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Place in Landscape Archaeology: A Western Philosophical Prelude

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Every body must be in a place. (Philoponus, *Aristotelis Physicorum*)

If there is no place thought about, there is no thought at all—no intelligible proposition will have been entertained. (Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*)

A philosophical approach to landscape archaeology must begin with a consideration of place: not as a geographical or cartographic entity but as a basic unit of lived experience. In what follows I trace out such an approach to place, which is here considered as an indispensable constituent of any landscape and its archaeology. In this way, I offer a distinctive inroad into landscape archaeology, one that is tempered with philosophical, and in particular phenomenological, analysis and description.

It is becoming increasingly clear that all events—human and nonhuman alike—*occur nowhere else than in place*. Each event has its own most appropriate, indeed unique, place—whether this is a microscopic spot where molecules collide or the mega-place of a galaxy. In between, there are the many places that suit the scale of human perception: hot tubs and houses, temples and tents, counties and countries. These constitute a veritable landscape of places that are at once situational and consolidating, challenging and orienting.

All such places—those that we can see in one sweep of the eye or traverse with our moving legs—anchor and locate even as they also resist and repel. More than this: they lend to their inhabitants (that is, people, and animals and things of many kinds) their own distinctive identities. Only ask *where* you are or have been, and I will be able to say much about *who* you are. As Carson McCullers puts it: “To know who you are, you have to have a place to come from” (McCullers 1967, cited in Basso 1996: 105). ¹

This is an extraordinary phenomenon, which needs much more acknowledgment than it has so far garnered in the controlling normative frameworks of Western science. In none of the many varieties of that science—certainly not in physics or biology, but not even in cartography or geography, ecology, or meteorology—does place receive its full due. Everywhere in Western thought, place counts for so very little, time and space for so very much. It is presumed, without further question, that time and space furnish the ultimate parameters of the animate and inanimate worlds. What is needed is a critical analysis of this dogma that allows us to grasp its limitations and to deconstruct its premises.
In the prelude I offer in this brief chapter, I trace out the philosophical roots of these premises in an effort to undo the claim that time and space are the primary dimensions of events. I consider this claim to be illusory on philosophical grounds alone. But it is also detrimental to an appreciation of the importance of place in human (and other animal) affairs. It blocks this appreciation in the name of “objectivity” and “truth.” But we must ask from the beginning: which objectivity, whose truth?

I do not want to suggest that a philosophical analysis of place should simply take the place of a scientific assessment of space and time. In a fuller account elsewhere (Casey 1997), I have shown that philosophers themselves laid the foundation for the “scientific” point of view that eliminated place from serious consideration in the West. But I want here to suggest that the cautionary tale I shall tell indicates ways in which a promising discipline such as landscape archaeology can benefit from a sensitivity to place and its ramified significance, whether in the present or in the twilight of human prehistory. It is of special pertinence to the emerging field of landscape archaeology, which has begun to focus on early human settlements in their place-specificity. Under the guise of landscape, it is coming to terms with place. For this reason, it behooves us to reflect on how place came to be neglected in Western philosophical thought, taken as an exemplary instance that may bring light to other areas of research.

The move to landscape archaeology which this volume explores—and whose recent development is deftly traced out by the editors of this volume in their Introduction (David and Thomas, Chapter 1, this volume)—is a welcome and timely event. It is welcome since it affirms an indispensable dimension of prehistoric life on earth: the place-based and place-oriented existence of early human settlement. It is timely insofar as it is consonant with the growing recognition of place in other disciplines at this historical moment: most notably, cultural anthropology, ecology and evolution, depth psychology, and philosophy (not coincidentally, all of which are represented to some degree in this volume). What all these fields share is a radical and salutary paradigm shift from the presumption that space in the early modern sense of the term—homogeneous, neutral, isotropic—is no longer suitable for the understanding and modeling of concrete human activity in the world. The obsession with space that arose with the triumph of Newtonian physics and its emulation in economics, empiricist philosophy, and associationist psychology has proven to be not just barren of insightful comprehension of human praxis. This praxis arises in particular places—those of the family, the neighborhood, the school, the church, the workplace, the hospital, the burial place—and its constrained calls for a very different model than those that imitate and internalize the abstractness and emptiness of pure space.

At the same time, the increasing acknowledgment of cultural plurality has brought with it a new awareness of place—the ways that different peoples relate to place, speaking about it differently and acting differently in regard to it. The “senses of place”—in the title of a widely cited book on the anthropology of place (Feld and Basso 1996)—are as diverse as the cultures that they infuse from below. To be in place in Aboriginal Australia is to be in a locale that bears little comparison to residing in Los Angeles, California. This does not mean, however, that there are not place variables that act to span different cultures: “lateral universals” in Merleau-Ponty’s suggestive term (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 120). These are structures that, however diversely specified in detail they may be, stay virtually the same overall across cultures—that continually surface and resurface around the known world.

Landscape archaeology is taking an equally radical but parallel step in the forefront of its research: finding the primacy of place not only in different cultural and geographical locations (as happens in cultural anthropology) but more particularly in earlier times—so early that no written records or oral traditions survive, only remnants of buildings or various artifacts. This is an audacious step that is as apt to revolutionize the field of archaeology, as have comparable steps in other leading disciplines. Here, too, lateral universals are likely to emerge as basic ways of coping with other humans in one’s own and other settlements, and with regional flora and fauna. All these parts of such life are beginning to be delineated with an eye to their placial properties. This is a laudable undertaking that inspires my enthusiasm as a philosopher who has concerned himself increasingly with gaining a more complete recognition of place in people’s experiences, especially as they are studied in various contemporary disciplines.

My premise is that place is central in the study of different cultures, past as well as present. Here, however, I restrict myself to one episode, that of the transition from space to place in modern Western philosophy. It is my conviction that much of this same transition (and sometimes this transition itself: when philosophy has had direct influence on other fields) is shared by other research disciplines, including landscape archaeology.
spelling out on their own terms. In the case of landscape archaeology, I must leave such explanation to others—in effect, all the authors in this volume—who write as specialists in this burgeoning and most resourceful field.

II

From the middle of the 17th century in Europe, space was regarded as infinite: an enormous unending empty totality. It is certainly true that something about space encourages this extreme view: namely, its encompassing character. We don’t need philosophers to tell us this: camping in New Mexico, I am reassuringly surrounded by the spatial spread of the local landscape at all times. Yet as I stay in that landscape for a while I notice something else happening, something that does not belong simply to the order of space as sheerly extended. This is my camp itself, the place I created on the hilltop where I first pitched my tent, built a fire, talked with friends, and gazed out on the landscape itself. This place was not just an aspect or part of the total space of the situation—even if it is true that it was located in that world-space as charted by cartography and geography. The place is unique: I could pitch the same tent, talk with the same fellow campers, and even (perhaps) have the same thoughts, but if all this occurred on a neighboring and even quite similar hill, the place would be experienced as different. And it would be different even if the sense of surrounding space remained much the same. A basic divergence between space and place thus arises even in a mundane circumstance such as camping.

To mark this divergence, many languages—certainly most European languages—distinguish between “place” and “space” (for example, lieu or endroit vs. espace; Platz vs. Raum; lugar vs. espacio, and so on). Nevertheless, the difference between space and place is one of the best-kept secrets in the history of Western thought. The putative hegemony of space—and of time, with which it was paired as constituting God’s “infinite sensoria” (Newton 1952: 370)—had everything to do with this repression of place. Especially in modern philosophy, where the very distinction came to be questioned and even discredited: one way of understanding modernity is by its very neglect of this distinction.

The ancient world knew otherwise—knew better. Indeed, the pre-modern (that is, more than two millennia before the modern era that begins in the 17th century) and the postmodern join forces in a common recognition of the importance of place, something one cannot afford to ignore in its very difference from space. For the ancient Greeks, what I like to call the Archtyian Axiom obtained: to be is to be in place; to be without place is not to be. Plato and Aristotle alike, their differences concerning place vs. space notwithstanding, both endorsed this axiom—as did such disparate thinkers as Gorgias and Zeno. Aristotle’s endorsement is most to the point: “everyone supposes that things that are are somewhere, because what is not is nowhere—where for instance is a goat-stage or a sphinx?” But beginning with a Neoplatonist such as Philoponus, who insisted on the difference between corporeal and spatial extension (the latter gesturing toward a space not congruent with, much less exhausted by, the bodies it contains), and continuing through a strong tendency in the Middle Ages to insist on the spatial infinity of God, we reach a point in the late Renaissance when a new axiom captivated philosophical (as well as scientific and theological) minds: to be is to be in space, where “space” meant something nonlocal and nonparticular, having little to do with exact location or close containment and everything to do with a vast homogeneous medium. Alexandre Koyré, the eminent philosopher of science, has aptly described this radical transformation of thought, this triumph of space over place, as a movement “from the closed world to the infinite universe.”

He observed that by the 17th century we find:

the substitution for the conception of the world as a finite and well-ordered whole, in which the spatial structure embodied a hierarchy of perfection and value, that of an indefinite or even infinite universe no longer united by natural subordination, but unified only by the identity of its ultimate and basic components and laws; and the replacement of the Aristotelian conception of space—a differentiated set of inner-worldly places—by that of Euclidean geometry—an essentially infinite and homogeneous extension—from now on considered as identical with the real space of the world. (Koyré 1957: vii)

In truth, many of the elements of the 17th century’s view of space had been postulated by ancient and medieval thinkers in the West. But it took the audacity of thinkers such as Newton in science and Locke and Leibniz in philosophy to propose explicitly that space is prior to place.

Before this could happen, Descartes placed the primacy of place in question by turning a skeptical light toward it. In Descartes’ decided-
longer be assumed to be “the first of all things” (Archytas). Descartes’ very equivocation is revealing, for it shows that “the father of modern philosophy” could not decide which term was more basic: space or place. Here, too, Descartes marks the turning point between the ancient and the modern worlds. Where place clearly figured first in the thinking of Greek philosophy—there was not yet a coherent concept of space, only a notion of the “boundless” (to apeiron)—its priority disappears in the rigors of Cartesian thought. He does not espouse an outright infinity of space, arguing instead that it is indefinitely extended. He retains a remarkably Aristotelian conception of place as “the surface immediately surrounding what is in the place.” This sense of place he calls “external,” since it fits around a given physical thing as its tight surround. “Internal” place, in contrast, has to do with volume and thus with spatial extension in three dimensions. As such, it is a model for space. However, Descartes is unwilling to generalize internal place to any “cosmic” dimension, that is, infinite space: at most, it possesses a “generic unity” that allows different bodies of the same volume to occupy it. When Descartes is driven to distinguish between “place” and “space” simpliciter, he refuses to prioritize space and place. To split the difference, he ascribes position to place and volume to space:

The difference between the terms “place” and “space” is that the former designates more explicitly the position, as opposed to the size or shape, while it is the size and shape that we are concentrating on when we talk of space... When we say that a thing is in a given place, all we mean is that it occupies such a position relative to other things; but when we go on to say that it fills up a given space or place, we mean in addition that it has precisely the size and shape of the space in question.

This seemingly innocent remark—including the revealingly equivocal expression “space or place”—harbors momentous consequences. Because in singling out position as intrinsic to place, Descartes departs from Aristotle after all and opens up an issue that will preoccupy the entire early modern period. This is the issue of location or, more exactly, “simple location” in Whitehead’s term for what is “the very foundation of the 17th-century scheme of nature” (Whitehead 1953: 58). Simple location encompasses both space and place—in whatever acceptance these terms assume during this foundational century—just as it bridges over the celestial views of space and time. For it is the view that any “bit of matter”—that is, any physical body—“is where it is, in a definite region of space, and throughout a definite finite duration of time, apart from any essential reference of the relations of that bit of matter to other regions of space and to other durations of time.” Put in the terms just discussed by Descartes, simple location is the view that position matters most in questions of place. The position is a simple location in a determinate region and thus a position relative to other occupants of that region—even if, as Whitehead stresses, that region itself is considered without reference to other regions. Others in the history of philosophy, most notably Theophrastus and Aquinas, had certainly noticed the crucial role of relative position in the determination of place. But position as such began to become thematic, and not exceptional, only in the second half of the 17th century, that is, after the publication of Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy in 1644. No longer confined to the determination of place in its uneasy equipoise with space as a matter of volume, it was soon to become an overriding conception of space itself in thinkers as diverse as Locke and Leibniz, one an arch-empiricist and the other an arch-rationalist.

John Locke, for his part, considered place and space alike in terms of measurable distance rather than any experiential quality: “each different distance is a different modification of space; and each idea of any different distance, or space, is a simple mode of this idea.” By concatenating particular distances, we reach the idea of “immensity,” or more vividly put, “the undistinguishable inane of infinite space” (Locke 1959 [1680]: 224). In contrast with infinite space, place is “nothing else but [the] relative position of anything.” So powerful is the idea of relative position that it comes to dominate what Locke has to say about space and place alike: “as in simple space, we consider the relation of distance between any two bodies or points; so in our idea of place, we consider the relation of distance betwixt anything, and any two or more points, which are considered as keeping the same distance one with another, and so considered as at rest.” Any intuitive difference between space and place—between, say, the capacious and the situated—here begins to dissolve in the acidic solution of purely relational positions. It follows that space triumphs over place, because it alone contains the total set of such positions.

Locke, the source of associationist psychology (the forebear of behaviorism), is representative of the early modern view that space trumps place at its own game: that is, location. If to be located...
location, then the nexus of all pertinent relations will be the
effective reality; and space, as the collection of all such relations, will 
be prior to place in those respects that are held to matter most. Not 
surprisingly, Leibniz, who was Locke’s successor in many ways, 
defined space as “that which comprehends all those places.”12 Space 
itself is defined by Leibniz as “an order of co-existences” (Leibniz 
1976: 89). Such an order is interpreted as “situation or distance,”13 
while situation is equivalent to relative position: another instance of 
the reduction of all spatial phenomena to simple location.

In this progressive dissolution of place as an independent variable 
in human experience, the coup de grace is delivered by Kant. 
Responding to Leibniz, Kant agrees that space is the order of 
co-existences, but he argues that space (and time) belong to 
individual human subjects, for whom space is a form of 
intuition. In mental intuition, however, there is no room for place, 
which Kant does not deign to discuss in his Critique of Pure 
Reason (first edition, 1781). Thus, by the end of the 18th century, 
the high point of modernist thought, place was no longer 
addressed by the leading philosophers: it had become, quite literally, 
beneath notice.

III

For the most part (with the notable exception of Kierkegaard), 
19th-century philosophers continued this pattern of neglect. 
The role of place, if it was noted at all, was pursued in other 
fields, though only as an accompaniment to supposedly more 
serious concerns. For example, Darwin saw clearly 
that for variation and selection to occur, members of a species had to 
become separated from one another in their respective places of habitation (for example, the Galápagos Islands) and to adapt successfully to the different environments characterizing these places. Even so, he did not thematize place as such: it was a crucial but unnamed variable in the evolutionary equation.

Twentieth-century philosophy witnessed a gradual re-appreciation of the power of place—its deferred 
dawning after centuries of marginalization, the return of the repressed as it were. The recognition of the value of place was intermittent, however. A curious pattern can be observed in which the acknowledgment of place comes late in the career of a given thinker. Foucault, for example, began to endorse the priority of space over time and history in his later essays and interviews, and by “space” he meant the location constituated by a given institution or set of historical practices—a location that is determined more definitively by social and political forces than by any geo-

essays explored place as “dwelling,” taken not as a 
domestic residence alone but as a locus for the event of 
Being to emerge in the guise of language. Deleuze 
and Guattari take up the difference between “striated” and “smooth” space—between Cartesian gridded 
space and an open-ended, porous, and unbounded place—and seek to uncover the historical and social 
roots of this difference. Irigaray compares the place in 
which the sexes intermingle as undoing the model of 
the “interval” (diastema) that had been a crux for 
the later Greeks and that keeps men and women at 
an untraversable distance. My own work examines the 
felt features of places by means of a phenomenolog-
ical description that is no longer eidetic or formal 
(as in Husserl) but based on concrete bodily experi-
eences of specific places. This work is much inspired 
by the earlier investigations of Merleau-Ponty (see 
Casey 1993; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Foucault 
and Merleau-Ponty 1962 [1945]).

Independent in provenance, these several 
efforts to reconsider space and place share a skep-
ticism regarding the very idea of infinite space that 
had obsessed the West since the late Renaissance 
and early modern era. In their diverse ways, they 
effect a deconstruction of this idea, claiming that 
it is not only hugely projective and ungrounded in human experience but that it has detrimental con-
sequences for the understanding and interpretation 
of this experience. In particular, the collusion 
between the notion of a neutral and homogeneous 
space and the presumptive neutrality and objectiv-
ity of the human sciences is called into question— 
perhaps most poignantly in the work of Foucault, 
who demonstrates that the institutional spaces 
of the neoclassical epoch of Enlightenment—the 
highly organized spaces of schools, hospitals, and 
prisons—are rife with social and political determi-
nations, undermining their putative rationality: a 
critique that rejoins that of Adorno and Horkheimer in The Dialectic of Enlightenment.

IV

And the implications of all this for landscape archaeology? My suspicion is that the belated but 
ongoing recognition of the power of place in phi-

lossophy—lost sight of in the early modern period 
of the West but now resurfacing in new and chal-
lenging ways—will offer a fruitful underpinning of the decisive turn to landscape in archaeology 
research. For it sanctions in advance and at the 
level of concrete description the indispensability of place in studies of the prehistoric world in its 
landscape dimensions. These dimensions are all
view of the remoteness in time of the settlements under scrutiny as well as the scattered remains that constitute the only surviving evidence of earlier life. Without the imagined reconstruction of the immediate and surrounding landscapes of these settlements, we are left with scant sense of how early human beings inhabited the earth in various locales, often distant from one another.

Conclusions

A landscape, then, is inconceivable without place. It is made up of a set of discrete places and is itself a place. As such, it is an instance of a placescape; it is part of what I like to call a “place-world.” By this I mean an historic or prehistoric world that is anchored in a given unique place—there in particular, nowhere else and certainly not in an abstract and universal space that tells us nothing about the character of a concrete locality, its layout as it bears on human habitation and in relation to the natural world in which it is situated. A focus on place, then, allows landscape studies of any kind—but especially those at stake in landscape archaeology—to tie down what would otherwise remain a matter of sheer speculation, of literally ungrounded thought. The description of place predicates helps make a lost landscape come alive again as a plausible scene of human settlement. This is a very significant step forward to assess the only surviving evidence of earlier life and the scattered remains that constitute the only surviving evidence of earlier life. Without the imagined reconstruction of the immediate and surrounding landscapes of these settlements, we are left with scant sense of how early human beings inhabited the earth in various locales, often distant from one another.

Notes

1. Basso (1996: 146) himself adds: “selfhood and placehood are completely intertwined.”
2. The statement attributed to Archytas by Simplicius is as follows: “All existing things are either in place or not without place” (as cited in Sambursky 1962: 37).
3. Physics 208 29–31. Plato's endorsement is at Timaeus 52b: “anything that is must needs be in some place and occupy some room . . . what is not somewhere in earth and heaven is nothing.” On Gorgias and Zeno, see Cornford (1957: 47–8).
4. See Alexandre Koyré (1957: passim). Curiously, however, Koyré tells only the last chapters of this long tale, those that bear on the Renaissance and early modern period. For a more complete account, the reader must consult such texts as

5. Descartes, 1985 [1644], I: 229. Descartes specifies that such a surface does not belong, strictly speaking, to the “surrounding body” but to “the boundary between the surrounding and surrounded bodies,” being in effect the “common surface” (ibid.). Concerning the question of infinity, article 26 of the same text states that “we should never enter into arguments about the infinite. Things in which we observe no limits—such as the extension of the world, the division of the parts of matter, the number of the stars, and so on—should instead be regarded as indefinite” (ibid.: 201). As Descartes makes clear in the next article, he prefers to reserve the term “infinite” for God; but if God is co-extensive with the extended universe, then surely it, too, is infinite.

6. “In reality the extension in length, breadth, and depth that constitutes a space is exactly the same as that which constitutes a body. The difference arises as follows: in the case of a body, we regard the extension as something particular . . . but in the case of a space, we attribute to the extension only a generic unity, so that when a new body comes to occupy the space, the extension of the space is reckoned not to change but to remain one and the same” (ibid.: 227).

7. Ibid.: 229. Note also Descartes' claim that “internal place is exactly the same as place” (ibid.).
8. Whitehead, 1953: 58. Cf. also p. 49 for a more elaborate alternative formulation. Whitehead remarks that “this concept of simple location is independent of the controversy between the absolutist and the relativist views of space or of time” (ibid.: 58).

9. Locke, 1959 [1680], I: 220. Locke italicizes “simple mode.” The importance of distance follows from Locke's instrumentalist conception of place: “this modification of distance we call place, being made by men for their common use . . . men consider and determine of this place by reference to those adjacent things which best served to their present purpose” (ibid.: 223).

10. Ibid.: 224. Locke says expressly that “we can have no idea of the place of the universe, though we can of all the parts of it” (ibid.).
11. The first statement occurs at ibid.: 225; the second is at p. 222.
12. Leibniz 1976 [1715]: 92, my italics. Cf. also the statement that “space is that, which results from places taken together” (ibid.).
13. Ibid.: 91. Leibniz underlines “situation.” At ibid.: 97, Leibniz speaks of space as “an order of
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