

# Geography and Metaphysics: Revisiting Geography to Rethink Space, Place, and Human Perceptions

Dr. Hanumantharaju R\*

\*Faculty, Dept. of Geography GFGC, Pandavapura

**Citation:** Dr. Hanumantharaju R (2022), Geography and Metaphysics: Revisiting Geography to Rethink Space, Place, and Human Perceptions, Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 28(4), 460-464

*Doi:* 10.53555/kuey.v28i4.9450

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

To The intersection of geography and metaphysics provides a unique lens to explore how humans perceive space and place. While traditional geography focuses on spatial patterns and physical landscapes, a metaphysical approach allows for a deeper understanding of subjective experiences, cultural constructs, and the philosophical essence of space. This paper revisits geographic thought, examining its evolution from classical determinism to contemporary humanistic and phenomenological perspectives. Traditional geographic discourse has primarily focused on spatial distributions, physical landscapes, and human interactions, yet a deeper philosophical inquiry reveals that space and place are not merely physical entities but also conceptual and experiential dimensions shaped by human cognition. By integrating insights from philosophy, environmental perception, and spatial theory, we explore how human cognition, memory, and cultural identity shape the meaning of place. The study employs a qualitative methodological framework, drawing from philosophical texts, geographic theories, and cultural narratives to illustrate the dynamic and non-static nature of spatial understanding. The findings suggest that metaphysical geography has profound implications for urban planning, environmental ethics, and socio-political spaces, challenging us to rethink how we define and interact with place in an increasingly globalized world.

**Keywords:** Metaphysics of space, place perception, revisiting geography, spatial philosophy, humanistic geography, phenomenology, cultural landscapes.

## 1. Introduction

Geography has long been concerned with the spatial organization of physical and human environments. However, traditional approaches have often overlooked the subjective and metaphysical dimensions of space and place. The metaphysical study of geography asks fundamental questions: What is the nature of space? How do human perceptions shape our interaction with place? Revisiting geography from a philosophical perspective allows us to engage with these inquiries beyond empirical analysis.

Historically, geography was shaped by deterministic views, where physical landscapes dictated human behavior. Over time, humanistic and postmodern geographies challenged these rigid frameworks, emphasizing individual experience, cultural meaning, and social construction. This study aims to bridge geographic and metaphysical thought, illustrating how revisiting geography can provide deeper insights into the ever-evolving relationship between humans and their spatial surroundings.

This paper is structured into several sections: First, we explore key philosophical and geographical perspectives on space and place. Next, we outline a qualitative methodology that integrates interdisciplinary approaches. Finally, we discuss the implications of metaphysical geography in contemporary society, concluding with the significance of rethinking geography for future research.

## 2. Revisiting Geography: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives

### 2.1 Classical Geography and the Deterministic View

Classical geographical thought was deeply rooted in environmental determinism, a perspective that emphasized the direct influence of natural landscapes on human civilization, societal development, and

cultural evolution. Thinkers such as **Hippocrates**, in his work *Airs, Waters, Places*, argued that climate and topography shaped the temperament, behavior, and governance of societies. **Strabo**, a Greco-Roman geographer, elaborated on how geographical conditions influenced the prosperity and decline of civilizations, reinforcing the notion that human destiny was bound to environmental factors. Similarly, **Ibn Khaldun**, a medieval Arab historian, introduced the idea that geography influenced the rise and fall of empires, asserting that desert environments fostered resilience and strong leadership, while urbanization led to social decadence. These deterministic views aligned with the **Newtonian model of absolute space**, which treated space as a fixed, independent entity existing outside human experience. In this framework, geographical landscapes were seen as rigid determinants of human action rather than as dynamic and interactive spaces shaped by perception and cultural meaning.

This rigid determinism persisted well into the 19th and early 20th centuries, influencing theories of geopolitics and economic development. For instance, **Friedrich Ratzel's political geography** and **Ellsworth Huntington's climatic determinism** continued to reinforce the notion that geography constrained human potential. However, criticisms arose as deterministic perspectives failed to account for human agency, technological advancements, and cultural diversity in how people interacted with their environment. The shift from absolute space to **relative space**, as discussed by Einstein's theory of relativity and later geographical critiques, challenged the classical view of geography as a fixed backdrop to human activity. Instead, it paved the way for more fluid and interactive understandings of space, ultimately leading to the emergence of humanistic and postmodern geographical approaches.

## 2.2 Humanistic Geography and Phenomenology

The **20th century marked a departure from deterministic views**, giving rise to **humanistic geography**, which emphasized the subjective and experiential dimensions of space and place. Scholars such as **Yi-Fu Tuan (1977)** and **Edward Relph (1976)** critiqued the objective, quantitative approaches of earlier geographical traditions, arguing that geography should account for human emotions, memories, and personal attachments to places. Tuan's concept of **topophilia**—the deep emotional bond between people and places—challenged the reductionist view that locations are merely coordinates on a map. Instead, he argued that places are infused with meaning through personal and collective experiences. Similarly, Relph introduced the idea of **placelessness**, where rapid urbanization and homogenization erode the distinctiveness of places, leading to a loss of cultural identity and belonging.

Humanistic geography found strong intellectual support in **phenomenological philosophy**, particularly in the works of **Martin Heidegger**. In his seminal work *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger introduced the concept of **Dasein** (being-in-the-world), which suggests that human existence is always embedded within a spatial and temporal context. According to Heidegger, space is not an abstract void but a realm of meaning constructed through lived experience. This perspective influenced geographers to explore the **experiential and existential aspects of place**, highlighting how memory, identity, and emotions shape spatial perception. Humanistic geography provided a necessary counterpoint to the rigid structures of classical geography, advocating for a **place-centered** rather than a **space-centered** understanding of human-environment interactions. However, as society became more interconnected through globalization and technological advancements, humanistic approaches had to contend with more complex and fluid conceptualizations of space, as addressed by postmodern geographers.

## 2.3 Postmodern and Relational Geographies

The rise of **postmodern geography** in the late 20th century introduced a radical critique of traditional spatial concepts, shifting the focus from fixed locations to the **relational and socially constructed nature of space**. Thinkers such as **Michel Foucault**, **Henri Lefebvre**, and **Doreen Massey** argued that space is not a neutral container but is actively shaped by power structures, historical processes, and social interactions. Lefebvre's influential work, *The Production of Space* (1991), challenged the notion of absolute space by proposing a **triadic model: perceived space (physical environment), conceived space (abstract representations such as maps and plans), and lived space (subjective and cultural experiences of place)**. This framework illustrated how space is continuously produced and reproduced through everyday practices, political ideologies, and economic forces, making it a contested and dynamic entity rather than a static backdrop.

Doreen Massey expanded on these ideas by introducing the concept of **"a global sense of place"**, which rejected traditional, bounded notions of place in favor of a **relational perspective**. In her view, places are not isolated, self-contained entities but are constantly reshaped through migration, communication networks, and global economic flows. This perspective is evident in contemporary urban landscapes, where cities evolve through cultural hybridization and economic interconnectivity. Postmodern geography also engaged with issues of **spatial justice**, as explored by **David Harvey** and **Edward Soja**, highlighting how urban spaces are produced in ways that reinforce economic inequality and political exclusion. By **revisiting geography** through the postmodern lens, we recognize that **space and place are fluid, socially constructed, and politically charged**, requiring us to rethink traditional spatial categories and embrace more dynamic, intersectional approaches to understanding human-environment relationships.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a **qualitative, interdisciplinary approach** combining:

- **Philosophical analysis** of metaphysical concepts of space (Heidegger, Kant, Lefebvre)
- **Literary and historical case studies** to understand cultural perceptions of place
- **Thematic analysis** of humanistic and postmodern geography literature

Data is drawn from academic texts, cultural narratives, and spatial theory to illustrate how metaphysical interpretations of geography offer new insights into human-place interactions.

### 4. Findings and Discussions

#### 4.1 Space as a Lived Experience

Traditional geographic perspectives often treat space as an objective, external reality that exists independently of human perception. This perspective is rooted in Cartesian and Newtonian understandings of space, where the physical world is viewed as a fixed container within which human activities unfold. However, metaphysical geography challenges this notion by emphasizing the subjective and lived nature of space. **Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein (being-in-the-world)** suggests that humans do not passively exist in space but actively construct and interpret it through memory, emotions, and cultural identity. In this view, space is not an empty framework but a deeply personal and existential phenomenon shaped by human experience. Heidegger argues that our engagement with space is inherently relational—our sense of belonging, attachment, and movement through space is tied to our perceptions and interactions, making spatial reality dynamic rather than static. This approach aligns with phenomenological geography, which highlights how spaces are experienced and given meaning rather than simply being measured and categorized.

One of the most profound examples of space as a lived experience can be found in **indigenous spatial knowledge systems**, such as **Australian Aboriginal Songlines** and **Native American sacred landscapes**. These cultural traditions illustrate an intrinsic connection between land and identity, where space is understood not as an abstract entity but as a **repository of ancestral knowledge, spiritual narratives, and collective memory**. Aboriginal Songlines, for example, map landscapes through oral traditions, linking physical locations with spiritual and historical meanings. Similarly, Native American tribes view sacred lands as integral to their cultural identity and spiritual well-being. These perspectives challenge **Western Cartesian notions of space as a neutral and empty backdrop**, highlighting the importance of **relational and experiential approaches** in understanding human-environment interactions. By revisiting geography through metaphysical and indigenous lenses, we acknowledge that space is not merely occupied but actively lived, experienced, and imbued with meaning.

#### 4.2 The Fluidity of Place

The concept of **place** has traditionally been understood as a stable, bounded entity—something that can be precisely located on a map and categorized based on its physical and cultural attributes. However, postmodern geographers have challenged this fixed notion of place, emphasizing its **fluid, dynamic, and socially constructed** nature. **Doreen Massey's concept of a "global sense of place"** argues that places are not isolated or self-contained but are constantly being reshaped through **globalization, migration, economic transformations, and technological advancements**. Rather than seeing place as a static location with a single identity, Massey proposes that it is an ever-evolving entity shaped by multiple influences, narratives, and interactions. This fluidity becomes especially evident in rapidly changing urban environments, where cultural hybridization and economic ambitions continuously redefine place identity. The idea of place as a **relational construct** challenges conventional understandings and urges us to consider how various forces interact to create new spatial meanings over time.

A compelling example of this phenomenon is the **transformation of urban spaces**, as seen in cities like **Dubai and Shanghai**. Historically, these locations were small fishing villages or desert landscapes with relatively modest economic and cultural significance. However, due to strategic economic planning, globalization, and large-scale infrastructural projects, they have transformed into global metropolises, symbolizing modernity, technological innovation, and international trade. Dubai's skyline, characterized by futuristic architecture, artificial islands, and luxury developments, reflects an **engineered place identity** driven by economic ambitions and global tourism. Similarly, Shanghai's rapid urbanization and redevelopment have turned it into a hub of international finance and cultural exchange. These transformations demonstrate how **places are not fixed but are constantly evolving** based on economic policies, technological advancements, and shifting socio-political landscapes. Revisiting geography through a metaphysical lens highlights that place identity is never singular or static; instead, it is an ongoing process of negotiation and reinterpretation shaped by diverse forces.

### 4.3 Power, Politics, and the Geography of Exclusion

The production of space is not merely a neutral or technical process; it is inherently **political and shaped by power dynamics**. **Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey** argue that space is actively produced through **economic, political, and social structures**, often leading to patterns of exclusion, inequality, and displacement. Lefebvre's concept of "**the right to the city**" suggests that urban spaces are shaped by capitalist forces that prioritize economic interests over social inclusivity. Similarly, Harvey highlights how **gentrification, urban renewal projects, and real estate speculation** often result in the displacement of marginalized communities, reinforcing social inequalities. Wealthier groups and corporate developers frequently reshape urban spaces to serve commercial interests, while low-income residents are pushed to the periphery, losing access to essential resources and cultural heritage. The geography of exclusion is thus an intentional and structured process, where spatial arrangements reflect and perpetuate existing power hierarchies.

One of the most striking examples of the **politics of space** is seen in territorial conflicts and border disputes, such as the **Israel-Palestine conflict and the U.S.-Mexico border issue**. In these cases, space is not merely **geographical but deeply symbolic and existential**, tied to identity, history, and political struggles.

Example: **Borders and the Politics of Space**  
The **Israel-Palestine conflict** and the **U.S.-Mexico border** highlight how space is contested, shaped by historical grievances, power struggles, and geopolitical interests. Space, in such cases, is not merely geographical but deeply symbolic and existential.

## 5. Conclusion: Toward a New Understanding of Space and Place

Revisiting geography through a **metaphysical lens** provides a deeper and more nuanced understanding of **space and place** beyond their traditional physical and cartographic representations. Rather than viewing space as a neutral and passive container for human activities, this study emphasizes its **existential, cultural, and political dimensions**. The analysis reveals that **space is not merely an objective dimension but a lived and experienced reality**, shaped by human perception, emotions, and historical narratives. **Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein** and **indigenous spatial knowledge systems** challenge the conventional Western notion of absolute space, illustrating that space is **relational, subjective, and deeply tied to identity and meaning**. Similarly, the **fluidity of place** disrupts the idea that locations have fixed, unchanging identities. As postmodern geographers like **Doreen Massey** argue, places are **constantly reshaped through migration, globalization, and technological transformations**, making them dynamic and evolving entities rather than static geographical points. This realization forces us to move beyond deterministic and rigid spatial frameworks and embrace a more holistic and **experiential understanding of geography**.

Moreover, this study highlights that **the production of space is inherently political**, influenced by power struggles that either **reinforce inclusion or exclusion**. As demonstrated by **Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey**, urban spaces are often manipulated to serve economic and political interests, leading to patterns of **gentrification, segregation, and spatial marginalization**. The contested geographies of the **Israel-Palestine conflict and the U.S.-Mexico border** exemplify how space is **weaponized to enforce control, belonging, or exclusion**. These insights reinforce the need for a **transdisciplinary approach** to geography—one that integrates **philosophy, cultural studies, and social sciences** to address the complex relationships between **space, power, and human agency**. Future research should extend these ideas by **exploring digital and technological spaces**, such as **the metaverse and virtual realities**, which are increasingly reshaping how people experience and construct spatial identities in the digital age.

The study finds that:

- Space is not just an objective dimension but a lived and experienced reality.
- Place is fluid, shaped by memory, identity, and sociopolitical factors.
- The production of space involves power struggles, reinforcing inclusion or exclusion.

This research calls for a **transdisciplinary approach** that integrates geography with philosophy, cultural studies, and social sciences. Future studies should explore **technological spaces (metaverse, virtual realities)** and their implications for place-making in the digital age.

Understanding space and place through metaphysical geography is essential in a world facing rapid urbanization, displacement, and cultural homogenization. By rethinking geography, we gain deeper insights into how humans construct and navigate their spatial realities, shaping both individual experiences and collective identities.

---

### References

1. Harvey, D. (1989). *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Blackwell.
2. Heidegger, M. (1971). *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Harper & Row.
3. Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Blackwell.
4. Massey, D. (1994). *Space, Place and Gender*. Polity Press.
5. Relph, E. (1976). *Place and Placelessness*. Pion.
6. Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. University of Minnesota Press.
7. Foucault, M. (1986). *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*. *Diacritics*, 16(1), 22-27.
8. Ramachandra, N. U. "Traditional Knowledge, Challenges and the Need for Revival." *RES MILITARIS* 12.2 (2022): 1611-1619.