Introduction
Geographical engagement with social justice goes back three decades. There was a defining moment at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Boston in 1971, when David Harvey read a paper entitled “Social justice and spatial systems” (first published as Harvey, 1972), and it is worth a reminder of the conditions which would have to be fulfilled for “a just distribution justly arrived at” (Harvey, 1973, pages 116–117):

(1) The distribution of income should be such that (a) the needs of the population within each territory are met, (b) resources are so allocated to maximize interterritorial multiplier effects, and (c) extra resources are allocated to help overcome special difficulties stemming from the physical and social environment.

(2) The mechanisms (institutional, organizational, political, and economic) should be such that the prospects of the least advantaged territory are as great as they possibly can be.

Income was broadly conceived as some measure of command over society’s scarce resources. Prioritising the prospects of the least advantaged reflected the so-called difference principle central to the theory of justice recently set out by John Rawls (1971).

Harvey recognised that a more detailed examination of these principles would be required to build spatial theory around them. However, the development of human geography over the subsequent two decades revealed little progress in this direction, other than the welfare approach with its focus on distribution and the growing concern with racial and gender inequality, despite a massive accumulation of literature on social justice in other fields (Kymlicka, 1990). The Marxism which Harvey was about to embrace, and which was to captivate much of the discipline’s avant-garde, had little...
interest in the specification of social justice, so blatant was the injustice of capitalism taken to be, and so evident the superiority of socialism. And what might have been learned from the socialism actually practised, in Eastern Europe and China (and of course Cuba), was largely overlooked by those espousing radical geography.

So, when Harvey returned to social justice at book length twenty-five years on, his central question of “the just production of just geographical differences” (Harvey, 1996, page 5) was virtually the same as that of “the just distribution justly arrived at”.

However, the wording had changed significantly, to reflect the contemporary preoccupation with difference. So had a major source of inspiration: no longer a leading figure in liberal political philosophy but now an exponent of critical theory hostile to the distributive paradigm implicit in ‘territorial’ social justice—Iris Marion Young. The title of her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) is echoed in Harvey’s own *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*.

Harvey’s return to social justice coincided with an urge on the part of other geographers to do likewise (Smith, 1994). The scope of this movement is indicated in a collection of papers celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Harvey’s original book (Laws, 1994), and in a variety of other contributions (for example, Gleeson, 1996; Hay, 1995). Low and Gleeson (1998) share with Harvey the introduction of nature into a discourse hitherto confined to human aspects of the subject, reflecting increasing concern for environmental justice (Cutter, 1995). All this has taken place within a broader engagement with the interface of geography and ethics, or moral philosophy (Proctor and Smith, 1999; Smith, 1997a; 1998a; 2000a).

What are we to make of this quarter of a century, in terms of our understanding of social justice, territorial or otherwise? Or to pose a question with broader ethical reach: are we any nearer being able to specify a morally defensible spatial arrangement of human life? One of the most important revelations of this period of moral philosophising has been the interdependence of social justice and the good life (Smith, 1997b). As Michael Walzer (1994, page 24) puts it, we are distributing lives of a certain sort, and what counts as justice depends on what that ‘sort’ is. If we accept that the distinction between matters of justice and those of the good life “is not given by some moral dictionary, but evolves as a result of historic and cultural struggles” (Benhabib, 1992, page 75), then to the debate over alternative theories of social justice, which continues to trouble Harvey and others, must be added the deeper question of what constitutes a good way of living for humankind in all its diversity.

Enter, or reenter, the question of difference. A central issue in social justice is that of identifying those differences among persons and groups which are morally significant to the distribution of benefits and burdens. Such differences can include conceptions of justice and of the good. In recent years a politics of difference has emerged, to challenge ways in which people may be treated unfairly, on grounds of disability, ethnicity, gender, postcolonial status, sexual orientation, and the like: those whose experiences were excluded from the supposedly universal ‘we’ based of the particular world view of the Western, male, bourgeois subject (McDowell, 1995, page 285). Some saw demands for recognition of difference on the part of these ‘others’ as group identity replacing class interests: “Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle” (Fraser, 1995, page 68). Others responded that “the material effects of political economy are inextricably bound to culture” (Young, 1997, page 148). While the process of domination and oppression, as elaborated by Young (1990), is complex and multifaceted, the focus of debates on social justice certainly shifted in the direction of culture.
The claim for recognition itself may be considered a matter of justice, challenging the restrictive scope of the distributional paradigm. Preserving the integrity of individual and group identity may also be considered crucial to the good life. But such claims are often means to more material ends associated with economic and social equality. Thus, “the impulse to include difference is driven by a conviction that one’s identity as the member of a race, sex or linguistic culture should not disadvantage one in social life” (Sypnowich, 1993, page 106). Difference is simultaneously a source of inequality grounded in domination and oppression, and of solidarity manifest in struggle against injustice.

This dual significance of difference has been especially appreciated within feminism. Tension is also acknowledged between the risk of essentialism implicit in such overarching categories as ‘woman’, mobilised in opposition to gender inequality, and the acceptance of different experiences of being a woman (or whoever). The recognition of increasingly complex, multiple identities, has led some feminists to strategies for avoiding what Audrey Kobayashi (1997, page 6) describes as “the postmodern nightmare” of a world in which there is nothing but diversity. Limiting the scope of relevant difference raises the question of the extent to which persons are the same in morally significant ways. Resolving the tension between difference and sameness involves understanding that the rationale of the politics of difference is for those ‘others’ to become part of a ‘we’ which is a source of social unity (Sypnowich, 1993, pages 106 – 107), as a community or nation but potentially including all of humankind.

The focus on difference has thus broadened the scope of social justice, and drawn attention to the disadvantage of specific groups. But in the process there has been an erosion of the sense of human sameness, or close similarity, required to ground a broader egalitarian project. While recognition of salient forms of difference may have helped to counter oppressive aspects of a universalising modernism, some of the greatest struggles for social justice in recent history (for example, for black civil rights in the USA and against apartheid in South Africa) were more a case of the universalist notion of equal moral worth countering particular social constructions of difference. It is time to revisit some arguments for equality which have been subdued by preoccupation with difference.

This paper proceeds from recognition of human sameness, through needs and rights, to an egalitarian conception of (territorial) social justice. The Earth’s uneven resources endowment, a traditional disciplinary preoccupation, is viewed as morally arbitrary and hence an aspect of difference to be transcended. The argument concludes with some observations on moral motivation, asking why we should actively endorse social justice.

**Human sameness**

Any suggestion these days that there maybe such a thing as human nature attracts suspicion of essentialism. “Any definition of human nature is dangerous because it threatens to devalue or exclude some acceptable individual desires, cultural characteristics, or ways of life” (Young, 1990, page 36). However, there are increasing indications of dissatisfaction with this position, and its risk of relativism, for deciding what may be acceptable requires standards capable of transcending the here and now of specific individual, group, or local practices.

Terry Eagleton exemplifies the reaction. He is critical of a form of reductionism, “which drastically under-values what men and women have in common as natural, material creatures, foolishly suspects all talk of nature as insidiously mystifying, and overestimates the significance of cultural difference” (1996, page 14). Some differences certainly matter; however:
“Differences cannot fully flourish while men and women languish under forms of exploitation; and to combat those forms effectively implicates ideas of humanity which are necessarily universal. ... what different ethnic groups have in common socially and economically is finally more important than their cultural differences” (pages 121, 122).

Similar positions are argued by others, for example in the response of Norman Geras to the denial by Richard Rorty (1989) of any human nature. Geras accepts that a persuasive conception of human nature must accommodate particularity. But to the assertion that the common traits of human beings are not substantial enough to constitute a useful notion, he responds:

“they are susceptible to pain and humiliation, have the capacity for language and (in a large sense) poetry, have a sexual instinct, a sense of identity, integral beliefs—and then some other things too, like needs for nourishment and sleep, a capacity for laughter and for play, powers of reasoning and invention that are, by comparison with other terrestrial species, truly formidable” (Geras, 1995, page 66).

These are not only natural facts, but also of moral consequence.

Although the tendency of much contemporary human geography is to stress cultural differentiation, there are other views. For example, Yi-Fu Tuan recognises that the meaning of the good life varies greatly among cultures, but claims that we share things in common: “maternal tenderness, paternal pride, and that special quality of warmth between comrades engaged in a necessary but rewarding task” (1986, page 13). These are the kind of relationships of mutuality subsumed under the ethic of care, of which some feminists have made much in recent years. Joan Tronto (1993, page 162) stresses that “humans are not fully autonomous, but must always be understood in a condition of interdependence ... all humans need care”. As Tuan (1986, page 29) recognises, care is sharing: a type of behaviour which calls for an ability to repress the urgency of one’s appetite and to anticipate the needs of others—properties of sympathy and imagination arising from the essentially social rather than atomised nature of human life. For Robert Sack:

“the encouragement of different and diverse viewpoints should not obscure the fact that human beings have much in common. We live in a concrete material environment and we share basic biological, social, intellectual, and perhaps even spiritual capacities; we also share the capacity to reason. Losing sight of this basic reality comes from too great an emphasis on difference and diversity” (1997, page 4).

He is unhappy about moves which deny the existence of anything essential and foundational that can lead to shared positions.

Harvey (1996) similarly continues to reflect universalist aspirations, in turning the militant particularism of local protest into a radical politics with global ambition. He emphasises the importance of human similarity, rather than difference, to alliance formation between seemingly disparate groups, in reestablishing “a conception of social justice as something to be fought for as a key value within an ethics of political solidarity built across different places” (1996, page 360). In this he echoes feminists advocating a strategic form of essentialism to facilitate political practice (Kobayashi, 1997, page 5).

Thus, diverse voices challenge the contemporary preoccupation with difference and seek a more universal perspective without abandoning insights gained from poststructuralist critiques, and especially from awareness of the particularity of persons and places.

**Human needs**

Having established a foundation of human sameness, the next step is to consider human needs. The notion of need implies the moral strength of some authority external to the individual, as opposed to a subjective personal want or desire. Particular needs
are sometimes referred to as basic, to stress their urgency and thereby give them special moral force, for example in resource allocation and development planning. The relativist claim that human needs are contextual, specific to particular times, places, and cultures, may be countered by the universalist argument that all persons share the same ‘basic’ needs.

However, attempts to define universal needs reveal differences. For example, consider what are claimed to be context-independent requirements for human welfare, set by universal, historically constant, and culturally invariant needs created by human nature:

“Many of these needs are physiological: for food, shelter, rest, and so forth; other needs are psychological: for companionship, hope, the absence of horror and terror in one's life, and the like; yet other needs are social: for some order and predictability in one's society, for security, for some respect, and so on” (Kekes, 1994, page 49).

Compare this with the following more restrictive view:

“It is not controversial that human beings need adequate food, shelter and clothing appropriate to their climate, clean water and sanitation, and some parental and health care. When these basic needs are not met they become ill and often die prematurely. It is controversial whether human beings need companionship, education, politics and culture, or food for the spirit—for at least some long and not evidently stunted lives have been lived without these goods” (O'Neill, 1991, page 279).

In short, what is required for a human life is subject to different conceptions of the good. However, O'Neill points out that these issues do not have to be settled for discussion of hunger and destitution to proceed.

One way ahead is to define universal human needs in a minimal sense, related to immediate physical survival. However, the essential requirements for living day-to-day, as with the avoidance of illness or premature death, would hardly differ from those of any nonhuman creature. If the notion is that of human needs, then there should be something distinctively human about them. The argument for a broader definition, including such things as education and food for the spirit, rests on propositions concerning the distinctive nature of being human rather than any sentient creature.

Propositions about human nature are central to the theory of human need elaborated by Len Doyal and Ian Gough (1991, page 37). Our mammalian constitution shapes needs for such things as the food and warmth required to survive and maintain health, and our cognitive attitudes and experience of childhood shape needs for supportive and close relationships. Their hostility to relativism is expressed in the notion that all people share one obvious need: to avoid serious harm. This goes beyond failure to survive in a physical sense, to include impaired participation in the prevailing social milieu. From this follow two basic needs: for the physical health to continue living and functioning effectively, and for the personal autonomy or ability to make informed choices about what to do and how to do it in a given societal context. The actual need satisfiers, in the form of goods and services, may be culturally specific, as opposed to the universality of the basic needs themselves. This is similar to the approach adopted to poverty by Armartya Sen (1992), as absolute or universal in the sense of impairing people's capability to function, but relative with respect to the commodities required to alleviate it.

The basic needs perspective strengthens the argument from essentialism by adding attention to context. For example, Martha Nussbaum (1992, page 205) finds that “legitimate criticism of essentialism still leaves room for essentialism of a certain kind: for a historically sensitive account of the most basic human needs and human functionings”. She stresses that, although the capabilities approach advances cross-cultural norms, this universalism “derives support from a complex understanding of
cultures as sites of resistance and internal critique” (1998, page 770). Eagleton (1996, page 104) concludes that we cannot jettison essentialism because we want to know which needs are essential to humanity and which are not; needs essential to our survival and well-being can then become political criteria:

“any social order which denies such needs can be challenged on the grounds that it is denying our humanity, which is usually a stronger argument against it than the case that it is flouting our contingent cultural conventions.”

Even the exponent of the politics of difference, usually hostile to universalism, recognises the significance of this perspective: “If persons suffer material deprivation of basic needs for food, shelter, health care, and so on, then they cannot pursue lives of satisfying work, social participation, and expression” (Young, 1990, page 91).

Arguments about the extent of ‘and so on’ will continue as long as there are divergent views as to the good: on what a truly human life might be. The more detailed the specification of human needs, the more difficult it is to sustain a universal position. There is also the problem that satisfying a relatively generous conception of human needs may place such economic and political demands on actual societies as to be unrealistic.

**Human rights**

If certain things are needed to live a human life, it might be argued that all people everywhere should have them by right. If social justice is to prevail, the moral imperative often associated with rights can give strength to particular entitlements. However, the notion of rights raises difficult issues, with respect to what they are, how they should be prioritised, who bears them (and where), and who have the consequent obligations to ensure that the rights are fulfilled.

In his morally informed framework for development, John Friedmann (1992, page 10) adopts the modern foundations of human rights and citizen rights with the classical notion of human flourishing for a claim that every person is entitled to adequate material conditions of life and to be a politically active subject in their own community (similar to the criteria of Doyal and Gough, 1991). He points to the distinction between civil and political rights on the one hand and economic and social rights on the other in the United Nations’ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. This distinction is adopted by other advocates of a rights perspective (for example, Gewirth, 1994), who propose that rights to freedom and to well-being are necessary conditions for successful action and, as such, are universally valid.

A fundamental difficulty is that what may be labelled for simplicity as liberty rights and welfare rights can conflict. And the former may be easier to handle than the latter. With respect to liberty, every individual is a rights holder, while everyone is also obligated not to interfere with the liberty of others. The necessary institutional arrangements are based on laws for the specification and protection of the actual liberties to which people are entitled. However, although the bearers of welfare rights are clearly all people as individuals, it is not clear who is to meet the claims implied. For example, if all people have a right to the food, clothing, and shelter necessary to survive, or to other things that they may need in order to flourish, who is obliged to provide, and at what geographical scale? Is it other particular individuals or groups (for example, the family or community), or a local government, or the national state, or some international agency? It is these kinds of questions which make welfare rights so much more difficult than liberty rights to define, and to claim, even without regard to cost.

An ingenious resolution has been offered by James Sterba. He conceives the right to life as both a positive right (that is, to the satisfaction of a person’s basic needs required in order not to seriously endanger health or sanity), and as a negative right
which requires that everyone in a position to do so not interfere with a person's attempts to meet basic needs. This raises the question of whether persons with goods and resources surplus to their basic needs are justified in prohibiting others less well endowed from using them for their basic needs. He concludes:

“For most people their right to acquire the goods and resources necessary to satisfy their basic needs would have priority over any other person's property rights to surplus possessions” (Sterba, 1981, page 102).

And in this view he is not alone, for even that staunch defender of private property, John Locke, believed that all have a right to physical subsistence which overrides the property rights of others (Dunn, 1984, page 43). This has important implications for the institutions required for social justice, with its challenge to the class relations of capitalism. However, universal welfare rights remain a fragile basis for social justice in practice, and patently ineffective for most of the world's population, without the moral force, political will, and economic resources required for their fulfilment.

Uneven resource endowment
To recapitulate, all persons share natural characteristics, generating needs which must be satisfied to live a human life, the wherewithal for which might be claimed as a human right. This position has strong egalitarian implications, for if the natural characteristics, needs, and rights are universal in the sense of applying to everyone everywhere, there is no moral reason why some people in some places should be better supplied than others with sources of need satisfaction.

However, there is one obvious geographical reason: the uneven distribution of resources. Although the influence of this aspect of difference might be taken for granted, as part of the natural order, it is possible to claim that “the distribution of resources across the world is entirely fortuitous and that it is morally unacceptable that people's lot in life should be determined by this accidental feature” (Jones, 1994, page 167). Resources here can include those created by humankind, like the home and local infrastructure, as well as the natural environment. This links into a broader argument about the morally arbitrary character of important sources of human inequality, dependent as they are on the chance of birth, and on subsequent good or ill fortune (see Smith, 2000b). The argument from arbitrariness features prominently in the debate on liberal egalitarianism (for example, Barry, 1989; Rawls, 1971; Sandel, 1982; for a critical review see Anderson, 1999). Thus:

“So much of what people achieve is a matter of being in the right place at the right time, of having good luck in family, teachers, friends, and circumstances, that no one is in a strong position to take much credit for the way their lives turn out” (Baker, 1987, page 60).

The chance of birth in a particular place on the highly differentiated surface of resources carries no greater moral credit than being born male or female, black or white. And such initial advantage as arises from the place of good fortune is readily transferred to future generations, similarly devoid of moral justification. As for the possibility of the disadvantaged seeking better opportunities elsewhere, for most people the capacity significantly to change their place, from a poorly endowed to richly resourced location (or state), is as limited as it is to change their gender or skin pigmentation. Economic migrants are seldom welcome, and the description of the right to free movement as the civil right we are not ready for is as apt today as when the phrase was coined thirty years ago (Nett, 1971). Insofar as the uneven distribution of resources for human need satisfaction, and rights of access, reflect the boundaries of nation-states, this source of injustice is grounded in political geography.
Social justice
That some people in some places are better off than others elsewhere is an outcome of
geography as well as of history. If the forces creating these patterns of inequality
carried their own moral justification, there would be no problem of social or territorial
(in)justice. However, so powerful are the arguments for equality that “the central issue
in any theory of justice is the defensibility of unequal relations between people” (Barry,
1989, page 3). Rather than being based on conflicting ultimate values, all contemporary
theories of the just society have the same foundation: equality (Kymlicka, 1990,
pages 4–5). Thus, “the major ethical theories of social arrangements all share an
endorsement of equality in terms of some focal variable, even though the variables
that are selected are frequently very different between one theory and another” (Sen,
1992, page 3).

While there may be a temptation in these postmodern times to recognise the
common yet fuzzy ingredient of equality and leave it at that, accepting the incommen-
surability of the different criteria or variables, there is a more progressive approach to
social justice suggested in the foregoing sections of this paper. This is to establish a
minimally universal conception of the requirements for human well-being, based on a
‘thin’ theory of the good (Nussbaum, 1992), and ask: why should inequality prevail?
If there is no answer with moral conviction, and the existing situation is one of
inequality (among persons defined by class, gender, race, or territory), then an argu-
ment for social justice as equalisation follows (Smith, 1994, chapter 5).

It requires strong moral argument to defend inequality in living standards. While
the desert associated with making great efforts in the form of contributions to society,
perhaps overcoming particular obstacles, could carry special weight (as in Harvey’s
original formulation), even this capacity might be traced to the chance of genetic
dowment, environment, or socialisation. The defence of inequality with (perhaps)
the strongest moral conviction has been provided by Rawls’s difference principle. This
requires social and economic inequalities to be arranged so that they are “to the
greatest benefit of the least advantaged”, while his general conception of justice
requires all social primary goods (liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and
the bases of self-respect) to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution is
“to the advantage of the least favoured” (Rawls, 1971, pages 302–303). Even if the
place of good fortune is taken to undermine the moral credit for most if not all
individual achievement, the difference principle is a defensible concession to the
possibility that inequality can work to the advantage of everyone and especially the
poor. The most obvious case is that of rewarding the more efficient (individuals or
places), in order to increase aggregate production from which the poor reliably gain.

The continuing appeal of Rawls’s difference principle is reflected in contemporary
literature. For Doyal and Gough (1991, page 132):
“inequalities will be tolerated to the extent that they benefit the least well off through
leading to the provision of those goods and services necessary for the optimisation
of basic need-satisfaction”.

The disparities that arise from barriers to advancement and such benefits as inheritance
under capitalism lead Miller (1992, page 187) to require that inequality works in the
interests of the worst-off, his moral defence being “equality of opportunity, which every
partisan of social freedom would accept on adequate reflection”. And the conception of
alternative development advocated by Friedmann (1992), stressing the moral claims
of the disempowered poor, has a distinctly Rawlsian tone.

The crucial practical question is that of defining the object of distributive justice, to
be equalised subject to Rawls’s constraint. If it is to relate to living standards in some
sense, then the specification of these standards cannot be avoided. But if the definition
is grounded in a particular culture, or ‘thick’ conception of the good, this undermines its universality and the possibility of considering justice in distribution at a broad, even global, scale. Hence the attraction of an approach like that of Doyal and Gough (1991), with its focus on the distribution of what is required universally for people to avoid serious harm, or the emphasis of Nussbaum (1992) and Sen (1992) on maintaining human capabilities.

Of course, to equalise the wherewithal for avoiding serious harm on a global scale might leave little surplus to sustain local indulgences. In other words, given limits to global resources, satisfying everyone’s basic needs here and now, never mind provision for future generations, greatly limits the scope for inequality (Sterba, 1981; 1998, page 63). Such a strategy would have implications for the good life, which would exclude those excesses of luxury consumption currently enjoyed by a small minority of the world’s population at the expense of the more modest needs of the vast majority. The wider the spatial scope of (re)distribution, as well as the more generous its conception of need, the more severely egalitarian its consequences. And the more egalitarian the outcomes, the greater the limitations on individual or group conceptions of the good which require disproportionate shares of sources of need satisfaction. This is one way in which the interdependence of justice and the good life is clearly manifest.

It remains to consider the priority which should be given to equalisation with respect to human need satisfaction. As was noted above, the right to material well-being might conflict with other moral values such as liberty, which could include the right to recognition of a distinctive identity or culture. This is illustrated in Rawls’s theory, which adopts liberal convention in prioritising liberty. His first principle is that “Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all”, and this takes precedence over the second principle which specifies that inequalities are to be arranged to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and attached to offices and positions open to all under fair equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1971, page 302).

However, liberty does not have to be given priority over social and economic equality. A reformulation, which claims that liberal and Marxian perspectives on distributive justice may not be poles apart, proposes the following first priority:

“Everyone’s basic security and subsistence rights are to be met: that is, everyone’s physical integrity is to be respected and everyone is to be guaranteed a minimum level of material well-being including basic needs, i.e., those needs that must be met in order to remain a normal functioning human being” (Peffer, 1990, page 14). This takes precedence over a maximum system of equal basic liberties, equal opportunity, and an equal right to participate in social decisionmaking. A version of the difference principle is specified as: “Social and economic inequalities are to be justified if and only if they benefit the least advantaged ... but are not to exceed levels that will seriously undermine the equal worth of liberty or the good of self-respect”. While this formulation has some operational problems (Smith, 1994, pages 96–97), the priority given to economic and social security over liberty allows such hallowed tenets of liberalism as private property and freedom from imposed conceptions of the good to yield to the basic needs of the worst-off. This could be a morally superior response to the reality of the contemporary world, in which most people have some elementary liberties guaranteed under the law (thought not necessarily upheld in practice), while this is not true of rights to even the most basic means of subsistence. The question of what kind of liberty (including cultural integrity) some people in some places actually enjoy, if their major preoccupation in life is to survive rather than to flourish, might add weight to the prioritisation of satisfaction of material needs at some expense to individual liberty.
**Why should we care?**

In the preceding sections I have attempted to show that a persuasive conception of social justice can be constructed, from human sameness and basic needs, via the moral arbitrariness of the place of good fortune, to the equal distribution of the necessities for human life, constrained by the principle that some inequality may benefit the worst-off. Insofar as geographical space is one (important) dimension within which distribution takes place, and is evaluated, the outlines of territorial social justice are revealed.

However, none of this entails moral motivation, in the sense of inducing people to act in pursuit of a more equal world. Why should we care about those less fortunate than ourselves, viewed from our personal pinnacles on the highly uneven surface of human well-being? Why should we actively promote equalisation, when we ourselves along with our nearest and dearest are likely to be losers in the redistribution of resources? Why bother with what might appear to be little more than utopian idealism, in a world which seems impervious to change in conscious pursuit of the good?

These meta-ethical issues arise in any project which, from the perspective of the relatively advantaged parts of the world, raises the question of how to extend the spatial scope of beneficence (Smith, 1998b). Neither external forces nor something internal to the self, neither the abstract reason of intellectual persuasion nor the immediate experience of empathy with close people, seem sufficient in themselves. If there is an answer, it must have something to do with understanding what suffering actually means, arising from a combination of personal experience and the imaginative capacity to generalise from the experience of others. And this is likely to involve the kind of approach to social justice outlined here: recognition of human sameness, and the prioritisation of inequality over difference. Furthermore, how this perspective is gained may depend very much on where we are: on how knowledge of the lives of others is mediated by geographical space.

Pointers may be drawn from two writers with otherwise different perspectives, already featured in this paper. For Rorty there is such a thing as moral progress, which is in the direction of greater human solidarity:

> "feelings of solidarity are necessarily a matter of which similarities and dissimilarities strike us as salient... the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of ‘us’” (1989, page 192).

However, this is achieved not by inquiry but by the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers: solidarity is “made rather than found, produced in the course of history rather than recognized as an ahistorical fact” (Rorty, 1989, page 195).

Geras focuses on the experience of well-being in addition to suffering, in engendering a similar sense of solidarity:

> “basic codes of moral conduct and deliberations about what may or may not be rightly done relate in definite, if not always direct, ways to considerations of suffering—the avoidance and alleviation of it—and to the promotion and maintenance of well-being, in the largest sense. This is the type of consideration which nearly anyone can understand as the possible candidate for a compelling, action-guiding reason, because in the experience of everyone will be some kind of knowledge... of what suffering and well-being actually feel like” (1995, page 94).
He goes on:

“In any world where relations are not entirely face to face... and [in] a discussion about wide-ranging solidarity such as might reach people who are many and distant, the necessity of a generalizing moral rationality to work together with decent human sentiments would seem to be elementary” (Geras, 1995, page 98).

Hence the importance of combining the reason of universalising notions with the experiential basis of empathy which is likely to be local.

As to justice, Bryan Turner (1986, page 97) posits: “If there is a universal emotion it may well be a sense of outrage which emerges from our experience of injustice when the innocent are overwhelmed by superior forces”, a transcendent experience which cannot be relativised. This is something which can be understood, because humans have the imaginative capacity to put themselves in the place of others, as “the well-spring of morality” (Paul et al, 1994, page vii). Turner (1986, page 115) goes on to suggest that “although inequality constantly re-emerges in human societies we appear to have a ‘natural’ sense of fairness and justice which develop out of the reciprocity that determines the contours of everyday life.” Thus opposition and resistance to inequality seem as inevitable as inequality itself, knowledge of which is sufficient to motivate action—at least for some people in some places.

A similar line can be found in Robert Sack’s framework for understanding Homo geographicus. He suggests that transcending local partiality is part of growing up, of expanding horizons, of knowing more about the world and its peoples and the consequences of our actions. “A moral position must be justified to others on the basis of a less partial or impartial reason, not on self-interest, custom, or practice” (1997, page 6). Yet he wishes to take difference seriously: “Conversation with real others from particular, partial, situated contexts is an essential component of applying reason and moving to a less partial position” (1997, page 230). As understanding of our interrelated world widens, awareness of the implications of our actions provides a basis for their evaluation and a reason for action: a source of moral motivation. Stuart Corbridge (1998, page 37) similarly locates moral responsibility in an understanding of the way in which the unfortunate lives of distant strangers are bound up with our own, in the globalising world economy; “there are good reasons for attending to their needs and rights as fellow human beings in a manner that will make calls upon ‘our’ resources and entitlements.”

Such reasoning may be supported by Kant’s categorical imperative, but as a thought experiment in role reversal rather than merely an exercise in abstraction. Insofar as it can address real others, the categorical imperative “applies to maxims which are replete with the local, partial, conditional, and contextual” (Sack, 1997, page 232). Rawls’s view from behind the veil of ignorance as to people’s position in society invites a similar interpretation: his theory of justice “is most coherently interpreted as a moral structure founded on the equal concern of persons for each other as for themselves, a theory in which empathy with and care for others, as well as awareness of their differences, are crucial components” (Okin, 1989, page 248). Corbridge suggests that the difference principle is a powerful exposition of “there but for the grace of God go I”: “Rawls forces us to put ourselves in the position of those people who, for no good reason, are less well off than ourselves... the needs and rights of strangers could easily—and but for the ‘accident’ of birth, be the needs and rights of ourselves” (Corbridge, 1993, page 464; see also 1998, pages 45–46). No stronger moral motivation has yet been devised. Hence the invocation of such sentiments as: “if I were you”, “put yourself in my place”, “if the tables were turned”, and so on, in everyday moral discourse. The pity is that even this falls short of what is required for a political response, in the form of effective action.
Conclusion

There are natural facts about human sameness, from which moral conclusions can be drawn. Although these may lack the conviction of a mechanical model, they strongly suggest some form of equality as a moral ideal. Reducing existing inequalities to the point at which they are evidently in the interests of the worst-off is the moral imperative: the basis of territorial social justice. Elaborating theory something like this, that might claim to be moral truth, is the aspiration, and the way out of the postmodern moral maze. The challenge of converting moral conviction into political practice is beyond the scope of this paper, other than to provide a reminder, if such is required, that political projects without defensible moral foundations can take dangerous directions.

The last words are left to others:

“The postmodern dilemma is avoided as and when we accept that certain human needs and rights, at least, can be taken to be ‘universal’, and when we learn that in attending to these needs and rights we are not so much dictating to others as dictating to ourselves.”

Corbridge (1993, page 469)

“If there is no truth, there is no injustice. Morally and politically anything goes. There are appalling language games always in preparation somewhere, now as much as ever. They will be ‘played’ by those looking for the chance of it in deadly earnest. It remains to be shown that, amongst our defences against them, we have anything better than the concepts of a common humanity, of universal rights, and of reasoning together to try to discover how things are, in order to minimize avoidable suffering and injustice.”

Geras (1995, page 143)

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