

WILLIAM DELANEY

Prevention Research Center
Berkeley, CA 94704

APPLYING HEIDEGGER

SUMMARY *Hubert Dreyfus has spent his life digging away, asking questions, trying to make sense out of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Kierkegaard. He has redefined the subtlety of human skills, battled the artificial intelligence people, and built a community of dedicated former students and fellow applied philosophers who are critiquing the West at its technological roots. He contends that within Heidegger's work are ideas of immense importance for our age.*

The bell sounds in the campanile, sending tiny percussions across the Berkeley campus. It's 4:00 PM. My series of interviews with Hubert Dreyfus of the University of California at Berkeley philosophy department are finished. Dreyfus invites me to see his house and meet his family. We're off in his 1970 kelly green Karmen Ghia, top down; the blue sky blazes above. The undersized German engine growls its way up the snaky road into the Berkeley hills. Dreyfus sports dark shades and a windbreaker. He is shifting gears and talking a mile a minute, . . . what else, but philosophy? It's Descartes on the downshift, Kant on the curve, Husserl through the rolling stop, and Wittgenstein as the Eucalyptus rush past overhead.

Dreyfus's home clings to a steep hill and looks out over the bay which today has a hazy blue steel cast to it. Genevieve, Dreyfus's French wife, is doing the taxes when we arrive. She does them with such fine precision that their accountant has offered her a job.

Moments later we're at the park for Dreyfus's nightly game with Lola, the family bilingual pooch and famed infielder. I'm at bat, a job usually reserved for Stephen, Dreyfus's son who is away at prep school in the East. Dreyfus throws the tennis ball underhand, fast. I swing and foul-tip a few. I sense a competitiveness in him. Lola is total absorption. She's both catcher and scampering fielder. Tonight, Gabrielle, Dreyfus's 12-year-old daughter, has accompanied us and cheers on Lola. She counsels me that if I'm interviewing her Dad I should know two things: after 22 years he still gets lost driving in the Berkeley hills, and he tells corny jokes. She tells me one. I agree.

Dreyfus resembles no one. He weighs 135 pounds dripping wet, wears glasses, has orange hair and a deep and at times nasally voice. He was raised in Indiana and, at 61, projects a boyish Woody Allen or now-grown-up Huck Finn quality. Although he has

published widely on the Existentialist philosophers, he is known particularly for his work on Heidegger, whom he has tirelessly promoted over the years. Many look upon him as the finest Heidegger scholar alive today. I asked Dreyfus why Heidegger was so important.

"Heidegger reveals things to us that we do not ordinarily see," he says, "and that is quite an accomplishment in an age which feels confident it sees everything it needs to see through its scientific lenses."

I like his reply, but I suspect some acrimony against science lurking in the background. But Dreyfus quickly adds: "Heidegger is not against science and technology, he just places science alongside other natural, intuitive ways of coping." I wonder how he got involved in this Heidegger business to begin with.

As it turns out, Dreyfus's boyhood preparation for Heidegger was anything but philosophical. Dreyfus grew up in the heartland of America, in Terre Haute, Indiana, in a household filled not with music, not with books and intellectual viewpoints, but poultry and egg data—his father's wholesale business. "My father for the most part watched baseball games and my mother did good deeds in the community," says Dreyfus.

Coming from this background, Dreyfus's chances of even knowing about philosophy let alone making it in philosophy were slim. Dreyfus owes his success in life in many ways to Wiley High School. "Wiley High was a second-rate high school, in a second-rate town, in this state, Indiana, which is one of the lowest in education in the country," says Dreyfus. But Wiley High had a debate team, and Wiley High had Winifred Ray. Winifred, as Dreyfus still insists on pointing out, had a very limited understanding of debate. "She was actually a terrible debate coach," he says. But Winifred Ray did one thing extremely well. Each year against

all odds and class boundaries, she got a student or two from Wiley into Harvard. One year she got five in. Both Hubert and his brother Stuart debated under Winifred, were handpicked by Winifred, and both were accepted by Harvard. Dreyfus describes his reaction: "I was so out of it in Indiana that I thought Cambridge was in England and I was going to study at Harvard in England."

Getting to Harvard was everything. It gave Dreyfus the stimulation he needed. He would stay for 12 years. He started in physics while his younger brother, Stuart, majored in math. Switching from physics to philosophy—because he was good at philosophy and only fair at physics—Dreyfus came into his own. "Math and physics gear you to go slow, only a few pages an hour," says Dreyfus, "philosophy is torturous but easy compared to physics." Dreyfus told me that in philosophy, like math, many things have to be read over and over to be comprehended. Dreyfus could do this. He also had another "advantage" not realized at the time. A few years ago, in his fifties, he discovered he was moderately dyslexic and had the reading ability of an 8th grader. As a disabled reader with an open, bright mind he was perfect for Heidegger.

Dreyfus believes there are many people who don't have philosophy in their lives and don't miss it. They go about their business, participate in some version of the "American way," buy houses, work at their jobs, raise kids, and talk across the fence on Saturdays. Some may be happy, some not. But Dreyfus and his former students like Patricia Benner and Fernando Flores have encountered a growing number of people who have a craving for some type of deep ontological, philosophical understanding of their lives. For these people philosophy is beginning to substitute for what religion once provided. But I wondered how Heidegger and Kierkegaard, who are so dense and difficult, could ever be expected to be of use to ordinary folks.

"For Heidegger people were overly concerned about what they ought to be doing, what looks good, what's respectable and normal," says Dreyfus. According to Dreyfus, this was a source of real regret for Heidegger. Common, ordinary, everyday people are trapped in a system that helps them, encourages them through its practices to remain inauthentic. People are searching for ways out of their entrapment but are having only partial and random success.

"Heidegger is very special in philosophy," says Dreyfus, "because in the 1920s he tried to provide a way out, a way to overcome what he takes to be the inauthenticity and shallowness of everyday existence."

But what was Heidegger like as a person, I asked. "Heidegger was a peculiar combination," says Drey-

fus. "He was a poor backwoods boy who enjoyed drinking the local wine with peasants and craftsmen, and he was an intellectual at home in Greek and Latin who knew Western civilization cold." I had read that he lectured artfully and inspired countless students with his style and charismatic manner. His patented technique was to appropriate and re-describe all that had gone on in philosophy before so as to reveal its roots in everyday reality. But Heidegger is a challenge to read.

How tough is Heidegger to track? Line by line, paragraph by paragraph, *Being and Time* is compact, unpredictable, slow going. This is early Heidegger and it is much more difficult to read than later Heidegger. I counted 30 slim volumes of Heidegger's works and lectures in Dreyfus's office, and only a third of Heidegger's output has been published. Heidegger's phrases are obscure ("the thing thinging"), tantalizing ("the saving power of insignificant things"), nostalgic ("keeping meditative thinking alive"), and poetic ("human being is a clearing").

Moreover, no one travels as light, ignores so many "No Trespassing" signs, and busts through as many canons of proprietary philosophy as Heidegger. He went outside the gate, over the wall, beyond the pale. Where Heidegger went in conceptual space there are no maps, no signposts, no wagon tracks. He stepped outside the tradition that stretches from Plato to Descartes, Locke, and Kant and beyond. To do so he invented his own language and he did it on the run. It took a midwestern kid with bird-dog instincts, honed at Harvard, but ready with real courage to jump free of shore and float the raft down the deep river currents of Heidegger. Dreyfus's new book, *Being in the World* (MIT Press, 1991), shows this free instinct.

Take Heidegger's prepositions. In a serious way Heidegger's is a philosophy of prepositions. "Being-in," "with-which," the "toward-which," the "for-the-sake-of-which," and the "in-order-to" all play crucial roles in his thinking. "In" was so important to Heidegger that he once proclaimed "we must set forth the ontological constitution of inhood." He is not an easy read. It took Dreyfus 20 years to write his commentary on Heidegger and it only covers the first half of *Being and Time*. This commentary could only be done by someone who keeps close to the phenomena. Dreyfus, unlike untold others, never gets lost in the perplexing phrases and word coining that became Heidegger's trademark. He is simply moored more securely than most of us in the everyday. His pacing is even and shrewd. His intuitive powers are well-developed and accurate. This is a philosopher who doesn't decode; he sniffs for clues and very rapidly gets his bearings in conceptual space and sets out

pointed in the right direction. You have to read Heidegger to understand what Dreyfus has done.

How was Dreyfus able to track for so long a thoroughly original mind into a terrain that was being conceptualized and revealed underfoot as one went? Dreyfus has discipline. He rises at 5:00 AM to do philosophy, naps every afternoon, and swims a mile every other day. He watches no TV. When asked if he works on weekends he replies gleefully, "and how!" One senses the marathon-level intensity and the pacing. But I am convinced he was able to catch and ride the Heidegger current because he let his instincts, not his conscious mind, do the tracking. He let the Huck Finn free spirit, not the by-the-book Tom Sawyer, take over. He allowed himself to free up and become his skill, and thus skillfully absorbed Heidegger. He played Heidegger against Heidegger. I'll explain.

Skill, as Dreyfus teaches and writes, is at the heart of his interpretation of Heidegger. We're talking about carpentry, driving, skiing, cooking, word processing, and catching a football on the run. For Dreyfus, skill is located in a kind of self-forgetting. All the greats, from Larry Bird to Nijinsky to Joyce, know how to get to that place of self-forgetting in order to play their best game. Writers call it the Muse, golfers call it being "in the zone." And Heidegger, the relentless critic of the rule-minded Descartes, and particularly Descartes's uptight, self-conscious Subject detached from the world of objects, has dedicated his philosophy to getting "in the zone." Sports were close to Heidegger's heart. In the words of his student Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Heidegger was born with skis on." He also became a crack handball player and attended sports events with a child-like enthusiasm.

Live philosophizing, like sports, is different from professorial philosophy. Dreyfus is caught by the mood of Heidegger, pushes off, takes Heidegger at his word, then plots him word by word. He shifts, backtracks, hangs on, splits, redefines, illustrates, correlates, synthesizes, and gets lucid and "transparent." Transparent is a favorite word of Heidegger's. The equipment of the veteran in touch with and drawing on his vast experience renders much of his world transparent. "The expert reacts straight away and immediately to the specific situation he is in," says Dreyfus. Transparent is the human being working effortlessly, unconsciously, in the zone, unaware, in the absorbing state of feeling and being actively at rest in his skill. At this level, it's Dreyfus, Larry Bird, Michael Jordan. Larry Bird is not a Conscious Subject with a Conscious or Unconscious Theory of how to dribble, work a screen, and shoot. He would get nowhere that way. Bird is thrown into the situation of basketball, absorbed among players, sweat, bad calls, hardwood floor, tennis shoes, slam dunks, and three-pointers.

He is the involved happening, the master B-ball coper who will feint, duck, flub-up, correct, twist, reach, and flick a wrist and *score*. And that is Heidegger!

Dreyfus says what Larry Bird says after the game, that what he is conscious of as having happened during the game is a mere trifle of what went on. Much more went on than Larry Bird knows in his mind and that's okay. In fact it is most important that Larry Bird does not know most of what went on, because to bring all of that complexity into consciousness would place Bird out of the zone, out of his absorbed coping—it would paralyze him and make him unnatural as a ballplayer. That's the way it is with human beings. In this view of things, the human way of existing is happening preconsciously, extraconsciously. This is where humans can work their stuff. It is a view of human being as flowing, rhythmic, gracefully absorbed, and accessible to vast amounts of background understanding which we draw on effortlessly and straight away as needed. Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger's philosophy starts there, out there, under the lights in the transparent thrownness of being-in-the-world.

And that is different. Descartes cannot stay with or handle Michael Jordan on the drive. From Dreyfus's point of view, Descartes and the tradition he spawned is more caught up in how people act when they are spectators or just learning to play basketball. Then everything is awkward, unknown, super-conscious, and rules help to overcome the awkwardness and to align behavior in the general direction of the hoop. But once we learn the basics we stop thinking. Dreyfus says the rules are like training wheels. Once we no longer need them we get rid of them. Michael Jordan starts moving and dribbling and shifting and faking and all hell breaks loose. He is a virtuoso—a veteran, not a beginner; he is a human being very good at what he does, drawing instantaneously on the experience of similar situations to lay out a flourish of basketball moves that are split-second and gorgeous. And they are done without thinking. Dreyfus says all this stress on thinking and being rational is partial and limited. We are rational, but we are also so much more than just rational. And we are rational in so many diverse and unacknowledged ways. Since Descartes we have been looking at things from the view of concepts and theories in people's minds and Heidegger says, stop it! He talks about dimensions of existence that are not even acknowledged in Western philosophy unless you go back to the pre-Socratics and Aristotle. And because he's Heidegger and bullheaded and convincing, he makes the reader listen in a different way. Dreyfus continues this tradition of talking from the blindspot. He speaks a live language of philosophizing that shifts the perspective.

Descartes was simply too intellectual. Through his methodical doubt and his obsession with certainty and detached contemplation Descartes forces everything up into the mind of the subject and builds a wall between the Subject, the player, and getting in the zone. All of the human sciences that base their work on the assumption that the individual as subject takes up his culture as a belief system miss the level of everyday coping according to Heidegger. Culture takes us up into its practices, not vice versa. And this view is challenging many assumptions about human beings, as philosophers like Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Foucault, and anthropologists like Pierre Bourdieu and Paul Rabinow are showing.

But how does this apply to the real world? In her work with asthmatic patients, Patricia Benner of UCSF's School of Nursing, a former student of Dreyfus's, determined that most of the patients viewed the self in relation to asthma as Descartes would. The self is the mind and the mind must control or keep guard over the body—to exclude any alien diseases entering the body like asthma. Benner's work with Dreyfus allowed her to stand back from this over-intellectualized, executive view of the self. If Heidegger was right, the subject-object, self-disease dualism was false, and intuition must be at work even in the experience of an illness like asthma. The over-controlled, rule-governed approach to managing an illness gave way in some patients to acceptance. Acceptance was when patients stopped trying to control and reject the asthma and began to accept the asthma as a part of their lives. Acceptance, for Benner, is a non-despairing accommodation to disease that allows patients to engage in a larger number of preventive self-care practices than patients who maintain a controlling view. Ironically, in Benner's view, once the patient is receptive to another understanding of asthma and the disease is actually given validity and its symptoms not denied, the asthma recedes more into the background of the person's experience and the person is more able to care for the asthma. Simple, important ideas like these have gained Benner a worldwide reputation.

Medicine is one thing, but what about business? How in the world could Heidegger be applied in business? One of the most dramatic examples comes from another of Dreyfus's former students, Fernando Flores. Working out of his offices in Emeryville, California, Flores has developed a worldwide computer consulting firm. Companies like IBM are attracted to Flores's interpretation of Heidegger because, according to Dreyfus, businesses are changing so fast that they cannot anymore just try to make a better product or satisfy the demands of their customers or know more facts and procedures. "The company that is out there

opening up whole new ways of looking at things is the only company that will have a business in the future," Dreyfus says. Through his writings and seminars Flores is beginning to influence people in business to understand the idea of opening up clearings, not just markets, as they seek more profound ways of understanding what human beings do best.

Dreyfus with his views of Heidegger is no stranger to controversy. He has a bulldog tenacity about holding his position. Winifred Ray would be proud. After receiving his Ph.D. at Harvard he taught at MIT and was almost refused tenure because of his outspokenness. His tenure woes did not come from within the philosophy department but from the computer science department, specifically the fledgling artificial intelligence field. Marvin Minsky and his cohorts, who would go on to world fame, had been trying to develop intelligent computers following Cartesian principles. They predicted that in 20 years, roughly 1985, computers would be able to do everything humans could do. On hearing this Dreyfus was astounded. If Heidegger was correct, most of what human beings do is not even in the mind where a cognitivist theory can grasp it. The artificial intelligence view must be wrong if Heidegger is right, thought Dreyfus. Not too long afterwards he began making his views known. The artificial intelligence people were shocked that a computer-illiterate philosopher (Dreyfus still is), could tell them what they could and could not do. They also were afraid he would keep them from getting grants. They moved to block his tenure. Dreyfus, the Wiley High debater, fought back, got tenure, and continued to fight back with the publication of two books on computers, nicely titled *What Computers Can't Do* and *Mind Over Machine*, which he wrote with Stuart Dreyfus, his mathematician brother.

Dreyfus has kept his bearings while tracking Heidegger's thought, and he has kept his sense of reality about Heidegger the person and political figure. Heidegger, as many know, was associated with the Nazis. Two books stare out from the philosophy section at Cody's bookstore in Berkeley, bearing witness to this relationship. They debate what the relationship actually was. Victor Farias, in an explosive book published in 1987, accuses Heidegger of being an anti-Semite and consistent supporter of National Socialism who did not disentangle himself in 1933 as previously thought. Maybe Farias's most damning criticism is that Heidegger's philosophy, with its supposed sensitivity to humankind's plight under the technological juggernaut, does not mention genocide once. And according to Farias, after the war Heidegger never mentioned directly but only anecdotally the Holocaust. It has become known as Heidegger's "silence." He lived until 1976.

Heidegger's involvement and later silence have stirred great debate among notables such as Jurgen Habermas, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe. Habermas questions 20th-century German thought and its inability to offer a defense and counter to National Socialism. At the heart of the debate lies what might be the greatest work of irony within philosophy in our century. To understand this we need to know about the key term, "destruction," associated with Heidegger's thought and later developed by Derrida, who called it "deconstruction." To perform deconstruction is to rewrite, reread, and recast that which has come down to us in the form of tradition and conventional thinking, including so-called common sense. As we have glimpsed, Heidegger deconstructs the entire tradition beginning with Socrates and Plato and culminating in Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche. Heidegger is the most painstaking philosopher ever for showing what the tradition does not include, what it lops off and denies or forgets. With thrilling originality and confidence he calls attention to this massive cultural forgetting on the part of Western philosophy. Yet, if all the evidence about his rectorship in 1933 is accurate, which most of it appears to be, then Heidegger himself has fallen prey to a serious type of local forgetting in the form of National Socialism. Heidegger the master deconstructor cannot deconstruct on his feet as rector of Freiburg in 1933 in a Germany taken over by National Socialism. This has grave implications for thinking which Jean-Francois Lyotard and David Carroll in *Heidegger and "The Jews"* pounce on. To wit, all forms of thinking, including and maybe especially Heidegger's, have their blind-spots, their own places where they forget, lose touch, drift, and reconstruct rather than deconstruct reality.

Maybe the Nazi issue is best understood seen through the eyes of Hannah Arendt, the famed, highly independent political philosopher and German Jew who fled Nazi Germany and worked in Paris helping Jewish refugees emigrate to Palestine. It was Arendt who in the 1930s called for the formation of a Jewish army to fight Hitler. In her youth at Marburg University, Hannah Arendt studied under Martin Heidegger, who was 17 years her senior. Heidegger was an exciting intellectual on his feet. He started as Husserl's assistant but soon students were flocking to his classes. Students sensed a presence and greatness about him. Many of his transcribed lectures have become philosophy classics. Even after World War II he would still fill halls when he would speak. Dreyfus remembers the crowds who came to hear him in Munich in 1957.

Hannah Arendt fell in love with Heidegger, had a long affair with him in her student attic apartment,

and wrote brave, painful poems to him as a young woman while he remained married. In Arendt's opinion it was primarily through his wife, Elfriede, who was active in the prewar German Women's Movement, that Heidegger came under the influence of National Socialism. It saddened her to see Elfriede's low-brow literature, the type the Nazis would not see fit to censor ever, on the same shelf with Martin's fine work.

Arendt criticizes Heidegger straight out in many places, but there is a note of compassion, almost pity, when she describes Heidegger's extreme mistrust of modernization. He grew up in and remained strongly attached to the Black Forest region of Germany. There many local peasant beliefs and communal attachments crystallized around the term "*Volk*." The local landscape and villages with their craftsmen and traditions were held in reverence. Heidegger would suffer a fervent, boy-like idealization of pastoral Germany all of his life. This, Arendt feels, may explain how he saw something possible for a brief time in the primitive Germanness of the Nazis. He publicly supported the party for one year, she notes.

Years later Arendt would say of the brilliant lecturer of Marburg who had caused her such sorrow and disappointment that he was still a "philosopher's philosopher" and the secret king of 20th-century thought. She also called him a liar in his private dealings, and a laughable "first-pants German boy."

Heidegger's philosophy, as I have mentioned, begins by attacking Descartes, by laying the blame for the rootlessness of modern life on Descartes's view of thinking and being.

"The idea of a detached thinker contemplating the world of objects in Descartes made our everyday involvement with tools and other people incomprehensible and irrelevant," says Dreyfus. "Cartesianism is a philosophical tradition that is not without its advantages and special merits, being the basis of modern science, but it has one profound demerit—it covers up important phenomena and their possibilities, making them nearly impossible to see," continues Dreyfus.

I begin to feel it's as though by siding with Descartes we are coaxed by science to crawl into a very narrow tunnel, or better yet, are handed peashooters with which to view reality. At this point in our interviews I begin to read Dreyfus's published works and everything I can find on Heidegger. In my notes I come across this statement of Dreyfus's: "All of us know at some deep level that the modern scientific view of the universe is only one perspective on all there is to life in the world."

It is obvious that Dreyfus admires Heidegger for his openness and daring. Heidegger keeps uncovering what we don't see, what we cannot see when we are

looking through the Cartesian peashooter. Heidegger then mounts a monumental overthrow of Descartes and Plato and Kant and Husserl. According to Dreyfus, Heidegger uses the simplest examples: hammering, turning a doorknob, catching the mood of a wild party. Dreyfus adds raising children, being a Dad, becoming a student. I learn that these ordinary, common, fully in view, and accessible details of everyday life are why Heidegger is so disconcerting to those who think of philosophy as an abstract technical discipline.

Many people have read Heidegger and commented on him but until Dreyfus the most relevant side of Heidegger had been missed. "Heidegger is the philosopher of common, everyday practices," says Dreyfus.

The community of authors and former students who thank Dreyfus for introducing them to Heidegger thank him for showing them this most practical and pregnant side of his work. Heidegger insists that we not ignore the depth and philosophical import of our everyday coping skills. These are trivialized and totally underestimated in modern life. Dreyfus writes beautifully about what it means to be an expert in a field, a master carpenter, a champion chess player. Dreyfus stumbled onto Heidegger's concern for the role of everyday practices and the power of marginal customs during Berkeley's heyday as a sanctuary for both yea- and naysayers—yes, the still undigested 1960s and 1970s.

We are in Dreyfus's office in Moses Hall. Outside the Karmen Ghia is parked beneath the towering campanile. We begin to talk about the sixties and seventies. Dreyfus changes his position in his chair. He looks at the ceiling as he tries to find what he really wants to say.

"I never thought the exciting and energetic scene in Berkeley in the late 1960s when I arrived was going to save Western civilization. I truly didn't know what to think. But I found Berkeley unbelievably exciting and enjoyable," says Dreyfus.

Part of the excitement for Dreyfus was that he was a visiting professor from MIT and made a number of trips back and forth between the citadel of science and technology and the bubbling streets and sidewalks of Berkeley. Dreyfus remembers, "MIT couldn't have been more straight in those days, and Berkeley couldn't have been more open and wild. It was 1968, just after the Free Speech Movement and just before People's Park."

Dreyfus describes the overworked students at MIT as falling asleep in his class and napping on benches outside in the hallways. The science and math classes were hard, students were expected to learn incredible amounts, and were always being measured against

each other. The drivenness and will to excel early, before you were 25, overshadowed everything at MIT. Berkeley, in contrast, was a different world. Dreyfus recalls, "Janice Joplin was singing on some street corner in San Francisco. Students were offering you every sort of drug. And it was just a lot of fun." Dreyfus remembers he once saw a naked poet standing in an urn on the campus reading poetry while people passed by and listened and looked or were attracted in other directions by the politicians and preachers. But a naked poet in an urn on the MIT campus? There was no way this could be appropriate within MIT's understanding of itself. In that context it could only have been the sad spectacle of a student who had snapped under the strain.

The trips between MIT and Berkeley caused Dreyfus to undergo the cultural bends. The two worlds challenged and taunted him with their differences. MIT came along after World War II with a view of itself, which it still cherishes, that anything can be achieved with technology and science. MIT is thoroughly American and Western in this regard. Discipline, strict scientific methods, and dedication to research rule the day. But Dreyfus picks up on a seemingly insignificant detail. "MIT had a pathetic faculty lounge. It was because the scientists and engineers ate in their labs. That was the kind of life that was expected," he says. Berkeley to Dreyfus's delight had two wonderful faculty lounges and the student restaurant, The Terrace, with its many opportunities for discussion. What it lacked in those days, Dreyfus used to complain, was a cafe life along Telegraph and surrounding avenues where street poets, writers, alienated artists, vendors, and academics could mingle. Yet it still in spirit was better than MIT.

What MIT considered incidental—a pleasant place to sit and talk and eat food, preferably outdoors—Berkeley considered central. What MIT saw as distracting—a scraggly and rebellious community of artists and street philosophers—Berkeley enjoyed. Berkeley in the late 1960s picked up on the anomalies in American life. A set of marginal practices, as Dreyfus calls them, were focused on, practices such as giving flowers, eating together, rapping, being with one another at outdoor rock concerts; and these things were revolutionary because the dominant society was neither taking time to do them nor thought they were important. To understand the differences in a deeper way Dreyfus turned to Heidegger.

Dreyfus was drawn to the importance of the contrast between overall moods and styles that lay hidden behind the Berkeley and MIT worlds. The mood of Berkeley in the late 1960s was wonderful in its power to open up new worlds and turn established values upside down. Sensuality poured through the

streets of Berkeley, warming and titillating and beckoning everyone to come over to the other side. Political protest was above all confident. Everyone had the sense they were beginning a new and better life. Dreyfus does not close his eyes to the drugs and destruction, the broken marriages, and malaise of much of the 1970s. "I'm not sure that anybody could have stood all that energy and diversity and confusion. It certainly was destroying the students right and left, and people lost their way," he says. But Dreyfus also knows the 1960s and 1970s are very special for a philosophy like Heidegger's, sensitive to changing cultural styles.

Until then what Dreyfus had been reading in later Heidegger, particularly his ideas of the need for new gods, Dreyfus had dismissed as romantic nonsense of one sort or another. After experiencing Berkeley in the 1970s he was not so sure it was sheer imagining on Heidegger's part. A new god that opens up a new clearing or world can take place in a very concrete fashion. Dreyfus claims, "Berkeley in those days gave one the sense that there could be another form of life, different possibilities organized around different practices where what seemed important would become unimportant, and what seemed marginal would become central." He began to ponder the cultural dynamics themselves and the coalescing of the marginal practices and insignificant details that were shunned and ridiculed at MIT and yet sprung into full-blown energetic culture in Berkeley. For Dreyfus what made it all interesting to philosophy was that the Berkeley mood, for all its strength, was invisible. It came like a sunny day pervading everything. People did not have to do much at all; they were simply swept up. They saw possibilities, new understandings of being, that have never been seen like that, with that type of vitality and richness, again.

What is perplexing for Dreyfus is that the MIT style won out so roundly. It's the most boring understanding of them all, says Dreyfus, and yet it trumps everything. The 1970s in Berkeley, with its rich, multiple understandings of being, are relegated to an aberration, an anomaly of history. But what is not lost is the proposition that a coalescing of marginal, insignificant elements that our culture today overlooks and degrades could tomorrow be the basis for a new clearing.

"If you hold on to the anomalies that make you aware of marginal practices, and these don't fit with what's expected and standard, and you're sensitive to this, then you might be able to open up a whole new interpretation of what's going on," Dreyfus says. All of these insights are buried in Heidegger. I wanted to know how Dreyfus got to them and how he could explain these complex ideas in such a clear fashion.

"I'm not really very smart so I have to explain it to myself and by the time I can do that others usually can understand," he says. But Brian Magee, the philosopher and BBC interviewer, goes farther and suggests that Dreyfus may have understood Heidegger better than Heidegger understood himself. There is an elegant simplicity in Dreyfus's writing and speaking, a sense of groundedness, of knowing where you are located in the big discussion of it all. With great care and an ego that permits dumptrucks of feedback and debate from students and colleagues over many years, he has rendered a commentary on *Being and Time* that radiates an earnest desire to communicate Heidegger. But Dreyfus is quick to remind us there is a trick to how he does it. "I need to learn from my students and teaching assistants. I would never make it at a small liberal arts school where I would have to teach in the traditional manner."

Heidegger must be saying something or he would never get past the criticisms—and the criticisms as we have seen are shocking. Heidegger's philosophy must be separated from Heidegger the man. Some will not be able to do that, and that is entirely understandable.

But Heidegger according to Dreyfus has a special message. It's long and complex but it is a message. Nothing is more subtle and controlled, more unfree, more unnatural for Heidegger according to Dreyfus than how we have come to think. And he names the perpetrators—Plato, Descartes, Kant, Husserl, even Nietzsche—perpetrators whom Heidegger honestly admits he also fiercely admires. What we have come to cherish in thought, what we require, what we expect from our thinking, have a set of severe limits attached. We are chained to a technique that allows us to do and see in efficient ways for certain things, but not see other things whose presence is towering and equally important. We have assimilated much of our thinking into our technical activities, making technology not just a set of practices but an encapsulating mode of being or way of understanding being. "Ordering" is the term Heidegger uses for all types of optimizing. We are ordering everything on the globe into tight little bundles of efficient commodities. We treat human beings like commodities, or in Heidegger's words, "standing reserve." It is the ordering itself that disturbs Heidegger. Ordering for ordering's sake has become an imperative. It is a very restricted clearing. It is dominating our view of nature, society, and what it means to be a human being. Max Weber saw this shift to ordering as rationalization. Foucault called it disciplinary biopower.

Nietzsche declared that God is dead. Heidegger said in his last interview, "Only a god can save us now." Many interpretations have been proffered to explain this statement. At the very least it signifies

that we in our present cultural situation are between two worlds. A very consistent social order and set of religious beliefs spanned Europe for nearly a thousand years. The unifying power of that Christian tradition is dead. That is, the synthesizing power that held it together for so many people at the level of everyday practice and understanding of what it means to be, is dead. We are left without that world and wander like metaphysical orphans, waiting for another unified world order to be born. Dreyfus understands a god as a cultural paradigm. In Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger an example of what a new god would be, and this will shock many, can be seen in what almost happened at Woodstock. Woodstock was not an aberration for Dreyfus. It suggested a possible alternative way of looking at ourselves and our place in nature. For a moment people saw things as central that were marginal before so that we thought in different ways for a brief time. And we backed off. Our music was ready, but the paradigm was too partial, too out of touch with other American practices, says Dreyfus. It left out too much, so sadly we went back to the familiar busyness of American life.

Heidegger believes that culture needs a renewing event like Woodstock to unite practices that give life meaning rather than mere efficiency and order. This recalcitrant terrain he makes the basis of his philosophy. He enters without drugs and he lays bridgework and scaffolding for others to follow in the form of a language whose primary function is to ward off technocratic incursions. Technocratic culture does not want us to go near Heidegger or to go into these other regions. And that's why Heidegger is so hard to read. With utmost prudence he stripped his language of traditional philosophical assumptions and made it as hard as possible to reinsert biases back into his philosophy. He did this out of a profound sense of what mankind needs most of all—an understanding of how narrow the present clearing is in which we work, relate to one another, and press forward without real goals for the sake of more efficiency. So reading Heidegger was rough and maybe impossible for most of us until Dreyfus showed up.

Dreyfus is eager to point out that Heidegger is not just another technology basher. He understands and sees an important role for technology. What bothers Heidegger is that our relationship to technology and things in general borders on becoming a mode of culture that is causing and will cause ever greater human distress. For Heidegger, it is not just ecological distress brought on by particular technologies, but the institutionalizing of one type of thinking—calculative thinking—over all others. This is cultural distress. It stems from how we understand human being, things, and our society.

Dreyfus gives a wonderful little lecture on the Japanese tea cup. We are at Black Oaks bookstore in Berkeley and Dreyfus's book, *Being in the World*, has just been released. About 75 people crowd around, sit on folded chairs, and listen attentively as Dreyfus explains Heidegger. The Wiley High debater is at his best on his feet. In the faces of the audience is reflected the desire to think better, deeper, and at a more profound level of understanding. Dreyfus stands in front of a small lectern, wearing a beige sportcoat that fades like an Indiana sunset into his carrot hair and raisin eyes. He wears a simple tie and dark-rimmed glasses. His wife, Genevieve, and daughter, Gabrielle, sit off to the side looking dignified and proud of Dad. He now gets to the part about what Heidegger means by an understanding of being, and particularly a technological understanding of being. He pauses.

The West has a peculiar relation to things. We deal with things and people as resources to be used and then disposed of when no longer needed. This styrofoam cup is a perfect example. When we want a hot or cold drink it does its job, and when we are through with it, we throw it away. How different this understanding of an object is from what we can suppose to be the Japanese understanding of a delicate teacup, which does not do as good a job of preserving temperature and which has to be washed and protected, but which is preserved from generation to generation for its beauty and its social meaning. It is hard to picture a tea ceremony around a styrofoam cup. [laughter]

Please note that one aspect of the Japanese understanding of what it is to be human—passive, contented, gentle, social—fits with this understanding of what it is to be a thing—delicate, beautiful, traditional. The Japanese also see politics as a way to gain consensus rather than as a negotiation of individual desires. In sum the practices containing an understanding of what it is to be a human self, those containing an interpretation of what it is to be a thing, and those defining society fit together. They add up to an understanding of being.

The styrofoam cup says something about how we view things and how we understand what it is to be human. But according to Dreyfus, Heidegger did not believe that we can invent ourselves at will. We are very much determined by the clearing constituted by our background understanding, and not the other way around. Our calculative thinking wants us to believe just the opposite—that we are in control of just about everything or soon will be. Again, for Dreyfus this is the hubris and arrogance of technicity. It is a danger because it contributes to covering up, stifling, and fleeing from authenticity. It is a 2000-year-old romance and intrigue with control. It blocks the reception of new understandings of being. Heidegger is ultimately quite humble in the face of culture. It's a gift and even technological culture is something for which we should be grateful.

Dreyfus maintains that Heidegger's is not ultimately a depressing philosophy. Once we realize that we neither make nor control our culture but receive it, we step out of the technological understanding of being. In knowing that the tendency to control is what we least control, we become receivers. "By saying we are the receivers of understandings of being we are saying in effect that there is something that we can never fully understand, which governs who we are, and which we cannot master or make happen, and that we have to be grateful to this and open to this," says Dreyfus. This sounds religious and mystical to me. But Dreyfus has a comeback: "All of this is very religion-like, but the amazing thing is that it's said in a way by Heidegger that doesn't in any way contradict our secular worldview." Dreyfus says his teaching as-

sistant, Charles Spinosa, calls this type of receptiveness a "resonance story." According to Spinosa, Heidegger wants us to be a culture with a clearing that is deeply connected with a tradition and is open to new understandings of being, but remains ultimately a rich and stable culture in which one understands and is grateful for the clearing one is in. It's living within limits. Heidegger is not Nietzsche. Nietzsche introduced the restless, constantly advancing modern mood. He thought the highest good was continually opening new clearings. Spinosa and Dreyfus say that Heidegger wants us to stay put, to be receptive like the pre-Socratics, and yet have our technology and science. As Dreyfus likes to say, in Japan the VCR and the house gods sit side by side on the same shelf.