

Prof. Dr. **Jeff Malpas**, Emeritus Distinguished Professor at the University of Tasmania, Australia

Growing up in Auckland, New Zealand, and completing his undergraduate work at the University of Auckland in both Philosophy and History, Jeff Malpas undertook graduate study at the Australian National University from 1982-1986 under the supervision of Jack Smart and Philip Pettit. Already at Auckland, and then later at the ANU, Malpas had made the acquaintance of Richard Rorty (then a fellow in the ANU's Humanities Research Centre) and the connection was indicative of the character of Malpas' work, like Rorty's, in spanning both analytic and continental thinking. Malpas' dissertation was on the work of Donald Davidson (with whom Rorty was closely associated), but it also drew on hermeneutic thinking, primarily that of Heidegger and Gadamer. In 1985, Malpas took up a position as a tutor at the University of New England in New South Wales remaining there until 1989 when he moved to Murdoch University in Western Australia. Although taking on a significant administrative role in his time at Murdoch, Malpas published his first book in 1992, with Cambridge University Press, titled *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning*. Drawing on his graduate work, the book explored the holistic and hermeneutical elements in Davidson's thinking on truth and interpretation, explicitly connecting Davidson with Gadamer and Heidegger—becoming not only one of the very first monographs on Davidson, but also one of the first to argue, in detailed fashion, for a connection between Davidson and Heidegger as well as Gadamer. Davidson had read the book in draft recommending its publication to Cambridge and Malpas visited Davidson regularly from 1994 until Davidson's death in 2003.

A key element in Malpas' approach in this first book was the connection between the Davidsonian commitment to holism (which Malpas argued was inseparable from Davidson's so-called "externalism") and what Malpas there terms "localism"—the latter being the idea that the holistic structure of meaning (or of the "mental" more broadly) is necessarily worked out through specific bounded domains or "localities". In other words, the holistic (or relational) structure of meaning does not entail the simultaneous integration of content but instead such integration is always worked out dynamically and in piecemeal fashion. Tied to this emphasis on localism was the further idea that the working-out of content was tied to the active engagement of speakers and agents in their immediate environments—Davidson's externalism was thus directly connected to a similar form of localisation.

The idea of "localism" as a necessary element in any holistic or relational account is central to the development of Malpas' idea of philosophical topography or topology—though with the idea of the "local" being taken up in the idea of "place" or *topos*. The focus on place has been the central element in Malpas' work since the publication of his 1999 book *Place and Experience* (originally with Cambridge University Press, and in a new and revised edition with Routledge in

2018) and it has opened up into engagements that extend well beyond philosophy alone—including in architecture, art, communication, ecology, geography, medicine, and sociology.

Malpas spent 1997-1998 at UC Berkeley, and then, with the support of both Davidson and Gadamer, as a Humboldt Research Fellow at Heidelberg University. In early 1999, he went from Heidelberg to take up the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania. His time in Tasmania has seen Malpas even more closely involved with issues of place and topology—the very character of the island reinforcing both the engagement with place and the interdisciplinary character of that engagement.

Malpas' topological or topographical approach (the two terms being used more or less interchangeably in his work) has a direct application in his reading of hermeneutics. Malpas' claim is that what characterises twentieth-century hermeneutic thinking is the fundamental insight that, far from being a barrier to the possibility of knowledge or understanding, situatedness or being-placed is what makes it possible. Moreover, Malpas also argues for place and being-placed as *sui generis* notions that are therefore not reducible to, even though they are connected with, the ideas of space and time. Space and time are themselves argued to be derivative of or embedded in place. Adopting a position that is strongly resonant with contemporary ideas of extended cognition, Malpas argues for a view of self and mind as topologically or topographical shaped and so as inextricably bound to the environmental contexts in which agents are situated.

The emphasis on place, and so also on the ideas of topology or topography, is something Malpas takes directly from literary sources no less than philosophical, as well as drawing on the empirical scientific literature. But Malpas also reads Heidegger's work as centrally oriented to the topological – the very idea of topology being taken from Heidegger's characterization of his own thinking as taking the form of a "topology of being" (*Topologies des Seyns*). The topological reading of Heidegger has been developed by Malpas in *Heidegger's Topology* (MIT, 2006) as well as in subsequent volumes in which the Heidegger's work is explored alongside other thinkers and in relation to a range of themes and domains – works such as *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place* (MIT, 2012), *Rethinking Dwelling* (Bloomsbury 2021) and *In the Brightness of Place* (SUNY, in press, 2022). In 2021, Malpas also published a short volume, in collaboration with the poet Kenneth White, titled *The Fundamental Field* (with Edinburgh University Press), that dealt with issues of place, poetry and thought in White's work whilst also drawing on Heidegger's.

A large part of Malpas' scholarly work, and not only the volume with White, has involved collaborations with others both in co-authored publications and in edited volumes. He has edited or co-edited some 25 volumes, including key works in hermeneutics such as *Gadamer's Century* (with Ulrich Arnsward and Jens Kertschner, MIT 2002) and *Consequences of Hermeneutics* (with Santiago Zabala, Northwestern University Press, 2010), and the *Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics* (with Hans-Helmuth Gander, Routledge, 2015), as well as the influential volume, with Steven Crowell, *Transcendental Heidegger* (Stanford University Press, 2007). His work on failure with Gary Wickham (and more recently Keith Jacobs) has been important in some sociological circles. He has also collaborated with architects and artists on a variety of projects and publications.

While at Murdoch University, Malpas was already in collaboration with Andrew Brennan, then Professor of Philosophy at the neighbouring University of Western of Australia, in work in organisational and public ethics. Malpas established the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Ethics soon after his arrival in Tasmania in 1999, and the Centre ran successfully for ten years before it was moved away from Philosophy, renamed, and later disbanded. Malpas was heavily involved in public comment on ethical issues in the Tasmanian and Australian media, sometimes in continuing collaboration with Brennan, developing his own individual approach to ethics in public life and in organisation environments that draws heavily on hermeneutic thinking along with Malpas' topological-topographical approach. Working with Sir Max Bingham, previously Tasmanian Attorney-General and a key figure in anti-corruption reform in Queensland during the 1980s and 1990s, Malpas was influential in discussions that led to the establishment of the Tasmanian Integrity Commission in 2009 (although the Commission took a different form than that recommended by Bingham and Malpas).

In 2012, Malpas's work was recognised through the conferral of the title Distinguished Professor by the University of Tasmania. Currently Malpas, is Emeritus Distinguished Professor at the University of Tasmania (since the end of 2018) and is also Honorary Professor at the University of Queensland. He has held positions as Distinguished Honorary Professor at La Trobe University and Adjunct Professor in Architecture at RMIT University in Melbourne. For a time, he was also Professor of Philosophy in Architecture at the University of Tasmania. Malpas has been a regular visitor at universities in the United States and Europe, especially in Germany (where he has been a visitor in Munich and Freiburg on several occasions) and Scandinavia (where he has had a close association with the University of Uppsala). A Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Malpas is also a Distinguished Fellow of the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows and is currently Vice-President of the Association.