Mabini Review
Volume XV, No. 2, 2025

Polytechnic University of the Philippines

Placing the Good Life: Towards a Phenomenology of Place

Chloe Nicole D. Piamonte
Polytechnic University of the Philippines
cndpiamonte@pup.edu.ph

Submit to this journal
Other related articles
Announcements
Other PUP Journals

Article History:

Received: March 18, 2025
Accepted: April 24, 2025
Revised: May 13, 2025

How to Cite this paper:

Piamonte, Chloe Nicole D. "Placing the Good Life: Towards a Phenomenology of Place." *Mabini Review* 15, no. 2 (2025): 23–39. Accessed [Month Day, Year]. https://doi.org.

Other citation formats:

APA MLA

Placing the Good Life: Towards a Phenomenology of Place

Chloe Nicole D. Piamonte
Polytechnic University of the Philippines
Ateneo de Manila University
cndpiamonte@pup.edu.ph

Abstract

This paper stresses the *place* of a phenomenology of place in philosophical discussions on the constituents of what various philosophers designate as the *good life*. A phenomenological approach to place aids in addressing the taken-for-grantedness of our lifeworld and its implications—including but not limited to—questions on embodiment, freedom, and intersubjectivity. Phenomenology reveals the layers of meaning behind the varying dimensions of human experience that constitute our lived emplacement. In turn, a phenomenology of place examines the onset of a conscious and subjective interpretation of places, as well as the things and concepts surrounding them. Making sense of the importance of place and locality is integral to the meaning-making endeavor that humans bear on their shoulders, even when the inevitable transformation of the world at particular moments in time leads to placelessness. Since phenomenology unfolds the richness of our everyday life, this philosophical reflection contends that *placing* ourselves is crucial to construing a life well-lived that makes human flourishing possible.

Keywords: existential phenomenology, human geography, phenomenology, place

> *I express myself in expressing the world; in my effort to decipher the sacredness of the world, I explore my own.*
>
> —Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophie de la Volonté"

> *Humanity still can work together in building our common home.*
>
> —Pope Francis, "Laudato Si'"

INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology, as a philosophical way of construing things and experience, seeks to make sense of objects and lived experiences in the world *perspectivally* and provide a proper description of them that may hint at their essences. In this paper, the phenomenological method is sought to address the taken-for-grantedness of our lifeworld and its varied implications. Fused with

MABINI REVIEW | Volume XV, No. 2 (2025): pages 23-39
 | ISSN: 2012-2144 (Print) | ISSN: 2546-0757(Online)

geography, the study of the earth as the dwelling place of human beings, it seeks to understand how people live in relation to their place, space, and environments.[1] The aim is to unravel the essences constituting human emplacement in the world. Since phenomenology reveals the layers of meaning behind the varying dimensions of human experience that constitute our human dwelling on earth, the paper inquires whether there is any meaning or significance in the human beings' thrownness and entanglement in a geographical world. As such, a phenomenology of place examines the onset of a conscious and subjective interpretation of places, things, and concepts surrounding them. "Phenomenologically, place can be defined as *any environmental locus that draws human experiences, actions, and meanings together spatially and temporally.*"[2] Making sense of the importance of place and locality is integral to the meaning-making endeavor that humans bear on their shoulders, even when the inevitable transformation of the world sometimes leads to placelessness. In the same way that it is possible to ground oneself in the familiarity of a place that one inhabits, the likelihood of placelessness and alienation from the world that we are thrown upon is also considerable. Nonetheless, to be human is to discover and seize one's place. Since phenomenology unfolds the richness of our everyday life, this philosophical reflection imagines that placing ourselves is crucial to construing a life well-lived.

This essay is comprised of three major sections. The first, "What is a Phenomenology of Place?", sheds light on how a phenomenological approach to the study of place contributes to the plenitude of meaning attributed to place. It draws its suppositions from the philosophical vantage points of existential phenomenology and geography. The section also paves the way for a brief discussion of how the phenomenological account of place is significant to the current dialogues and trends in the field of philosophy and allied disciplines. The next section, "Places and Spatial Experiences", clarifies the meaning of place alongside making sense of people's spatial experiences. It briefly underlines the developments and transformations of places through time and the repercussions they bring to the way of life and spatial experiences of people occupying varied places. A brief narrative on the relevance of the essay to virtually all fields in the social sciences and place studies was also provided. It also encompasses discussion of places and spatial experiences in the local context. The succeeding section, "Emplacement and the Meaning-Making Project", underscores the implications of our lived emplacement,

1 David Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement: The Selected Writings of David Seamon* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 51.

2 Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement*, 21; emphasis mine.

which include subsections on embodiment, freedom, and intersubjectivity. This account should stress how a philosophical framework to the study of place that integrates a particularly phenomenological approach is substantial to dialogues about place. To end, the paper concludes with emphasis on why it is crucial to *place* ourselves in understanding human flourishing and transcendence.

WHAT IS THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF PLACE?

Phenomenology, considered as both a method and a philosophical viewpoint, favors the subjective and intentional forms of human experience. If rationality is the basis of why we call ourselves human, then phenomenology is the exploration of ourselves in our humanity.[3] Approaching objects and entities in the world that surrounds us phenomenologically means that we explain another kind that is grounded in *how things appear.*

The father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, popularized this philosophical tradition by saying that we should go back "to the things themselves!"—the motto of phenomenology. This is an invitation to disengage from what he calls the *natural attitude* and henceforth adopt a *phenomenological attitude* instead, and disclose our awareness towards an object where consciousness directs itself.[4] For Husserl, the natural attitude represents the *scientistic* basis for drawing the definition of an object or an experience.[5] This reliance on the scientistic convention comprises our assumptions, beliefs that bank on the existence of a mind, and construing a theory-dependent reality.[6] Husserl thinks that the natural attitude blurs, rather than reveals, the *essence* of a thing or our experience of it. A viewpoint grounded in the familiarity of the positive sciences. By contrast, the phenomenological attitude refers to the objects of knowledge as they appear or are given to consciousness. Thus, a phenomenologist refers to consciousness as always intentional, always directed towards an object outside of itself. And to avoid the naiveté of the natural attitude, a phenomenological attitude suspends or *brackets* the validity of how the natural attitude constitutes its object. This is a procedure that Husserl calls *epoché*.[7] It is through this that what Husserl construes as phenomenological reduction is made possible, to arrive at the essences of things or experiences

3 Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117.

4 Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology,* 122.

5 Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology,* trans. William Alston (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).

6 Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (USA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 46.

7 Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*.

by untying oneself from the natural standpoint. It is a departure from what the phenomenologist designates as the natural attitude that is diluted with the dependence on certainty, which permeates the conventions of the positive sciences. Phenomenology underscores the fact that our rationality is not only about logical and scientific reasoning, but also about intentionality, which guides us to gain insights into deriving the meaning of a part or whole of our experience. This means that phenomenology, as a philosophical method and viewpoint, employs an understanding that our consciousness is intentional—it is directed towards an object or experience outside of itself. In other words, *my consciousness* is always *consciousness of X.*

So much so, the phenomenology of place particularly reflects on what it means to know, experience, and live in a world comprised of various places. *My consciousness* is consciousness of a place or my experience of place. This method of philosophizing approaches the notion of place in a way that we get to unveil a descriptive meaning of place vis-à-vis understanding it as an important parcel of what constitutes the *good life.* As Edward Relph in his work, *Place and Placelessness,* remarkably writes, "To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to know *your* place."[8]

One of the common definitions we attribute to the notion of place is that it is a certain kind of location or a point in space, usually designated to be used or occupied by someone or something. This could be in the form of communal classics and old-style landscapes prior to the advent of the earlier stages of the machine age. Much has changed, and moving forward to the 20th century and up to the present, radiant cities, suburbs, downtowns, townscapes, among others, have been hurled and scattered to various locations in the world. The fast-paced modern world resulted in innovations and transformations of places demanded of professionals such as architects, engineers, and geographers, among others. New forms of architecture and modern urban design emerged, and the visual contexts of places that people are situated in introduced a whole new meaning to them. For instance, with the *corporatization* of the globe in the developed world, more than half of the population needs to live and stay in places where their work is located.[9] Some think that these urban constructions are usually seen as "unremarkable or unpleasant" because of their unforeseen departure from the evocative landscapes and urban designs of the past.[10] This new meaning that could be derived from the said changes often leads us to pessimism towards understanding our place in the world that exudes annihilation. In the late Pope

8 Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (UK: Pion Limited, 1976), 3.

9 Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

10 Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape*, 1.

Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si',* it has been pointed out that signs of growth over the centuries have not always led to the improvement of the quality of life and that "in some places…the privatization of certain spaces has restricted people's access to places of particular beauty."[11] In hindsight, the inevitable modern developments already implicitly tell us that these human activities transfiguring the nature of places gave little to no help in positing that the reflection on places is integral to human life.

> …"place" places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depths of his freedom and reality… The apparent importance of place, both functionally and existentially, has not been reflected in examinations of either the concept of place or the nature of the experience of place.[12]

Relph, as a geographer himself, contends that the likes of architects and planners only displayed a distinct lack of interest in it, even when their task can be well understood as "a development of a system of meaningful places that give form and structure to our experiences of the world."[13] Nonetheless, it is important to note that having a sense of place indicates a sturdy and affirmative faculty that links human beings to their world.[14] In geography, this insight is handled with serious consideration, as widely travelled geographers who have knowledge of the cosmos are careful observers of the ways of life of people in particular places.[15] They recognize the distinction between good and terrible settings. Adopting a Stoic ideal shaped by virtues, the starting point of geography is sensitive to the localized needs of people whose way of life must have a sense of the *good* that outlines a meaningful life contextualized in a place.

In line with the preceding discussion, a phenomenological study of place grounds the understanding that consciousness of place is an apparent part of reality and that our knowledge of it is a simple fact of human experience.[16] And since phenomenology favors the subject's perspectival taking of its intentional object, it sheds light on unexplored areas that the study of place should incorporate. To emphasize, a phenomenology of place specifically reflects on what it means to know, experience, act, and live in various places—it conjures

11 Franciscus, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican: Vatican Press, 2015), 31.

12 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 1.

13 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 3.

14 Relph, "Sense of Place," *Ten Geographic Ideas that Changed the World*, by Susan Hanson, 205-226 (USA: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 5.

15 Relph, "Sense of Place", 7.

16 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 4.

a subjective worldview that immerses the heart of *being* in its placeness. "A worldview," as stressed by Heidegger, "includes a view of life."[17] This worldview is implicated by the directedness of consciousness outside itself, which grounds the recognition of the materiality of being-in-the-world.

PLACES AND SPATIAL EXPERIENCES

Heidegger, at the onset of his contribution to the phenomenological enterprise, had been foreshadowing how integral place and spatial experiences are in construing the existential structures of *Dasein.* In *Being and Time,* he began pointing out how we should rid ourselves of the forgetfulness of the meaning of being to enable an inquiry into our everyday reality.[18] In philosophizing about *existence* phenomenologically—the starting point for existential-phenomenology—Heidegger lays down the question of being once again, with emphasis on inquiring *who* this being is that raises the question of being. He later divulged that this being, unlike mere entities or things that simply exist, is that being for whom existence is an issue.[19] And Dasein is "in its being this being is concerned about its very being."[20] As opposed to Husserl's phenomenological vantage point, Heidegger contends that it would be a mistake to employ the phenomenological reduction and bracketing to *being* or existence per se. Here, the existential phenomenologist argues that this being, unlike the traditional metaphysical conception of being—like Plato's forms, creation of God, among others—is temporal and is thrown, situated, or *placed* in the world. Heidegger maintains that *Dasein* is *in* the world, its existence founds thrownness—it is a being-in-the-world—it is through which that the interwovenness of Dasein to the world is to be assumed. The existence of Dasein has a local and historical dimension that makes its being-in-the-world possible. These key concepts of an earlier magnum opus set the ground for Heidegger's reflections on spatial experiences much later.

Heidegger goes on to write that a place, a locality, or a "dwelling… is the basic character of *being* in keeping with which mortals exist."[21] In his work "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," the German philosopher situated the

17 Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, ed. James Edie, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), 5.

18 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

19 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 10.

20 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 11.

21 Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, 143-161 (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 158.

concreteness of the notion of thrownness and being-in-the-world through inquiring about what it means to dwell.[22] The being of Dasein is then to be completely grasped via its local and its historical situation, founded in time and for the most part, place.

> … Heidegger's thinking points towards the understanding that 'geographical experience begins in places and reaches out across spaces to landscapes and regions of existence.' Dwelling may be rooted in a particular place, but *Dasein's* everyday experience of 'being-in-the-world' also involves negotiation with, and movement through, spaces: sites of openness, boundlessness, and potentiality.[23]

Identifying and reflecting upon one's humanized location is integral to illuminating the realities encompassing human identity and individuality, and human existence per se. Humans' spatial experiences should be reflected with rootedness to their perspectival view of their place and dwelling that is surrounded by a conglomerate of objects, people, and environments. And the phenomenological approach should be suitable in this regard.

This world that being is intertwined with ought to be presumed in the senses that space, place, and even placelessness are understood. For Relph, while a space constitutes a mere abstract or physical area lacking the particularities of human affairs, a place is one that is saturated with meaningful human experiences and cultural or social connections.[24] Unlike space, place is a more concrete, *humanized* location. Situatedness in a place is understanding concrete spaces as "an infinite void which serves as a receptacle for bodies."[25] It is the materialization of the ontological idea of the intersubjective aspect of our emplacement. Our concrete thrownness in the world manifests in our emplacement as bodies, and it is in a similar vein that we encounter our concrete others (this shall be discussed further in the succeeding sections). This takes part in the constitution of a place that makes our meaning-making project possible. Consequently, it is through the conception of place that placelessness—the environmental lack of individuality and emotional significance leading to a precarious alienation—becomes a considerable facet of the modern subject's being-in-the-world. That perhaps if it is possible to find our *place* in this world,

---

22 Heidegger", Building Dwelling Thinking," 143.

23 David Cooper, "The Poetics of Place and Space: Wordsworth, Norman Nicholson and the Lake District," *Literature Compass* 5, no. 4 (2008): 807-821.

24 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*.

25 Arian Acampado and Guiraldo Fernandez, Jr., "Philosophical Understanding of Space from the Visayan notion of Kahimtang," *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, vol. 7, no.1 (2019): 42-51.

placelessness—being *out of place* in one's apparent place—may also be the thing that awaits us as an end result. Placelessness as a negation of identifying oneself in a fixed place makes people susceptible to existential crises that limit human capacities for exercising freedom, a strong sense of self, and transcendence.

Accordingly, what do humanized locations look like in the present, considering their dramatic and unstoppable advancement that they attained in this modernly urbanized world? Relph says it is quite common that the newness brought by modernity to architecture, landscapes, and urban designs is perceived as "either uglified or destroyed meaning."[26] Additionally, "technological advances of the last 100 years, such as structural steel, commercial electricity and automobiles, are significant because they have made possible entirely new built-forms and ways of life".[27] These newly built forms of places are evident almost anywhere in the world. The emergence of the suburbs in America and the United Kingdom, for example, is an offshoot of the residential development brought by the invasive erection of corporations in the industrialized globe. The trend goes on with the scattered states of North America and other places such as Canada, resulting in uniform house styles occupied by virtually uniform middle-class families, and layouts designated as abhorrent "blandscapes".[28] Consequently, its varied forms also paved the way for the edifice of apartments, subdivisions, and townscapes. In the Philippines, similar changes also prevailed as the small *barangays* from the precolonial period evolved to the highly organized, massive communities governed by a localized political organization that remains today. Our meek rural beginnings adopted the transformation of the world brought by the unrelenting developments of industrialization alongside our historical situation.[29]

As such, it is also no longer surprising that subdivisions, downtowns, high-rise condominiums, and enormously gated villages are built in the scattered islands of the country. Strangely enough, it is pretty common that just a few blocks away from these fashionable neighborhoods, a distinct community of slum areas comprised of low-income to marginally poor families resides. Here, it is important to note that finding ourselves as part of a community is

26 Relph, *Modern Urban Landscape*, 2.

27 Relph, *Modern Urban Landscape*, 8.

28 Relph, *Modern Urban Landscape*, 172.

29 Emma Porio, "Barangay," *Archium Ateneo*, (2019): 1-5.

also an important consideration in understanding one's identity.[30] From this follows that spatial settings necessitate a critical recognition that may invoke professionals from architectural and urban design endeavors to contribute meaningfully to the construction of humanized locations that are conducive to individual flourishing.

Since places and aesthetic locations provide visual contexts to our day-to-day encounters in the world, a consideration of their historical actuality and what transpired then and now is integral to understanding why a phenomenological account of place unveils a distinctly construed subjective view to its populace. Needless to say, humanity knows its place in the world. Introducing phenomenological insights on places sets the theoretical ground for the practical conception of individual spatial experiences.

EMPLACEMENT AND THE MEANING-MAKING PROJECT

The meaning-making project of individual conscious beings is entrenched in the idea that we are spontaneously cast into the world, cogently implying that the rest is up to us. In an existentialist position, this is what *existence precedes essence* means. We exist first, and then later determine what sort of sense we shall attribute to our existence—a meaning-making project. Alongside this consideration, it is crucial that being cast into the world is addressed through contemplating our concrete emplacement in the world where our very existence is made possible. This denotes the necessity of a dialogue about our embodiment, freedom, and intersubjective relationships with other people. These three concepts are the immediate ideas and realities that surround our emplacement in the world. For instance, embodiment makes our existence apparent as it is easily accessible to any other embodied perceiving individual emplaced in the world. Secondly, freedom is a necessary entailment of being thrown into the world,

30 Emilio Ozaeta, "Towards an Understanding of Place: Place-making and Archetypal Structures in Sariaya and Quiapo." *Espasyo: Journal of Philippine Architecture and Allied,* no.2 (2010): 51-62. In this essay, Ozaeta demonstrates a deeper insight that place-making within a local setting reveals the experiential activity that occurs in a place. It focused on a theoretical backdrop of topoanalytic and psychoanalytic exploration of the structures of place, particularly in the localities of Quiapo, Manila, and Sariaya, Quezon. Parallel to this is the philosophical understanding of space in particular Visayan cultures. With the Visayan notion of *kahimtang,* people identify themselves with their dwelling based on how they construe their characteristics. "If a person is living in a big and grandiose house, it is said that the person living in it is rich (adunahan). If the person is living in a small house built of light materials, it is said that the person is poor (kabus)." See Arian Acampado and Guiraldo Fernandez, Jr., "Philosophical Understanding of Space from the Visayan notion of Kahimtang," *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research,* vol. 7, no.1 (2019): 42-51.

as we are the authors of our projects, and we are the ones who *will* make our conscious decisions. Lastly, intersubjectivity is an important aspect of existence that should aid in understanding our place in the world alongside other people. To dig deeper, what these have to do with our meaning-making project shall be discussed in the subsequent subsections.

Embodiment

The immediate evidence of our emplaced entanglement and experiences in the world is the body. We are generally familiar with the habitual movements and activities of our body in relation to the objects in the world that surround it. For instance, waking up in the morning naturally prompts one's body to proceed to the corner of the house where the light switch is, points a finger to turn it on, and the light is on—"the hand knows exactly where to go."[31] The geographer David Seamon, drawing from his understanding of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, calls this bodily intentionality as *body-subject.* It is defined as the "inherent capacity of the body to direct behaviors of the person intelligently, and thus function as a special kind of subject that expresses itself in a preconscious way usually described by such words as 'automatic,' 'habitual,' 'involuntary,' and 'mechanical.'".[32] In this regard:

> A phenomenological exploration of movement indicates that the body is intelligently active and, through this activity, efficiently transforms a person's needs into behaviors. If one is to move effectively to meet the requirements of everyday living, the body must have within its ken the required habitual behaviors… In this way, they rise above such mundane events as getting to places, finding things, performing basic gestures, and direct their creative attention to wider, more significant life dimensions.[33]

In relation to this, the body-subject with all its capacities develops other complex behaviors extending over time and space. One of which is a *body routine*—a set of integrated behaviors that sustain a particular task or aim, like washing dishes, tending to plants, or feeding a pet.[34] These are the kinds of tasks that do not really require thinking. It is all a routine. Relative to this, the time-space routine is "a set of habitual bodily behaviors that extend through a considerable portion of time."[35] Consider these two examples:

---

31 Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement*, 56.

32 Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement*, 57.

33 Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement*, 58.

34 Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement*, 59.

35 Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement*, 59.

> One group member described a morning routine that he followed practically every day except Sundays. He would be up at 7.30, make his bed, perform morning toilet, and be out of his house by eight. He would then walk to the corner café up the street, pick up the newspaper (which had to be the New York Times), order his usual fare (one scrambled egg, toast, and coffee), and stay there until nine, when he would walk to his nearby office. A second group member described a time-space routine that her grandmother followed: "She is always in a particular place at a particular time and usually doing a particular thing there." Between six and nine, for example, the grandmother would be working in the kitchen; between nine and twelve, sewing on the front porch.[36]

These instances indicate that the series of actions and behaviors of the body routines blend into the broader patterns rooted in the body-subject. For emphasis, these are routines that do not require thinking; we do not need to figure anything out. The morning routine unfolds, and it seems that what we are left to do is to follow it. Additionally, when the body-routine and time-space routines of an individual merge into a wider environmental whole, it becomes a *place-ballet*—"a fusion of many time-space routines and body-routines in place".[37] Its result may be something like the fast-paced morning rush hour of a Light Rail Train (LRT) station in Manila, which is mostly regularly crowded by students and workers alike. It could also be the vital environment of New York City's Greenwich Village, or the streets of Binondo Chinatown, or the lively night market of Raohe in Taiwan. In sum, a place ballet is where individual routines collide in terms of place.[38] Such is part of understanding the nature of human experience in the context of their surrounding world. Considering all this, if place unfolds the external bonds of our existence in the world, it should at the same time include the depths of our freedom as part of our reality.[39] We ought to go back into the thing itself, recognize the taken-for-grantedness of the everyday life, and examine the apparent importance of place existentially.

Freedom

Furthermore, what are we in a world that is spatial and localized? Philosophers had been inquiring about fundamental questions on being or existence, or simply, what does it mean to be? Our quest for meaning will always remain an issue for conscious body-subjects that are us. We are bound

36 Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement*, 59-60.

37 Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement*, 60.

38 See also Emilio Ozaeta, "Towards an Understanding of Space: Place-making and the Archetypal Structures in Sariaya and Quiapo," (2010), 51-62.

39 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 1.

to this meaning-making project as a necessary entailment of the reality of our freedom.[40] It is through a self-reflective act that we recognize this freedom along with its implications. That if we are condemned to be free, we are tasked to create our destiny. The same applies to the human desire to craft a place that they will find comfortable and that will be conducive to doing things that our conscious acts yield. A place-ballet should remain as it is if that is the kind of place similar to the description. Otherwise, architecture and urban planning, environmental considerations, and human geography should be accounted for in the lack of interest in reflecting upon the depths of the significance of place in human life. A place, a dwelling, must be something that makes the meaning-making project of an individual possible, instead of becoming an ignominious hindrance to it.

Considering once more Heidegger's notion of thrownness, his French counterpart, the existential phenomenologist Jean-Paul Sartre, contends that humans as thrown into the world cogently implies that we are free. Understanding that humans are inevitably free means we have the inherent capacity to create; this ability is what makes transcendence and meaning-making possible. However, the emplacement of an individual conscious being in our lifeworld should involve the gift of finding ourselves in a *place* that conjures belongingness, familiarity, and even nostalgia. Otherwise, our freedom to make conscious choices that craft a life that we can render as meaningful and worth living would be hindered by placelessness.

Intersubjectivity

"Places occur," writes Relph, "where [cultural] webs touch the earth and connect people to the world."[41] Pertinent to the preceding discussions, a place, once again, is saturated with meaningful human experiences involving cultural and social connections. Contrary to mere space, a place is a more concrete, *humanized* location. These humanized locations include building relationships and encountering other conscious body-subjects who are also thrown into a concrete geographical location in the world. Phenomenologists call this *intersubjectivity.* We relate to other people intersubjectively as they, too, are conscious subjects who are free and are capable of making conscious decisions relative to our meaning-making project.[42] In the language of Heidegger, we

40 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Sarah Richmond (New York: Washington Square Press, 2018).

41 Relph, "A Pragmatic Sense of Place," *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology* 20, no. 3 (2009): 24-31.

42 Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (UK: Cambridge University Press), 2008.

are inexorably bound to experience various interactions with conscious *others* as a logical entailment of our thrownness in the world. In Sartre's account, our consciousness of other people implies a recognition of our freedom and all its necessary implications since there is someone who "looks" at me.[43] We stare at our own freedom as a result of having other conscious subjects stare at us. In one way or another, the impact that others may have on our self-reflection imbues a recognition of the supremacy that comes along with our humanity. Knowing also that these concrete others, similar to our human capacities, are conscious and free, it is in this respect that we craft a meaningful life that does not in any way take their freedom and dignity away from them. It is through this consideration that we become conscious of our own freedom and that of others.[44] As the existentialist Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes, it is through our freedom that we *will* the freedom of others.[45]

More to the point, a particular place where individual routines collide together is called a place-ballet. It is in the solidity of such a humanized location where we find ourselves intersubjectively connected to other people. Part of the trajectory of being an ongoing project is spontaneously propelling ourselves towards something, including meaningfully running into concrete body-subjects who also inhabit the world. Building a life well-lived to cater to our human desires and needs ought to pay conscious consideration to other human persons who also aim for the same goals. It is through this act that a profound understanding of us in a shared place with other people is modelled.

CONCLUSION: PLACING THE GOOD LIFE

Recognizing oneself as a body-subject prompts conscious attention to the gestures comprising everyday life. It makes us think of planning out our actions and movements. Phenomenologically, it reclaims what was taken for granted. It is through the understanding of which that we manage to transcend beyond the automatic and reclaim our freedom towards everyday spaces, dwellings, and environments. From an existential standpoint, the good life may be constituted by freedom transcending itself. Since Socrates, we have already been told that an unexamined life is not worth living. It is with the same motivations that this phenomenological reflection is grounded upon.

43 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 347-408.

44 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (USA: Citadel Press, 1976), 21.

45 Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 30-31.

Recalling the ancient geniuses of the likes of Aristotle, the notion of the *good life* has been designated as the final goal of humans. It is in the attainment of the good life that we ultimately experience "what is best, noblest, and most pleasant."[46] He uses the Greek term *eudaimonia* to refer to this idea. Eudaimonia, commonly loosely translated as "happiness", is the best of all human goods as it means living well, doing well, and flourishing. It is the satisfaction of the ultimate necessity of the soul—a form of goodness that is of the highest degree.[47] Unifying this to the study of place, considering our lived emplacement and spatial experiences, is of prime importance to ground our goal of attaining the good life. To dwell means to live and to thrive.[48] As discussed in the prior sections of this essay, having been thrown into a particular geographical place in this world has a bundle of implications for understanding ourselves as conscious, embodied, free, and intersubjective individuals. By extension, this recognition implies that architecture, geography, and urban planning help construct a place where communal flourishing is enabled and that their role in our emplacement as a society is crucial. Those who work in policy-making should also acknowledge the *oughtness* of their professional hands in writing and implementing policies that are products of a reflective decision-making that aligns with public interest. Tapping a more general take, let us be reminded that this also calls for serious attention to our environmental situation. As Emi Naito writes, "The destruction of the environment affects everyone… The destruction of humankind's homeland is the destruction of humanity."[49] Considering that environmental problems are affairs of our everydayness, it is time to rethink a holistic approach to nature as it is part of how we draw meaning in our placeness in the world. By the same token, Francis' *Laudato Si'* is reminiscent of these needs. "There is also a need to protect those common areas, visual landmarks, and urban landscapes which increase our sense of belonging, of rootedness, of "feeling at home" within a city that includes us and brings us together."[50] And finally, to affirm all these through Heidegger, the philosopher contends that we dwell by building, and it is through building that we articulate meaning.[51]

---

46 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (USA: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), 10-13.

47 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 11.

48 See Joshua Jose Ocon, "Dwelling in Our Common Home: An Urban Existentialist Reading of the *Laudato Si'*," *THEORIA: The Academic Journal of the San Carlos Seminary Philosophy Department*, vol. VIII, no. 1 (2024): 79-92.

49 Emi Naito, "The Critique of Heideggerian Environmentalism on Ecological Feminism," *11th DLSU Arts Congress* (2018): 1-15, 2.

50 Franciscus, *Laudato Si'*, 112.

51 Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking."

This essay navigated through an array of discussions on subjective human actions and experiences drawn in any humanized location where meanings are shared together, both in their spatial and temporal aspects. Understanding our lived emplacement, our thrownness and givenness to a particular geographical location that is this planet, resonates with the Socratic conviction that one must "Know thyself." An individual's concrete place in the world is the immediate proof that one is a being-in-the-world. It is where we find ourselves amidst the automatism of everyday life; a body-subject collapsing to body-routines that in one way or another govern us temporally and spatially. It is where we find ourselves colliding with other body-subjects immersed in their own habitual sequences and constitute a place-ballet where one can identify with—the place-ballet that makes intersubjective relations possible in one humanized location. In a certain place, we "join human movements together into a larger group dynamic or to fragment individual movements into isolated spatial units that do not interact visually, acoustically, or bodily."[52] The sense of our lifeworld that was once taken for granted and normally goes unnoticed and unquestioned becomes more apparent. It is integral to human growth and transcendence to find our place in the world and avoid its ultimate negation as much as possible—placelessness that inhibits people from creating a meaningful sense of self, freedom to act, and transcendence. Taking for granted some aspects of what we are supposed to value, such as those covered by architectural and urban planning, geography, and environmentalism, precariously results in placelessness. As existential phenomenologists like Sartre would say, we are a project. One that is in a state of flux and continuity. Thus, the meaning-making capabilities of human beings necessitate an inclusion of reflecting upon place, space, and their concrete geographical thrownness in the world.

To be free is to be able to ground oneself in a humanized location out of our free, conscious actions. The Aristotelian outlook of achieving our ultimate goal in this plane of existence, *eudaimonia*—human flourishing and the good life, should be grounded on a place that makes this possible. Whether absurdity, anguish, angst, or despair—as existentialists call it—come in the way, the possibility of *living with it* while saying *yes* to life ought to be an inclusion in the potentialities of a place that conscious human beings inhabit. As Relph writes, "To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to know *your* place."[53]

52 Seamon and Gary Coates, "Toward a Phenomenology of Place and Place-Making: Interpreting Landscape, Lifeworld and Aesthetics," *Oz* 6 (1984): 1-9.

53 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 3; emphasis mine.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acampado, Arian, and Guiraldo, Jr. Fernandez. "Philosophical Understanding of Space from the Visayan Notion of Kahimtang." *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 7, no. 1 (2019): 42-51.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics.* Translated by C.D.C. Reeve. USA: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity.* Translated by Bernard Frechtman. USA: Citadel Press, 1976.

Cooper, David. "The Poetics of Place and Space: Wordsworth, Norman Nicholson and the Lake District." *Literature Compass* 5, no. 4 (2008): 807-821.

Franciscus. *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home.* Vatican: Vatican Press, 2015.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

Heidegger, Martin. "Building Dwelling Thinking." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, by Martin Heidegger, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 143-161. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

Heidegger, Martin. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology.* Edited by James Edie. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Vol. Revised Edition. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982.

Husserl, Edmund. *The Idea of Phenomenology.* Translated by William Alston. Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973.

Naito, Emi. "The Critique of Heideggerian Environmentalism on Ecological Feminism." *11th DLSU Arts Congress.* Manila: De La Salle University, 2018. 1-15.

Ocon, Joshua Jose. "Dwelling in our Common Home: An Urban Existentialist Reading of the *Laudato Si*'." *THEORIA: The Academic Journal of the San Carlos Seminary Philosophy Department* VII, no. 1 (2024): 79-92.

Ozaeta, Emilio. "Towards an Understanding of Place: Place-making and the Archetypal Structures in Sariaya and Quiapo." *Espasyo: Journal of Philippine Architecture and Allied Arts*, 2010: 51-62.

Porio, Emma. "Barangay." *Archium Ateneo*, 2019: 1-5.

Relph, Edward. "A Pragmatic Sense of Place." *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology* 20, no. 3 (2009): 24-31.

Relph, Edward. *Place and Placelessness.* UK: Pion Limited, 1976.

Relph, Edward. "Sense of Place." In *Ten Geographic Ideas that Changed the World*, by Susan Hanson, 205-226. USA: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Relph, Edward. *The Modern Urban Landscape.* New York: Routledge, 2016.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness.* Translated by Sarah Richmond. New York: Washington Square Press, 2018.

Seamon, David. *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement: The Selected Writings of David Seamon.* New York: Routledge, 2023.

Seamon, Gary Coates & David. "Toward a Phenomenology of Place and Place-Making: Interpreting Landscape, Lifeworld and Aesthetics." *Oz* 6 (1984): 1-9.

Sokolowski, Robert. *Introduction to Phenomenology.* UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Sokolowski, Robert. "Phenomenology of Friendship." *The Review of Metaphysics* 55 (March 2002): 451-470.

Sokolowski, Robert. *Phenomenology of the Human Person.* UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Zahavi, Dan. *Husserl's Phenomenology.* USA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chloe Nicole D. Piamonte, M.A., teaches at the Humanities and Philosophy department of PUP Manila and serves as the Chief of Social Inclusivity Studies in the same university. She also holds a part-time Lecturer position at the Philosophy Department of the Ateneo de Manila University. Her recent publication, "A Phenomenology of Illness: The Lived Body, Health, and the Other" (January 2025), was published in Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy. Among her interests, informed by her orientation from existential phenomenology, are phenomenology of place, critical phenomenology, gender and race studies, and Filipino Philosophy.