

Preface to the Korean edition of *Place and Experience*

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Place and Experience is the first of my books that investigates place or *topos* as a central concept of philosophical inquiry. The book represents the culmination of a long period of philosophical thinking, building on my earlier work on the philosophy of Donald Davidson (Davidson's work plays a central role in the book), and also on the topological reading of the thought of Martin Heidegger which, at that time of writing *Place and Experience*, I was still in the process of developing. Unlike *Heidegger's Topology*, which is the book that follows, *Place and Experience* is oriented towards a largely 'analytical' approach to the question of place, attempting to connect what is essentially a hermeneutical and phenomenological set of concerns (also deriving from poetic, literary and artistic sources), with ideas and arguments from the English-speaking analytical literature, including work in cognitive science, philosophy of action, and philosophy of mind.

Looking back on the book after what is now over ten years, there is little that I would change – certainly not concerning the book's central claims. Indeed, much of my work since can be understood as an articulation and further development, rather than entailing any substantial revision, of the ideas first set out in *Place and Experience*. In hindsight, however, there are some issues that would have benefitted from some additional elaboration or clarification.

One of these issues concerns the way place relates to space and time. Some readers have assumed that place is to be understood as more closely related to the first rather than the second. *Place and Experience* does give special emphasis to the *material* working-out of self. Such materiality cannot, be understood, however, as directing attention to the spatial alone – spatialization is always temporalization just as the reverse also holds. Similarly, while I have argued against the prioritization of time over space, I have been equally concerned to argue against the prioritization of space over time. Both have to be understood as appropriations of place, such that there is neither space nor time apart from place, while neither space nor time can be understood independently of one another.

Another issue that merits closer attention concerns the ethics and politics of place. *Place and Experience* touches on this, but does little more than that. Since then, I have attempted to take up the topic more directly, and in more detail – although the most complete treatment of the topic awaits the completion of the book, *Ethos and Topos*, on which I am currently working. I take the view, not surprisingly, that one cannot give any real content to ethics

unless one also takes explicit account of the placed character of human being; one cannot understand the political without also understanding the placed character of political action and engagement. Moreover, understanding such placedness leads us, not in the direction of any form of conservative or reactionary thinking, but rather towards an essentially *relational* ethics as well as a *pluralistic* politics. Elsewhere I have talked of this in terms of the way attentiveness to place involves an attentiveness to the essential complexity, indeterminacy, and questionability of our situatedness in the world – and this, of course, is something that is taken up, if all too briefly, in the final pages of *Place and Experience* through the notion of the *fragility* that attaches to place and to the human. Increasingly, it seems to me that understanding and recognising such fragility is fundamental to any form of humane or broadly ‘democratic’ politics, and essential to the possibility of ethical life.

One final issue that deserves comment relates to a possible objection. It has sometimes been put to me that the supposed significance I attach to place is a spurious consequence of the fact that existence always means existence *at some place*, but this means no more than having some spatio-temporal location, which does not imply that there is any special content or significance that can be attached to place as such. Inasmuch as places can have any character or identity of their own, it must derive, so it is claimed, from what is located in those places, whereas places themselves cannot have any genuine role in determining the identity of what is located within them. Such an objection already depends, however, on presupposing exactly the conception of place that *Place and Experience* contests. The idea of place as mere spatio-temporal location may be one way of thinking about place, but it is not the only way, nor, I would argue, is it the most fundamental. *Place and Experience* aims at a rethinking of the concept of place just as much as it is concerned with arguing for the significance of place in relation to identity and the self.

Although it can be read independently of my other books and essays, *Place and Experience* should indeed be seen as one part of the larger project of a ‘philosophical topography’ to which almost all of my work can be seen as contributing. My hope is thus that readers will not remain with *Place and Experience* alone, but will explore the ramifications of the ideas and arguments that appear there as they develop elsewhere – and not only in the explicit work I have done, and continue to do, on place, but also in relation to my work in philosophy of language, in hermeneutic theory, in aspects of the history of philosophy. The topographic approach for which I argue, and which my work aims to exemplify, is intended as a mode of philosophical thinking that involves a re-oriented conception of what philosophy itself might involve, and so, if *Place and Experience* is successful, then it ought to provide a point of entry, even if only partially, into such a different mode of philosophical engagement.

It is always a pleasure to have work translated into another language. The appearance of this translation is particularly pleasing, not only because it will enable *Place and Experience* to reach a wider audience, but because it also seems to be indicative of a particularly strong interest in topographic thinking within contemporary Korean scholarship. Perhaps the interest in place that is so strong in Korea is itself an expression of Korea's own sense of place – a sense of place that surely reflects, not only Korea's geographically significant location between the cultures of Japan and China, nor even the political cleavage that is evident in the division of the Korean peninsula, but also something of Korean culture itself, and the attentiveness to place within that culture. With the appearance of *Place and Experience* in Korean, I hope that I will have more opportunity to become better acquainted with such a Korean topographical sensibility.