however, in response to a challenge laid out to me by Norman Dahl, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Minnesota. I met with Dahl early in 1991 to discuss my interest in 'applied ethics'. He listened with interest to my rudimentary discussion of moral ecology, probed the possibilities for geographical studies in professional, social and environmental ethics, then voiced something that took me (yet again) entirely by surprise -- that moral philosophy had reached a dead end. The analytic emphasis on universal and objective principles in normative ethics, in addition to the preoccupation with deductive reasoning and symbolic logic in metaethics, had detached moral philosophy from the lived world of moral experience. Dahl doubted the analytic style of philosophical ethics (i.e. the ethics taught in most academic philosophy departments) would contribute much to an empirical social science like geography. Nevertheless, he did suggest an alternative. Instead of plumbing moral philosophy for truths to apply to geography, he suggested I look to geography for its own moral wisdom, and perhaps reflect on what geographers might teach analytic moral philosophers (Dahl 1991).

It took me some time to comprehend the import of Dahl's remarks. Dahl was not advocating, for instance, the rejection of all moral inquiry, much less of philosophical ethics. Nor was he encouraging the search for universal truths from geography, truths applicable to ethics. Rather Dahl was suggesting a less disciplinary approach to moral understanding, one where geography and ethics were not only mutually informative, but where ethics was partially constitutive of the geographical tradition itself. I eventually came to see his comments as suggesting three interrelated lines of critical and/or constructive inquiry. The first is the history of moral understanding in geography itself. How have moral concepts and practices been embedded in the geographical tradition? The second is a critique of the theoretical and methodological presuppositions and consequences of analytic moral philosophy, and by extension, of applied ethics. What forms of non-analytic, non-applied ethics might geographers look to in their moral inquiries. The third and final inquiry is the moral wisdom to be gleaned from the geographical tradition itself. What insights does geography bring to moral understanding? These three lines of inquiry form the theoretical mile markers, so to speak, of this book.

Presuppositions

One 'metatheoretical' presupposition that undergirds situated ethics is hermeneutics. *Hermeneutics*, from the Greek 'hermeneutikos' meaning 'interpretation', is the study of understanding. By *understanding* I mean the experience, description, explanation, and evaluation of human or natural phenomena. Hermeneuticists claim that human activity can only be understood by accounting for persons' intentions, concepts, meanings, interpretations, and communications. This involves the natural languages, speech communities and discourses in which persons participate and through which they come to an understanding of the natural and social worlds. The emphasis on understanding in hermeneutics differs from objectivist approaches in geography and the social sciences, approaches which stress the accumulation of observations (empiricisms), explanations based on universal laws (positivism), or structural causes for human relations (structuralisms)

(Floistad 1973; Mueller-Vollmer 1989). Empiricism, positivism, and structuralism are objectivist forms of science because they locate the standards for valid knowledge, as well as the explanations for human belief and behaviour, outside human subjectivity, that is, in the external world of an 'objective reality'. Hermeneutics does not deny the importance of biological or social structures, but it does maintain that human activity cannot be explicated without an appreciation of agency and culture. (Bernstein 1991).

Modern hermeneutics developed out of exegesis (biblical commentary), as a set of rules for interpreting sacred texts. This *biblical hermeneutics* was subsequently generalized as a method for interpreting all written texts, into *philological hermeneutics*. The German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834 C.E.) took philology's methods of textual interpretation and analogized these to human understanding itself, what is now called *general hermeneutics*. It was another German, the historian and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911 C.E.), who was the first to use hermeneutics as a methodology for the *Geisteswissenschaften* (his translation for John Stuart Mill's 'moral sciences'). Noting that human life-ways are suffused with a subjectivity that is outside the competence of natural science, Dilthey sought a method appropriate to the subject matter of human agency. His method of understanding, called *Verstehen*, was based an empathetic identification, that is, the re-experiencing of another's subjectivity (e.g. intentions, motives). Dilthey believed Verstehen could be performed objectively (without taint of one's own subjectivity) and therefore produce an empirical knowledge as certain as that of the natural sciences (Smith 1993, 188-189).

If Dilthey was the first to use hermeneutics as a methodology in the human sciences, its subsequent development traveled far beyond his intentions. John Smith traces several strands of hermeneutic inquiry informing the humanities and sciences of the late twentieth century. The first strand is *validation hermeneutics*. It is associated with Edward Hirsch and most closely approximates Dilthey's model (see Hirsch 1967). Here the task of interpretation is to 'get the meaning right'. The meaning of the 'text' is considered autonomous and authoritative, that is, the message contained is entirely conditioned by the author(s). Because of this authorial autonomy, *validation hermeneutics* distinguishes between valid and invalid interpretations of texts by noting the difference between the *meaning* a text is given by an author, and the *significance* a text has for readers (190-192). *Critical hermeneutics* is the second strand, and is most often associated with Jurgen Habermas (see Habermas 1993). Through ideological distortion and circumstances of oppression, meaning and understanding can be warped, to reappear as false consciousness. The task of critical hermeneutics is to empower and emancipate others by removing the conceptual blinkers complicit in their oppression (Smith 1993, 192-194).

Georg-Hans Gadamer is credited with the development of the third strand, *philosophical hermeneutics* (see Gadamer 1993). Gadamer develops the concepts of linguisticality and historicity into a general philosophy of what it means to be human. All understanding proceeds from *prior understandings* ('prejudices' in the language of Gadamer) that are themselves embedded in a living *tradition* of concepts and practices. Without losing sight of an author's intentions, the meaning of a text is not regarded as autonomous, but as situated in objective historical circumstances. Meaning arises out of the dialectic between text, prior understandings, and social circumstances. These understandings and traditions are not static, but evolve through time and differentiate over space. The task of philosophical hermeneutics is not accurate interpretation or the assessment of truth in meaning (although it is not hostile to these projects in particular instances), but with promoting mutual understanding. Through dialogue, this hermeneutic seeks to reach deeper, richer, and perhaps better understandings, what Gadamer calls the *fusion of horizons* (Smith 1993, 194-197). Contrary to anti-hermeneutic claims, the goal of achieving a fusion of horizons is not founded on a naïve approach

to discourse, wherein ideology or unequal power relations are ignored. Nor does the fusion of horizons presuppose an undistorted context for dialogue, one necessitating a Rawlsian 'veil of ignorance' or a Habermasian 'ideal speech situation' to eliminate all barriers to rational (i.e., clear-headed and un-coerced) conversation. Rather philosophical hermeneutics assumes that all understandings are 'prejudiced' (for better or worse) in the sense of beholden to particular points of view, and it is only through the fusion of horizons that these prejudices can be provisionally confirmed, corrected or transcended (Smith 1991, xxiii-xxiv). In the words of Gadamer,

> The concept of 'horizon' suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand -- not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion. (Gadamer 1993, 305)

As Brice Wachterhauser articulates it, there are three themes characterizing most forms of philosophical hermeneutics -- language, history and context. The first theme, *linguisticality*, refers to the human ability to understand and communicate through language. Language is an ontological feature of human life, which is to say that language, and all that is associated with it -- thought, expression, performative action, symbols, abstractions, terminology, etc. -- is not a neutral medium of description, but constitutes our very apprehension (i.e. perception and conceptualization) of the world (Wachterhauser 1986, 9-12). Hermeneuticists reject the notion of language as merely an utterance of knowledge, where both the objects of knowledge and knowledge itself exist independently of language (Floistad 1973, 460). In place of this 'designative' theory of language, hermeneuticists emphasize the 'constitutive' nature of language, that is, language as the medium through which we constitute our knowledge of ourselves and our world (Taylor 1995, chap 5). Terence Ball sums this up crisply, noting, 'As we speak, so we are. As our speech changes, so too, do we' (Ball 1988, 1).

The second theme, *historicity*, bears a similar relation to hermeneutics as linguisticality. It too is regarded as an ontological condition of human experience. Historicity 'denotes our participation in and intractable belonging to history', meaning 'all human knowledge-claims bear within them an essential relation to the historical process out of which they emerge' (Wachterhauser 1986, 7). Knowledge is consequently a historically contingent and evolving 'point of view', that is, a standpoint that is always informed by our background interests and presuppositions about the world (Wachterhauser 1986, 7-9).

Contextuality is the third theme. Contextuality refers to the 'situated nature of all understanding', where 'the meaning of any phenomenon or proposition depends on the "whole" of which it is a "part" or, in other words, it depends on the "context" in which it has a "function"' (Wachterhauser 1986, 12). The *hermeneutic circle* is an example of this contextualism. In it is simplest form, this involves the interpretation of any 'text' -- a word in a sentence, a sentence in a passage, a chapter in a book, etc. -- as a reciprocal interplay between the parts and the whole, the concurrent contexts through which we understand meaning. This interplay may simultaneously exist at multiple and non-linear geographic and interpretive scales. Thus

> The hermeneutical circle is…a circular process in which the understanding or meaning of a part depends on the understanding or meaning of the context, and vice versa. In this process the understanding or meaning of the context as a whole is in some relative sense regarded as prior to the understanding or meaning of it is parts. (Floistad 1973, 452)

Since any utterance is nested within historical and social contexts that transcend a text, literary genre or personal biography, the circle simultaneously exists in multiple spaces and at multiple scales, from individual human consciousness, to the ideologies of identity groups, to widely shared (if contested) cultural paradigms and worldviews (Floistad 1973, 458-460).

> We accept the fact that the subject presents itself historically under different aspects at different times or from a different standpoint.... Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is to be heard. It is present in the multifariousness of such voices: this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have a part (Gadamer 1993).

Altogether then, hermeneutics is attentive to the meanings, conveyed through language and history, articulated and enacted in contexts, which inform the actions of human agents. As expressed by William Addison, this has several ramifications about how we study human beings.

1. [People] are meaning-giving beings, that is, they give meaning to their actions, and these meanings are important in understanding human behaviour.
2. Meaning is not only that which is verbalized; meaning is expressed in action and practices....
3. The meaning-giving process is not entirely free; meanings are made possible by background conditions such as immediate context, social structures, personal histories, shared practices, and language....
4. The meaning and significance of human action is rarely fixed, clear, and unambiguous. Meanings are not limited to pre-established categories. Meaning is being negotiated constantly in ongoing interactions. Meaning changes over time, in different contexts and for different individuals.
5. Interpretation is necessary to understand human action. Truth is not determined by how closely beliefs correspond to some fixed reality.... Facts are always value-laden and researchers have values that reflected in their research projects. (Addison 1992: 111-112)

Implications

Certainly hermeneutics is having a widespread impact on how we think about the subject matter, theory and methods of the humanities and the social sciences (see Bruns 1992; Davison 1998; Mueller-Vollmer 1989). The primary implication I want to focus on here is how hermeneutics frees both moral and scientific understanding from the sterile opposition of objectivism and relativism, a binary opposition generated by a foundational approach to knowledge. Foundationalism asserts that true knowledge requires the certainty of self-evident truths, which form the 'foundation' for all subsequent knowledge claims. The metaphor of building new foundations is deeply rooted in early modern thought. According to Francis Bacon (1561-1626),

> It is idle to expect any great advancement in science from the superinducing and engrafting of new things upon old. We must begin anew from the very foundations, unless we would revolve forever in a circle with mean and contemptible progress. (Robertson, Ellis, and Spedding 1905, 262)

Rene Descartes (1596-1650) reinforced the metaphor in his *Meditations*.

It is now some years since I detected how many were the false beliefs that I had from my earliest youth admitted as true, and how doubtful was everything I had since constructed on this basis; and from that time I was convinced that I must once for all seriously undertake to rid myself of all the opinions which I had formerly accepted, and commence to build anew from the foundation, if I wanted to establish any firm and permanent structure in the sciences. (in Bernstein 1991, 16)

Bernstein notes that this search for ineluctable foundations of knowledge is emblematic of a deep-seated anxiety about the status of our moral and scientific knowledge. 'Descartes leads us with an apparent and ineluctable necessity to a grand and seductive Either/Or. Either there is some support for our being, a fixed foundation for our knowledge, or we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos' (Bernstein 1991, 18). It is this totalizing Either/Or that Bernstein labels 'the Cartesian Anxiety' (Bernstein 1991, 16-20). While the Cartesian Anxiety has historical roots in ancient and medieval philosophy's search for certainty (e.g. Pythagorean 'numbers', Platonic 'forms', Christian 'revelation'), it is especially present in what Bernstein terms *objectivism*. Objectivism is a philosophical orientation of modern ethics and science.

By 'objectivism', I mean the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness. An objectivist claims that there is (or must be) such a matrix and that the primary task of the philosopher is to discover what it is and to support his or her claims to have discovered such a matrix with the strongest possible reasons…. The objectivist maintains that unless we can ground philosophy, knowledge, or language in a rigorous manner we cannot avoid radical scepticism. (Bernstein 1991, 8)

Those persons rejecting the objectivist conviction frequently articulate what the objectivists fear most -- a thoroughgoing scepticism that Bernstein terms *relativism*.

The relativist not only denies the positive claims of the objectivist but also goes further. In its strongest form, relativism is the basic conviction that when we turn to the examination of those concepts that philosophers [and scientists] have taken to be the most fundamental -- whether it is the concept of rationality, truth, reality, right, the good, or norms -- we are forced to recognize that in the final analysis all such concepts must be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture. Since the relativist believes that there is (or can be) a nonreducible plurality of such conceptual schemes, he or she challenges the claim that these concepts can have a determinate and univocal significance. For the relativist, there is no substantive overarching framework or single metalanguage by which we can rationally adjudicate or univocally evaluate competing claims of alternative paradigms. (Bernstein 1991, 8)

In this contrast between objectivists and relativists there is little room for distinction or argument. Either there are self-evident truths, upon which all scientific and moral knowledge depends for their rigour and veracity, or any species of scientific and ethical thought and practice is equivalent to all other species. Hermeneuticists (along with other post-objectivists) contest this approach. Self-evident truths do not exist; rather they are generated historically and socially as at best situated forms of knowledge. The belief in self-evident truths invisiblizes the implicit and ubiquitous background of

beliefs and intentions that form the context for all knowledge production. This is strikingly clear in the biography of Descartes himself, whose background concerns for establishing a new and enduring moral and social order in eighteenth century Europe was critical to his rationalist position, as well as the foundational enterprise for modern ethics and science (Toulmin 1990). Because there are no context-free and presuppositionless starting points to knowledge, only contingent points of departure exist from which we can articulate our best understandings of the world. Altogether then, hermeneutics avoids the Cartesian Anxiety through a 'historically situated, linguistically mediated, contextualist and antifoundationalist theory of understanding' (Wachterhauser 1986, 12-14, 16).

Yet the recourse to relativism is no more justified than that of objectivism. Relativism is a parasitic reaction to the overblown claims of objectivism, assumes objectivism's 'idea of a basic dichotomy between the subjective and the objective' and does not, therefore, contest the dualistic presupposition of the Cartesian Anxiety (Bernstein 1991, 36). Hermeneutics differs from relativism on this point in particular, by noting that our knowledge is situated, that is, it does exist within a framework of intelligibility derived from our situatedness in the natural and social worlds. While our philosophies will never attain apodictic representations of the natural or human worlds, what Richard Rorty describes as the 'mirroring of nature' (see Rorty 1979), we can nevertheless distinguish better from worse understandings of ethical and scientific matters. This is what Gadamer, MacIntyre and Taylor mean when they speak of 'practical' as opposed to 'theoretical' reasoning. Gadamer and Taylor speak well to how hermeneutics approaches situated knowledge. According to Gadamer,

> The great merit of Aristotle was that he anticipated the impasse of our scientific culture by his description of the structure of practical reason as distinct from theoretical knowledge and technical skill…. I think, then, that the chief task of philosophy is to justify this way of reason and to defend practical and political reason against the domination of technology based on science. That is the point of philosophical hermeneutic. It corrects the peculiar falsehood of modern consciousness: the idolatry of scientific method and of the anonymous authority of the sciences…. In this respect, hermeneutic philosophy is the heir of the older tradition of practical philosophy. (from Bernstein 1991, 39-40)

And from Charles Taylor,

> Practical reasoning…is reasoning in transitions. It aims to establish, not that some position is correct absolutely, but rather that some position is superior to some other. It is concerned, covertly or openly, implicitly or explicitly, with comparative propositions. (Taylor 1989, 72)

Outline: A Conversation
This book is a collection of essays structured around common themes, rather than a single argument prosecuted through a sequence of chapters. This organization is an intentional consequence of the conversational nature of my work. I do not trust totalizing narratives, and my primary intention is to advance a conversation on the nature of ethics in geography. Just what *kind* of conversation needs to be specified?

> A true conversation -- which is not to be confused with idle chatter or a violent babble of competing voices -- is an extended and open dialogue, which presupposes a background of intersubjective agreements and a tacit sense of relevance. There may be different emphases

and stresses by participants in a conversation, and in a living conversation there is always unpredictability and novelty. (Bernstein 1991, 2)

A conversation in this sense is not a simple exchange of information. It is an exploration of intellectual horizons that presupposes our tractability to new points of view. Sometimes new insights emerge from our being convinced that a prior understanding was wrong. Just as often (at least in my own experience), a qualitatively different perspective emerges out of the conversation itself, a better understanding that either interlocutor had when they started the conversation. Thus 'a conversation is a dramatic work, even if a very short one, in which the participants are not only the actors, but also the joint authors, working out in agreement or disagreement the mode of their production' (MacIntyre 1984, 211). In keeping with this conversational approach, the chapters of the book are grouped into thirds. Each grouping constitutes a distinct albeit related conversation about animals, ethics and/or geography, with intertextual linkages.

Chapters 1-3 constitute an historically informed narrative of ethics in geography. 'Situating Ethics' (Chapter 1) provides an overview of my intentions and presuppositions. 'Moral Geographies' (Chapter 2) illustrates this theme with respect to two discourses -- classical natural teleology, and modern environmental determinism. Chapter 3, 'Geography's Moral Turn', continues this theme with a discussion of the emergence of ethics as an explicit subfield since the early 1930s. This includes ethics' methodological submergence in regionalism, its theoretical absence in spatial science, and its emergence during the humanistic counterrevolution to disciplinary positivism.

The next three chapters develop a theory and methodology for situated ethics. In Chapter 4, 'Merging Horizons of Moral Understanding', I explore the conceptual horizons of geography and ethics, reject 'theoretical' and 'applied' approaches to moral thought, and articulate a geographically sensitive approach to 'practical' ethics. With that background in mind Chapter 5, 'Methodology and Method', explores one methodological possibility, with an emphasis on casuistry and case study. Chapter 6, 'The Roots of Quality', addresses what I believe is the most common complaint against situated ethics in human and physical geography (or ethics in any science), namely that it is not 'empirical' and is therefore not geography. This complaint is founded on a misunderstanding of the nature of empirical phenomena, and I offer a distinctions about tangible and intangible empirics as well as moral causation to correct this misunderstanding.

The final three chapters exemplify the pragmatic application of situated ethics with several case studies focused on animals. 'Animals, Ethics and Geography' is Chapter 7 and argues for the importance of context, the moral standing of animals, as well as the possibilities for solidarity with all members of the 'geographic community' -- human or non-human, domesticated or wild. Chapter 8 is entitled 'Contested Moralities'. The text literally intervenes in a debate pitting biocentric against ecocentric ethics. Here I offer the alternative paradigm of geocentrism to provide a more robust account of our relationship to animals. Finally, in Chapter 9 'Canis Lupus Cosmopolis', I builds on my recent work with wolf recovery in North America. This chapter explores how cosmopolitan worldviews draw nature and culture into a common orbit of ethical meaning, something that has normative implications for the well-being of the people and predators who share a common landscape.

Caveat
Some readers will doubtless find this excursion into ethics a suspicious activity for geographical 'science', relying as it does on reflection instead of data gathering and hypothesis testing. I make no

apologies for this overtly philosophical approach. I applaud the commitment of most geographers to forms of research very different from my own – for example, the quantitative analysis of tangibly empirical spatial patterns and processes. Even so, I see no historical or conceptual warrant to regard such practices as disallowing moral inquiries in geography. Indeed, speaking collectively, our scholarship has often failed to reflect on the moral dimensions of research, restricting ethical concerns to narrow procedural matters, or asserting morally self-justifying political projects. A lack of moral reflection foments ignorance of the moral presuppositions and consequences of scholarship, and a broadly philosophical orientation towards ethics is a necessary corrective to this tendency of mitigating or marginalizing the moral voice of geography.

At the same time, I want this situated ethic to be suggestive, not conclusive. I want my work to be appropriated and deployed in a way that deepens our self-knowledge, de-ossifies our interpretations, and heightens our moral sensibilities. I try not to trade in totalizing narratives, and I am wary of theories offering a privileged, unique and complete understanding of any subject. I have not, therefore, set out to create a grand ethical system -- a mode of objective and universal reason that is binding on all persons in all times and places. Rather I am trying to articulate a partial and practical ethics -- a reasonable understanding of our moral responsibilities that will help guide our reflections and actions in the world. I am consequently as interested in informing moral deliberation as I am in delivering moral judgments, and my approach emphasizes distinctions over dichotomies, interpretation over deduction, dialogue over monologue, reflection over theorization.

Nor do I rely on mechanically applied methods for the deliverance of moral judgments. On the contrary, a situated ethic opens our methodological toolkit to a range of concepts, principles and methods. This creates the conditions for a plurality of possible moral judgments. While this introduces a degree of latitude for divergent interpretations of morality, it is not an invitation to relativism or nihilism. Recognizing a plurality of moral concepts and a legitimate range of ethical judgments does not prevent us from distinguishing better from worse accounts of our ethical obligations.

Finally, I do not believe that mine is the only or uniquely exemplary form of situated ethics. One of my root assumptions is the belief that a plurality of ethical theories *in dialogue* produce more wisdom than not. Moral understanding is like a gem; different perspectives illuminate different facets of the whole. A plurality of perspectives helps (in the long run) to deepen our moral sensibilities through separate and/or shared insights. Academic and popular voices that deride ethical judgments in favour of either an uncritical appreciation of difference, or the ethical self-sufficiency of identity politics are misinformed and irresponsible. Yet, particular moral understandings should not be so totalizing as to pretend to definitively answer ethical questions, nor should they obliterate the insights and contributions of other points-of-view. We need a conceptual language and map to navigate the world's moral complexity, a map that helps us make situated judgments about what is desirable in life, without falling prey to undiscriminating relativism or unsituated universalism, without sacrificing our discriminating judgement about what is right, good, just, or of value.

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