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Fences, Walls and Maps: Forms of Historical Space

11.1. Two conceptions of space and time

In philosophy, space and time are often conceived of as *Kantian* conditions of possibility. Kant argued in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787) that they prestructure our experience. They are not themselves objects, but they preform our perception of objects. This conception of space and time has informed philosophical accounts of how the human mind works when engaged in natural sciences and mathematics (or at least *modern* science and mathematics; as far as I know, in contemporary physics space and time would not be regarded as independent conditions or as conditions that have to do with the human mind). Before we can study the objects and laws of nature, and before we can formalize these laws, we have to presuppose the categories of space and time as an *a priori*.

The space and time I will be concerned with in this chapter, however, have little to do with these abstract, universal and ahistorical concepts. Following the phenomenological tradition, the scientific way of looking at the world is not taken for granted and is shown to be problematic when applied to all human activities and reflection, that is, when it is used outside the language game of modern science. In the first part of this book I have questioned the practice of moral status ascription as a moral science, according to which moral status is ascribed to objects after examination of their properties. In my attempt to go beyond the ‘dissection theatre’ of moral status science, I have explored a different, relational approach to moral status. Moreover, in the preceding chapters I have not examined the conditions of possibility of *scientific* knowledge of moral status, but the conditions of possibility of *any* knowledge of moral status, especially common, everyday experience of moral
status and everyday moral practices of moral status ascription. The space and time that prestructure this kind of experience and practice, then, are not the space and time of mathematics or physics, but what we may call ‘historical space’: a form of space that is the materialization and condition of possibility of a particular way of seeing and doing, a particular form of life which developed throughout history, which is open to interpretation, and which profoundly shapes our thinking – including our thinking about moral status. What I hope to introduce and briefly examine here are patterns of moral geography, in particular moral status geography: meaningful patterns of ‘moral status doing’ that form space and are formed by space. What these forms of historical space reveal and make possible is not (only) the work of the mathematician, scientist or philosopher, but the perception and praxis of all people, including farmers and traders, for instance. Without offering a comprehensive description of all moral–geographical patterns, it is instructive to discuss some of them, in particular those relevant to moral status ascription.

First I will offer a brief discussion of the relation between culture and space, which will reveal modern thinking as a form of distancing. I will put concepts such as earth, land, territory, universe, globe and network within a history of distancing. In the next section I will further develop this interpretation and turn to a particular condition of possibility of major importance that continues to prestructure our thinking about moral status: the city–countryside–wilderness pattern. I will attempt to describe this significant moral–geographical structure in order to show how moral status ascription and the moral distinctions that come with it are entangled with the ways we have structured our space, that is, they are made possible and shaped by the way humans have lived and the way they have perceived and treated others – humans and non-humans. In the last section I will expand this analysis by discussing the earth-space pattern and show its implications for how we think about moral status.

Hence, by reconnecting them to their historical–geographical soil, this chapter shows that moral distinctions are living distinctions. Moral status becomes historicized and localized.

11.2. Cultures and space

We are used to thinking of the relation between culture and space as a contingent one. In modernity we separate thinking (the mental, belonging to the ‘inner realm’) from the ‘outer’ domain, the material