

Landscaping Heidegger: Jeff Malpas Interviewed by Richard Marshall (3AM Magazine)

1. You've defended Danto's 'ideal chronicler' against views that suggest that the notion of telling history 'as it was' as opposed to telling a story as a person constructs it or narrates it. This seems a crucial argument where constructivists and skeptics about notions of objective truth, history are thick on the ground. This is an issue that you return to, for example when challenging Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa's rejection of 'robust realism.' They say that because the way we normally access the world is so enmeshed with our attitudes and concerns that getting a view of the world outside of those things, pure so to speak, is hopeless. But you disagree don't you? So how do you argue that history really should strive to tell it as it was, and that Dreyfus and Spinosa's view is wrong?

The essay on the Ideal Chronicle is rather old now, and I actually don't recall all the details of its argument. Essentially what you find in that essay, however, is a defense of the centrality of truth that is similar to that which I have developed elsewhere (although inflected by the particularities of the context). My view of Spinosa and Dreyfus' position is that it misrepresents Davidson's position (that was also Davidson's view). It also seems to me to repeat a set of standard misunderstandings about the nature and significance of truth against which both Davidson and I have argued at length in many different places. When I wrote the my reply to Dreyfus and Spinosa, ten years or more ago, I was still more inclined to view my position as in some sense 'realist', and the essay reflects that (Davidson had already moved away from the term, and although it took me longer, I have also abandoned talk of 'realism' in my own work). So far as history is concerned, the concept of truth is as important to historical discourse and inquiry as it is elsewhere (a point for which I argue explicitly in a couple of other papers), and inasmuch as the 'Ideal Chronicle' can be construed as a way of articulating the centrality of truth in this regard, so one can say that history strives and should strive to 'tell it like it was' (although I probably wouldn't use quite the same language now). Why are Dreyfus and Spinosa wrong? Largely because the distinction between what we say and what we speak about in such saying is an absolutely basic one that underpins the very possibility of speaking. It is that distinction that is the basis for whatever truth is to be found in the idea of "realism". At the same time, that distinction cannot be reified into some general metaphysical distinction between language (or belief or knowledge) and the world, and that is partly why realism is also misleading.

2. How does this link (I'm assuming it does but I'm often wrong!) with the idea of transcendental philosophy is actually ontology rather than epistemology. You have argued that like Kant's 'Critique' the transcendental philosophy of Heidegger is also. Is this a way in to begin to answer the question why place is so important to you, an interest that perhaps you first registered when looking at Proust's Madeleine where phenomenology and hermeneutics seem to be of interest in terms of a kind of transcendental approach?

The link is in the idea that what is at issue in the transcendental is nothing other than the revealing of the originary space of appearance as such, and that space is also the space of the possibility of truth. So transcendental thinking is always ontology because of its concern with the very ground of the possibility of appearance, which is given in and through the articulation of the structure of truth. (although the way "ground" functions here is in a way quite different from that which is usually assumed). I am often criticized for holding that Davidson's position is not to be construed as merely 'epistemological' – that it involves a set of *ontological* claims (in similar fashion, Heidegger argued, against the neo-Kantians, that Kant was doing metaphysics rather than epistemology). That Davidson is indeed to be understood in this fashion is clearest, it seems to me, in his account of the 'three varieties' of knowledge. Here the focus is on what might be termed the ontology of knowledge – the three forms of knowledge are ontologically interdependent (they are constituted only in relation to one another), and they also imply an interdependence (evident elsewhere in Davidson's thinking) between self, others, and world. One might say that this is an outcome of Davidson's development of the Quinean rejection of any substantialist conception of meaning – not only are meanings not to be construed independently of other meanings, but neither can selves be construed independently of other selves or of the objects with which they are involved, nor can language be construed independently of the world. I would also suggest that Davidson's articulation of the "Three varieties" of knowledge is the articulation of what is an essentially transcendental structure – it is not merely an account of three different kinds of knowledge, but rather an articulation of the way knowledge is

constituted in terms of the basic interconnection of self, other, and world (it is worth noting that something like this same structure also appears in Heidegger's early work – see the *Grundpropleme der Phaenomenologie*, 1919/20 where Heidegger talks of the self-world, with-world, and surrounding-world).

3. You ask: does our idea of ourselves as social beings depend on a grasp of sociality? This gives you an opportunity to further consider space, this time the connection between space and social. You argue as a transcendental truth that a creature with the idea of space must have a concept of sociality as well. This might strike some as improbable: why isn't it possible for there to be a creature, say on a faraway planet, that understands itself in terms of having a place on the planet but not having any sense of society at all? Or aren't there forms of life floating around in the sea that have a sense of space – they hunt and so map themselves out in spatial coordinates and the like – but are unaware even of themselves as selves or of others? Why is this just not a possibility?

I am afraid I am not much of a fan of so-called 'thought experiments'. They usually depend on too many hidden assumptions to be reliable indicators of anything of major philosophical import. As Wittgenstein says in the *Investigations*: "Could one imagine a stone's having consciousness? And if anyone can do so — why should that not merely prove that such image-mongery is of no interest to us?" (I, 390). In considering the connection between space and sociality, my interest is in the conceptual dependencies that obtain between those concepts, and between them and others. The analysis of such conceptual dependence is part of what I think transcendental reasoning is directed toward. In claiming that a grasp of sociality requires of space and *vice versa* (since I really view these as mutually related concepts or structures), I rely on the fact that the social and the spatial both call upon similar notions of materialized externality. The spatial, understood as spatial, is just the idea of a realm that allows for the simultaneous presentations of nevertheless distinct particulars, and allied to this, of multiple presentational perspectives that always imply some possibility of their mutual correlation. The social entails an externality within which other subjects, and objects, can be positioned in relation to oneself and to one another. The possibility of conceptuality that is also at issue here, whether in the form of the concept of space or of the social, also entails a mode of externalization that is possible only through the spatial and that is a presupposition for the possibility of language – for language not only depends on sociality, and so in turn on spatiality, but the possibility of representation, on which language also rests, is in turn dependent on a mode of externality (as Kant makes very clear). The idea that spatiality and sociality are connected is already suggested by the Davidsonian idea of knowledge that you asked about earlier: there the idea of subjectivity and objectivity are seen to be interconnected with the idea of the intersubjective, and if we understand these forms of knowledge as also corresponding to forms of spatiality, then subjective and objective spatiality are interconnected with the spatiality of the intersubjective. From this perspective, there can be no grasp of self or world (and so no understanding at all) that does not presuppose spatiality (since, as I indicated earlier, the very idea of simultaneous but distinct existence is precisely what is at issue in the idea of the spatial), and because, once again, there can be no grasp of spatiality that does not also involve the idea of the possibility of other selves who can be differently positioned in relation to us, or to our own bodies, and to the 'common objects' that surround us both and with which we causally interact and towards which are intentionally directed. The network of concepts that appears here is something I have tried to delineate in a number of places in my work. Unfortunately, I find many philosophers are simply unwilling to try to think through such networks of conceptual connection, preferring to assume that we already know the nature and boundaries of our concepts from the start. It should be clear, even from these few comments, that I tend to distinguish between different ways in which spatiality might be grasped. In particular, I distinguish between a capacity merely to operate spatially – that is to have what might be construed as a purely behavioral grasp of space – and the capacity for a conceptual grasp of space, which includes a capacity to be able to represent space to oneself and others (notice that I don't speak here of behavioral and representational, or conceptual and non-conceptual, spatial *content*, but rather of different capacities to grasp spatial content which *capacities* are behavioral or representational, non-conceptual or conceptual). Every being that can move in a directed and coordinated manner must have a capacity to distinguish between itself and its world, but that capacity need not extend beyond the behavioral level. Even a robot vacuum cleaner can exhibit behavior attuned to spatiality, but I wouldn't say that it has any sense of space nor of itself. Although there is an important difference between the different ways in which space can be accessed or 'grasped', there are also similarities – to be capable of movement and action at all, regardless of whether it is shaped by conceptually, requires a capacity to engage with space.

4. *A cool part of your approach is the way you harness your interests in topography with writers unusually considered together. So you have no problem discussing Heidegger with Davidson and seem to be equally at home in traditions usually considered deaf to one another. So before looking at your thoughts here, what do you think about the recent discussion about the analytic/continental divide? Is it useful or a barrier to a more ecumenical, open spirit in philosophy?*

There is a Monty Python skit in which Karl Marx, presented as a quiz show contestant, is asked the following question: "the struggle of class against class is a 'what' struggle?" The answer, which Karl provides immediately, is that it is a *political* struggle. The same point applies here: the distinction between analytic and continental philosophy is a *political* distinction. This is important, because we often mistake it for a *philosophical* distinction. But it isn't that, at least not primarily, and that is why the 'discussion' has been going on for so long (it certainly isn't recent), and shows so little sign of going away. Unlike some analytic thinkers, who seem to want to abandon the analytic/continental distinction in favor of just 'philosophy' (but who then often go on to make clear that when they talk about 'good philosophy', they almost always mean 'analytic' philosophy), I don't think the distinction can simply be discarded, since to do so is to blind oneself to the political realities that are at work, and I also tend to identify myself most closely with what is usually viewed as a "non-analytic" tradition, namely, the hermeneutic. Nevertheless, I find myself increasingly frustrated by the whole analytic-continental opposition, it seems less and less relevant to my actual philosophical work, and whereas once I thought there was the possibility of opening up genuine dialogue between the two traditions, I now think that is a vain hope. Moreover, even though, as I say, I tend to identify politically with the non-analytic, I don't find myself altogether at home in either the analytic or continental camp. In this respect, I probably occupy a rather anomalous position in the contemporary landscape of academic philosophy (maybe 'hermeneutics' and 'philosophical topography' are necessarily anomalous) – in fact, officially, I am no longer even in a philosophy department – and in lots of ways that anomalous position actually suits me quite well. What I do as a philosopher doesn't fit readily into any of the usual categories, and I am more and more engaged outside of the discipline anyway – although there other sets of political distinction and division often become operative as well!

5. *As we've seen in your earlier remarks, ontology and hermeneutics are conjoined in your approach, and they have to be. That's what I take to be your argument about transcendental commitments (but I may have got that wrong so you may need to clarify and set me straight!). So Heidegger is the philosopher who you argue is important because he is interested in investigating ontology through an enquiry into the structure of understanding. Davidson in the so-called analytic tradition is someone I think you argue is doing the same kind of thing. Is this right and can you say something about how you connect these strands through what you label the 'hermeneutic turn'?*

Heidegger addresses the nature of hermeneutics in only very few places in his work – primarily in the 1923 lectures on the hermeneutics of facticity and the 1950 'Dialogue on Language' (something I explore in a recent paper called 'The Beckoning of Language'). Moreover, the term 'hermeneutics' is not one that figures at all in Davidson's work. Nevertheless, I view the work of both thinkers as essentially hermeneutical in character, and for me this means at least two things. First, a concern with the nature and possibility of understanding (which I would argue is at issue in Davidson's talk of a concern with 'objective thought' and so does not imply a concern with something 'subjective'). Second, a recognition, sometimes implicit, of the fundamentally situated, 'placed' or 'topological' character of understanding as such. So hermeneutics is, for me, always topological or topographic; it is also always ontological. What ontology means here is not the same as 'metaphysics'. Ontology names, instead, the inquiry into the ground, unity, and limit of things – and in its most fundamental sense, into the ground, nature, and limit, of the very appearing of what appears, the presencing of what presences. Ontology understood in this way is not 'subjectivist' (meaning it does not look for a ground understood as some underlying *subjectum*), but rather understands the task of grounding as identical with the task of delineating limit, and so also with the articulation of a certain unity. In this respect, ontology is not only essentially transcendental in character, but it is itself topological or topographical – it concerns itself with what Heidegger calls the *topos* of being. *Topos* being understood here as that bounded, unitary locale that is also the ground of appearing or presencing (a more detailed discussion of these issues can be found in my recent *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*). I would argue that the 'hermeneutic turn', if there is such a thing (and I would claim that Davidson, Heidegger and Gadamer can all three be seen as making such a turn, even as they also open it up as a possibility), is thus a return to a basic form of ontology that is transcendental as it is also topological. It

also entails a rethinking of the philosophical as itself essentially configured around the concern with place – with place as such (so the concern is a substantive one), with place as determinative of thinking (and so the concern is also methodological), and with the place of thinking as such (and so the concern is always self-questioning and self-reflective) .

6. Davidson himself was intrigued by the way you hooked his ideas up with Gadamer and Heidegger wasn't he? And a key interest in Davidson that connects with what you're doing is the notion of truth and the role it plays isn't it? Like you, he argues that truth is objective (and so disagrees with people like Rorty's relativism I guess) but there are no body of eternal truths. Can you explain this and say where you stand?

I think Davidson was intrigued by the idea of connecting his ideas to those of Gadamer and Heidegger, and he and I did talk about that connection, but Davidson did not find Gadamer or Heidegger very accessible, and I don't think I was ever able to offer him an easy way to gain access to their thought. It seemed to me that the differences in philosophical upbringing and orientation were just too great for Davidson to make the move to a Gadamerian or Heideggerian perspective (the same was true of Gadamer in relation to Davidson's work). Nevertheless, Davidson was not antagonistic to connections being made between his thought and theirs. When it comes to the question of truth, the key point from a Davidsonian perspective is the rejection of the idea of the proposition. For Davidson (and for me), there are only sentences, and it is only sentences that can be true or false. For this reason, truth is always a matter of the truth of this or that sentence, and sentences exist only in relation to languages and speakers. The immediate conclusion is that what is true depends on who speaks and what they say, as well as on what is spoken about. Truth is thus relative to languages and speakers (although in a quite unproblematic sense), and in a certain sense contingent (simply because meaning is contingent), even though truth is also objective – that is, it involves a commitment to the possibility that what we say is open to correction on the basis of what we take to be the case with respect to the objects of our speaking. This conception of truth is what sets my position, and Davidson's, apart from the position espoused by thinker such as Rorty and Vattimo, with whom Davidson and I otherwise have much in common.

7. You ask whether commitments to truth and honesty are just a sham because the public sphere is full of lies and liars. But you don't think those commitments are a sham. Some might point out that it has always been thus, so there's nothing broken, rather, business as usual. But you take the widespread abuse of truth to indicate a breakdown in public and political life don't you? Can you say something about this?

My claim is that the commitment to truth, and to speaking the truth, is a basic commitment that underpins the possibility of human, which is also to say, social, life, and therefore also to the possibility of meaning and understanding. Since I think this is such a fundamental commitment, it is not a commitment that can ever be dispensed with. Even when we claim to have abandoned truth, as Rorty and Vattimo do, we remain committed to it. This is why the lie, when it becomes widespread, is both epistemically and ethically problematic. Lying is a practice that can only exist as a practice parasitic upon truth-telling, and the idea of a society in which the lie became the norm, is not the idea of any genuine society at all. The problem that afflicts contemporary society is that the idea that truth does not matter has become commonplace – it is generally assumed that what matters is what people take to be true, not truth, and truth is not only open to manipulation, but is also a means of manipulation, is nothing but a means for the exercise of power. Although lying is an age-old phenomenon, it has seldom been the case that there has been such a widespread suspicion of and disregard for truth. Moreover, this lack of concern for truth is something that our own institutions and practices seem actively to promote. Thus the focus on systems of audit and quality assurance, which now operate much as did the old systems of surveillance and control under communist regimes, promotes modes of behaviour that are often hypocritical and emptied of meaning, that prioritise compliance over genuine commitment, that are corrosive of basic ethical ideals of trust, honesty and respect, and that are directed at control above all else. As a result, we live in a society that no longer has any real sense of its own foundations. In this respect, I do think there is something radically different about the character of the contemporary world (and some of my analysis here follows Heidegger's, although I give it a more explicitly ethical direction), but even were this not the case – even if it were true that society was always given over to vice rather than virtue, still I would argue that this should not be a reason for withholding criticism. Whatever the historical circumstances in which

we find ourselves, we should not cease insisting on the need for political and personal life to be more in accord with the fundamental values and commitments that make it possible. No matter how widespread the disregard for truth has been in the past, or how widespread it is now, that does not mean that we should therefore be more accepting or tolerate of the lie or the falsehood. Indeed, it should perhaps make us even less accepting and less tolerant. I would add that the insistence of attending to truth – of not accepting power truth as that to which truth is reduced, but of seeing truth as that which operates against power – seems to me to be the very basis for the possibility of political opposition and resistance, and so Foucault comments, as I have quoted him elsewhere, that "[t]he task of speaking the truth is an infinite labour: To respect it in its complexity is an obligation that no power can afford to short-change, unless it would impose the silence of slavery".

8. So is it because you approach Heidegger and Davidson that place, situation, topography are so central to your philosophy?

I would say that it isn't because I approach Heidegger and Davidson as important thinkers that place, situation, and topography are so central to my thinking, but rather it is because I approach place, situation and topography as such important concepts, that I give such centrality to Heidegger and Davidson. It seems to me that few other philosophers have taken up these notions in the way that they are taken up in Heidegger and Davidson – and even though such concepts are present in the work of thinkers such as Bachelard (whose work I also love), the development is not so philosophically acute or penetrating as it is in Heidegger and Davidson.

9. The unity of consciousness is a key to your approach and getting this right makes a huge difference to whether claims like the possibility to have a robust realism or not go through don't they? You argue that the nature of the unity of consciousness are grounded in Davidson in organised, oriented, embodied activity – and this again seems to connect with Heidegger too doesn't it? Can you say what the significance of this issue is for you and how you understand the best way to approach it?

Unity is a key notion in my account, but it has to be understood in the right way. Unity is never the simple unity of what is numerically one or the simple unity of a static system. Genuine unity always presupposes both differentiation and activity. I take this to be a lesson to be found originally in Aristotle, but it is also present in Kant. In addition, this way of understanding unity seems to me to imply a relational conception of unity, although such relationality is always and only worked out topologically – that is in terms of modes of bounded, embodied activity. I find such a conception of unity, particularly as applied to ideas of meaning and mind (where both are now understood in a way that might be called "externalist"), to be central to Davidson and to Heidegger (as well as Gadamer). You mention the idea of 'robust realism'. But remember that term is actually one that Dreyfus and Spinoza use – it isn't mine – and in fact, following Rorty's advice, I no longer refer to my position as 'realist' at all. If anything, my account of the nature of mind and meaning tends to run contrary to the sort of 'robust realism' of such as Dreyfus and Spinoza. Their position actually relies on a form of separation of mind from world (enshrined in their emphasis on the 'independence' requirement – a requirement that, as they employ it, cannot be made coherent or precise) that Davidson, Heidegger, and I would all reject. In this respect, I tend to think that in many respects Dreyfus himself remains much more of a Cartesian than is often assumed (although the fact that he is so much closer to Merleau-Ponty than to Heidegger might suggest as much). My account, and the account that I think is to be found in Davidson and Heidegger, refuses the usual dichotomy of mind and world, beginning with the fact of meaning and mind as always embedded in the world, as part of it, and then understanding action and meaning as arising through the dynamic interconnection of agents with themselves, with one another, and with the things around them (an interconnection that cannot be reduced either to externalized behavior or internalized brain-states alone – in this respect, the 'externalism' at issue here itself undercuts the usual 'internal-external' dichotomy). It is precisely because of this prior and active embeddedness – this active placing – that both robust realism and skepticism turn out to be incoherent or irrelevant positions, since they both depend in one way or another on treating meaning, mind, and action apart from the world in which they are always already embedded and with which they are inextricably intertwined.

10. When Davidson answers the question about what the relation is between our beliefs and the perceptual world he sounds like he doesn't think our experiences of the world count as grounding

those beliefs. John McDowell has claimed that this is a mistake because it severs the connection between our experiences and our beliefs. But you defend Davidson don't you using a transcendental argument about the concept of belief? You say that what Davidson is arguing is that just being aware of being located in space embeds us in the world and it is that which grounds our beliefs in the external perceived world. Have I got that right? Are you also saying that this is what Heidegger was arguing too?

Yes, I think that is a pretty accurate account of the core of my position. As I indicated in my answer to the previous question, it is our dynamic placing in the world that is the ground for meaning, and so also, I would say, for belief, and this seems to me a view to be found in Davidson and in Heidegger, as well as in Gadamer, in Camus, and in most of the other thinkers on whose work I draw. One might argue that this is actually a position not too far from McDowell's own, however, since part of what McDowell aims to do by his treatment of conceptuality is to break down the problematic gap between mind and world that he sees as undermining any possibility of grounding belief. I just think that his reading of Davidson, in particular, is wrong on this point, and that he misinterprets Davidson's emphasis on the distinction between, reasons and causes, or more generally, between causes and grounds. Incidentally, Davidson originally saw McDowell's position as close to his own, and was bemused by the fact that McDowell saw him as an opponent rather than an ally.

11. You wrote a very cool essay about Heidegger, geography and politics where you confronted in a very subtle and fascinating way Heidegger's Nazi politics and his place-orientated thinking. You related his thought to other environmentalists like Jakob von Uexküll, Friedrich Ratzel and Paul Vidal de la Blache, which I guess most readers won't have heard of. You point to a contradiction between commitments to deep ecology, on the one hand, and Nazi commitments to subjectivism and deterministic biology. Can you tell us something about all this? And is your thought here that the issue of environment and place in Heidegger is not tainted by his Nazism because he was just philosophically muddled as to how it could connect with his politics?

One of the key points of the essay to which you refer concerns the crucial difference between the place-oriented thinking that is to be found in Heidegger, as well as in Ratzel and Vidal de la Blache, and the racially-oriented character of Nazi ideology. The thinking that takes human being to stand in an essential relation to place, and to be constituted in and through that relation, is a mode of thinking that cannot allow the sort of simple, 'internal', biological 'determination' of the human that is to be found in Nazism. Significantly, von Uexküll, whose work is often cited in ecological and environmental circles, and whose ideas are sometimes compared to Heidegger's, was not only personally sympathetic to Nazi ideology, and especially its biologism and racism, but his thinking is itself biologicistic and subjectivist in character. Thus, the sort of topological and topographic thinking exemplified by Ratzel, Vidal de la Blache, and Heidegger, is actually positioned in opposition to the thinking exemplified by von Uexküll and by Nazi ideology (contrary to the, to my mind, rather dishonest allusions that Agamben makes in his book *The Open*). I do certainly do not think that Heidegger's thinking on environment and place is tainted by Heidegger's Nazism. But I think this for a number of reasons: because I think that the connection between a thinker's political and philosophical commitments is often much less straightforward than we assume (whether any particular commitments held by a thinker are related by implication, and even whether they are consistent, is always something open to question); because I think it is unclear exactly what Heidegger's commitment to Nazism actually was (and there have been all too few serious attempts to address this question); because I think that the explicit thematization of place in Heidegger is actually part of his attempt to extricate himself from the entanglement with Nazism (and so becomes part of his criticism of it), rather than being in any way a consequence of it (thus the explicit focus on place becomes increasingly important in the period *after* 1933/34, not before); because I think, contrary to many commonplace assumptions, that the concept of place, and the notions that come with it, is itself fundamental to the possibility of any form of humane or genuinely democratic politics – the fact that place, along with ideas of justice, truth, the good, and the right, is made use of by authoritarian politics shows something about the fundamental nature of the concept rather than anything about its essentially conservative or politically regressive character (it also shows something about the way all politics aims to appropriate what is most fundamental). I think there is no doubt that Heidegger was muddled about his politics in the 1930s – although I think muddlement is too weak a term – intoxication might be better. Like many philosophers, he was highly vulnerable to the prospect, when it seems to be offered, of his ideas being politically realized and made effective, and it was that prospect that seduced Heidegger into the 'mistake' of 1933-34. Whenever a philosopher falls victim to

the seductions of power in this way, the result is almost always unfortunate – at best, embarrassment, at worst, humiliation, philosophical diminishment, and even self-destruction. We also expect philosophers to be more questioning, and so more resistant to such temptations and the vanity and pride on which they feed. Unfortunately, philosophers, like all of us, are merely human, and so prey to the faults and flaws that come with such humanity. That was certainly true of Heidegger.

12. You call Heidegger's pupil Hans-Georg Gadamer 'the decisive figure in the development of twentieth century hermeneutics'. He's another figure you connect with Davidson don't you? (as well as Wittgenstein). C.J. Prado notes that Davidson resisted some efforts to connect his work with Gadamer but later changed his mind somewhat, which suggests some ambivalence about the connection in his mind at least. I think you are less ambivalent aren't you that there is a fruitful connection? I think you argue that just as Davidson rejects a way of thinking about agreement that grounds it in an essentially subjective, even shared structure prior to any encounter, which is how some readers read Davidson, you think Davidson reads Gadamer in the same way, and so mistakes his project in the same way others have mistaken his. Is that right? Can you say why you find him so impressive and does he add to what we get in Davidson? Are they coming to the same conclusions via different routes or are there subtle differences that make them both worth studying?

I am not sure what Prado has in mind here other perhaps than the fact that Davidson was cautious about the extension of his work into domains with which he was unfamiliar, and so there were occasions when he expressed skepticism about some attempts to develop his work in certain directions. Yet in my own conversations with Davidson, he never showed any resistance to his work being connected with Gadamer's (and Gadamer was someone we discussed on a number of occasions), but rather curiosity about such a connection. Moreover, both thinkers seemed to have a genuine admiration for one another corresponding from at least the time of Davidson's award of the Hegel-Prize (a prize awarded to Davidson at Gadamer's instigation). It was also through Davidson that I made my own connection to Gadamer in the late 'nineties and then had the opportunity to talk to Gadamer in Heidelberg about Davidson's work. I don't recall any change in Don's views about Gadamer, although he did try to read Gadamer's *Truth and Method* as preparation for his essay in the Library of Living Philosophers volume, and I think he found it a difficult read (I never felt that there was much to be gained by Davidson trying to read Gadamer as it seemed to me that there was too great a gulf in terms of their respective philosophical cultures – they were always likely to misread one another, as is shown by the Library of Living Philosophers exchange). I don't think either of them had any deep understanding of the other's work – I think that they felt an affinity, even though they were never able to articulate that in any detailed fashion. Of course there are differences between Davidson and Gadamer, as there are between any thinkers of worth, and the value of their work is that they do indeed bring different perspectives because of their different backgrounds and approaches. Yet they both seem to me to adopt an essentially hermeneutic and topographical approach. One of the reasons Davidson is significant is because of the way he works out a topographic approach from within an analytic frame., thereby also setting up a certain critique of the analytic. Gadamer is significant, in part, because he is such an insightful and illuminating reader of Heidegger and also because he is such a key figure in the history of hermeneutics – contemporary hermeneutics is probably unthinkable without him. In this respect, Gadamer is one of the most underappreciated figures in the history of twentieth-century thought, just as Davidson is himself one of the most misread and misappropriated.

13. You say that Davidson, Heidegger and Gadamer do not ground understanding in some element or single source, "not Dasein, nor Spirit, nor Life, nor even History" but rather "in the complex dialogical interplay between speakers and their world," an interplay that is within language and tradition but "never held captive by them". Here you show an impressive ability to connect the dots between thinkers usually not discussed together with such authority. So what's the basic argument and significance of this?

The short answer is that the basic argument is grounded in my account of place, and in the fundamental role of place in thought and experience (essentially the ideas alluded to in some of my earlier responses), and this is significant in that it involves a basic reorienting of philosophy so that philosophy comes to be seen as essentially topology or topography. The longer answer involves a rethinking of the concept of ground that understands it not in terms of some underlying foundation or principle, but rather through the exhibiting of the topological or topographical unity of the domain whose grounding is in question. This rethinking of ground, and with it the clarification of notions of

unity and limit, is indeed a rethinking of philosophy, but also entails a rethinking of the human and of the human relation to world that has implications for ethics as much as for ontology or epistemology. The central role I give to place here is also quite different from most previous attempts in the history of philosophy to give priority to some one idea or principle. One of the characteristic features of the philosophical treatment of place has been the tendency to discard the notion as vague, unclear, derivative. In this respect, place has many of the characteristics that Heidegger argues are typically attributed to 'being'. Certainly, place resists attempts to turn it into anything substantive – it is an essentially open, bounded structure (its openness and boundedness are tied together) in which resides the very possibility of any sort of presencing (of both appearing and not-appearing). Of course, in emphasizing place here, I am suggesting that what is at work here is some abstract topological structure – place itself appears only in terms of specific places, and so too is presencing always a presencing of the here and now – it occurs only and always in the singular concreteness of existence. The world, in its inexhaustibility, is opened up only in and through the singular places in which we find ourselves – places that are characterized by a specificity of geography and history, of landscape and narrative, of the human and that which goes beyond the human. The boundlessness of world thus opens up only within the boundedness of place. The opening of the boundless within the bounded is also what lies at the heart of language, of tradition, of finitude.

14. In last year's 'The Place of Landscape' you place a philosophical, conceptual investigation at the heart of the book. What is the general thesis and does it connect with the issues of place, identity, hermeneutics and ontology that have been your themes for many years?

The general thesis is that landscape is to be understood through place. My own contribution argues against the diminished conception of the visual – a conception that treats visibility as essentially displaced – that I think dominates in much contemporary thinking. It also argues for the continuing significance of landscape even as it acknowledges those problematic aspects that have often dominated in the literature. To some extent, my essay can be seen as a continuation of Ed Casey's inquiries into landscape – notably in his *Representing Place* – but Casey also has an essay of his own in the volume, and it is an essay of special interest to me because of its focus on the idea of the 'edge' of landscape. A number of the essays in the first section of the volume, including mine and Casey's, take up these sorts of conceptual issues as they inform thinking of landscape, and so also inform the thinking of place. While the first part of the book focuses on conceptual issues, the second part takes up landscape as it arises in particular contexts, and in particular forms, and the third part includes what might be thought of as particular landscape studies. The aim of the volume was to look at landscape from a range of [perspectives, and I think the volume certainly does that. In so doing, I think it also demonstrates again the importance of place in contemporary thought – and not just in philosophy or geography, but in art, environmental studies, photography, history, literature, garden design, and elsewhere.

15. I've left it til the end to ask you about Heidegger and topology in more detail because I needed to be able to grasp the significance of topology for philosophy. You argue that, although rarely explicit, it is a theme that runs through all or most of Heidegger's work – don't you? He didn't see place as an objective Cartesian geometrical space did he, but kind of thinks of it as an 'event.' This can be confusing as it seems to change the subject. So can you explain what Heidegger meant by space and topology and why it is approached as it is in his work?

The claim I make in *Heidegger's Topology*, and elaborated in *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, is that all of Heidegger's thinking is, to be understood as topology – as he himself says, it is a saying of the place of being (*Topologie des Seyns*). Heidegger only begins to articulate the idea of place in his works after *Being and Time*, and this is partly a result of his increasing engagement with Holderlin (although it also develops out of his earlier thinking). Place is certainly not to be based on any idea of Cartesian spatiality, but is rather that bounded opening emergence in which things come to presence, in which space spatilises and time temporalises. In this respect, place stands in a close relation to what Heidegger calls the Event (*das Ereignis*) which must itself be understood topologically rather than temporally or spatially. Place encompasses space and time (which is why Heidegger sometimes talks of the play of time-space (*Zeit-Spiel-Raum*)).

16. It is through understanding his ideas of topology that we get to grips what he means by technology. Again, this sometimes sounds like he's not using the word to mean what we thought technology means (roughly, tools and machines). Can you explain this: is technology the thing that

threatens 'dwelling' - a '...loss of concealment, the loss of finitude and boundedness -- the loss, one might say of the nearness to the holy, of a proper ethos, of a proper place'.

Technology is not tools and machines, but a mode of ordering of the world, specifically a mode of ordering that orders purely for the sake of ordering. Its most powerful current instantiation is the globalised form of bureaucratic-economism that now dominates most of the Anglo-Saxon world and is steadily infiltrating everywhere else – technological devices are themselves merely elements within that larger frame, and are determined by and dependent on it (your mobile phone, for instance, is useless without the economic and organizational system within which it operates, and within which you are as much an element as is your phone). Within this ordering of the world, everything is understood in terms of quantity, in terms of boundless transfer and flow, in terms of constant relation and inter-relation. Within this ordering of the world, everything is taken up within the same homogenizing structure, reduced to the same quantifiable measures and means. Things themselves lose their identity, submerged into the larger technological framework, subsumed under the logo, the brand, and the trademark. Everything becomes its own uncanny double, but in such a way that there is no longer even the possibility of distinguished the double from what it doubles. All is representation, image, *simulacra*. Central to this mode of ordering is the way in which it obliterates spatial and topographic differentiation. Technology presents the world as simply a network of connected sites or locations, none of which are intrinsically any different from any other, and all of which are connected by transfer and flow. The loss of concealment of which Heidegger speaks is a loss of the sense of the proper boundedness that alone allows things to appear – where such appearing involves both concealment and unconcealment. To dwell is to be in the world in a way that is attentive to such appearing, to the concealing/unconcealing of things, and so to maintain an attentiveness to boundedness and finitude. It is just such attentiveness, and with it a recognition of human fragility and the world's transcendence, that I think is at issue in Heidegger's talk of the holy. Yet precisely this is what technology refuses. Perhaps surprisingly, the way technology appears and represents itself, – technology's obsession with connection, flow, globality, and unbounded relationality – is not only reflected in the language of contemporary corporate capitalism, but also in the language of much contemporary humanities and social science research. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that contemporary universities have allowed themselves to be so overtaken by the bureaucratic-economistic model – it seems they have already abandoned any position from which they could contest even the intellectual framework of the technological.

17. You disagree with Heidegger about whether we're doomed never to return to 'dwelling' don't you? You think Heidegger just exaggerated the contemporary situation. Is this right? And are you hopeful that we can turn things around, or are you saying we don't need to because actually things aren't that bad and technology not so pervasive or corrosive of the 'gathering of space'?

I am not sure that I have ever said that I disagree with Heidegger about being "doomed never to return to 'dwelling'". Where I do disagree with him on the question of technology is his tendency to overlook what seems to me to be the boundedness of technology itself. In the Parmenides lectures Heidegger describes technology as an 'obscuring cloud'. What it obscures is its own character and part of what that means is that technology hides its character as a mode of framing of the world – a mode of ordering. Thus technology appears everywhere as if it were transparent to us, as a means simply for us better to live and manage our lives – as if technology were merely there at our service. One result of this is that technology hides its character as a mode of ordering even of the human (so that we become mere resource for contemporary managerial and economic systems – as subjects of organizational and governmental control or components in structures of consumption and commodification). At the same time, however, technology also presents itself as if it were all-encompassing and unassailable in its ordering of things, and yet technology is no less immune to breakdown and limitation as is any other frame of ordering. Technology is thus bounded and yet cannot represent that boundedness to itself. This means that technology cannot represent the possibility of its own failure, even though technology is constantly failing – and failing not only in the mundane sense that technological devices fail, but because its very nature creates the condition for its own breakdown. Technological systems, in their constant move to encompass more and more, also give rise to more and more tension, interference, and disruption. The argument for this conclusion is one that I set out some time ago in a paper with Gary Wickham called 'From Joe DiMaggio to Michel Foucault; On Governance and the World', but it is also an argument that I reprise in *Heidegger's Topology* and elsewhere. I do think that Heidegger sometimes seems to be in the sway of an idealized view of technology (rather like his sometimes idealized view of Nazism) that misses the

failing character of technology. Thus, on many occasions, he writes in ways that seem to take technology's own self-representation as all-encompassing and all-controlling as true of technology itself, whereas his own account ought to commit him to the view that technology is itself deluded as to its own nature – and that means that it must be deluded about precisely its capacity to encompass and to control. On other occasions, I think he is well aware of the failing character of technology, and that what he intends is merely to depict technology's self-representation as clearly as possible. Certainly, Heidegger's comments about the saving power and the importance of small things suggest that he is well-aware of the way technology carries its own failure within. Like Heidegger, I do not think we can turn things around (just as technology can save us from technology), but one always retains some small hope that things might turn around for us – but, in Heidegger's terms, only a god could enable that hope to be realized. My own guess is that, if we are 'saved', it will only be as a result of near catastrophic collapse of the current system of the world – which may turn out to be no form of 'saving' at all.

18. And finally, are there 5 books (other than your own which of course we'll be dashing away to read straight after reading this) which will help us further understand your world?

My world or my work? Maybe they aren't so different. The five books I would recommend are (and being restricted to five is tough – so there is an inevitable degree of arbitrariness in this choice): Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*; Donald Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*; Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*; Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* (if that is too daunting, try Georges Poulet, *Proustian Space*); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation*. I could have added many other works by these thinkers and others – including (besides thinkers such as Aristotle and Kant) Gaston Bachelard, Andrew Benjamin, Edward Casey (of course), Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, Juhani Pallasmaa, Kathleen Raine (on Blake), Edward Relph, W. G. Sebald, Iain Sinclair, Simone Weil, Kenneth White, Peter Zumthor, and at more of a remove, Emmanuel Levinas, Knud Løgstrup, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. I would also mention one other writer who has been important to me, but is probably not someone your readers may know: the Swiss theologian, Heinrich Ott. One of Ott's essays ('Hermeneutic and Personal Structure of Language, in J. J. Kockelmans [ed], *On Heidegger and Language*) was a powerful early influence, and Ott's other writings are also significant for me if only because of their strongly hermeneutical reading of Heidegger as well as their topological sensitivity.