You started your studies at the University of Oslo in the department of physics and astronomy. What insight do you draw from these studies in your philosophical work?

When I took artium, I wanted to study physics. I was very interested in quantum mechanics because there you had a theory that had worked perfectly for decades; being tested again and again, it had always survived. The theory was expressed in a mathematical formalism, but it was hard to see what kind of reality was described by the mathematical formulae. So one can say that what attracted me was a kind of philosophy, yet it was physics. I started studying mathematics in Oslo, and continued the mathematical studies in Göttingen on a German fellowship that made it tempting for me to go there. I focused on those branches of mathematics that are important for quantum mechanics. I have not applied my philosophical ideas on quantum mechanics, but in the seventies I gave a talk in Oxford on a topic that appears to be relevant. After the lecture, a physicist who had been attending came over to me and was very interested in the topic of the talk. In the talk I discussed meaning and had proposed a view on meaning which I called the “MMM view” Man Made Meaning. The physicist was Archibald Wheeler, and he said that the MMM view was exactly how he wanted to interpret quantum mechanics. Listening to the lecture, he found that the MMM-view is the right way to interpret, or make sense of, quantum mechanics. Wheeler invited me to Austin, Texas, where he was teaching then, to lecture for students in physics. So there is this kind of connection between my philosophy and physics, but that connection was made by Wheeler and not by me, and he went on to write about what he called “the MMM interpretation” of quantum mechanics. The focus of my talk was on what it is to communicate. Communication is established because what we call meaning is a product of the evidence that is available to us when we seek to communicate. Communication does not consist in our grasping concepts that are also grasped by others. We are correlating our way of talking and our way of behaving on the basis of evidence about the world around us and about how others experience it.
For several years, you have argued against most kinds of "schools", "labels" and "-isms" within thinking. Why do you find these divisions uninteresting, or even negative?

I regard it as negative, and I do not want to participate in such discussions at all. People who participate in label discussions usually evade reading what the other persons are writing. They say, for instance, “That’s ‘positivism’, and not worth wasting one’s time on.” If you ask them “What is positivism?” the only answer they can give you is that it is something negative. Conversely, those who reject continental philosophy tend to regard it as unclear deep sounding talk. Husserl, for example, who writes in a rather complicated way, is often regarded so incomprehensible that it is not worth the time to try to penetrate his writings. My view is that one should not reject a view without understanding what it is all about. As soon as I see label-polemics, I want to ask: “What exactly are you criticizing?” Use of labels is a bad sign because it usually indicates that one does not know what one is criticizing and also does not even know what an argument is. Similarly, in political discussions some discussants group some people together and use a label for them: “they are Jews,” or “they are Muslims.” If you ask them “What does it consist in to be a Jew, and why it is that being a Jew is bad?” they cannot give a good answer.

This label throwing became very prominent in the late 1920’s and early -30’s when Hitler got power in Germany. Hitler was a typical label thrower, and so were most of the people who supported him. The philosophers in the Vienna circle were very opposed to Hitler – some of them were Jews, but most of them were not. They regarded the view that Hitler had as awful, and the views were completely below any standard of argumentation, so they were very critical. At Stanford, we have courses that have the same purpose as the “Examen Philosophicum” has here, to train people in critical thinking. These are big courses, with 2-300 people in big auditoriums, so it is not a nice way to teach. However, in one of these courses I decided that we should read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. This goes against the tradition, because both in the U.S. and in Germany one does not want young people to read *Mein Kampf*. We read the book to see how Hitler used all kinds of means to persuade the readers. *Mein Kampf* is really a kind of introductory textbook to advertising and labeling. Hitler uses all kinds of labels – especially “Jews.”

I think that one important task we have as philosophers is to train people not to be taken in by that kind of rhetoric and not let label-throwing replace arguments and evidence. Sweeping generalizations, general phrases, labels and so on. It is not just that labels indicate that people are not going deeply into issues, it also illustrates that people tend to be persuaded by things that have nothing to do with the argument. I think we have an important task as philosophers in trying to get people to reflect on the importance of arguments.

How would you convince a philosopher who firmly supports the distinction between “analytic” and “continental” traditions of the distinction’s un-interestedness?

I have been attacked for rejecting that distinction. What I would do, and have done, is to ask questions. “What is positivism?” for instance. There were some people in the 1970’s who attacked “positivism”. They debated in newspapers and characterized their adversaries as “positivists”. I did not want to participate in such debates, since I do not like controversies of this kind. I tend to withdraw. It is hard to convince people who let label-throwing take the place of arguments, so I have instead spent my time on more constructive work.

In what cases could a division of thoughts be beneficial?
If you want to present philosophers and their views in an orderly way, then it would be natural to look at influences and similarities and differences and group people together because you want to compare or contrast their views on certain points. One could, when looking at Husserl, for instance, look at Bolzano, Brentano and see that they are interconnected; one can follow ideas and see what problems these ideas encountered and how they changed people’s views or prompted them to improve their views. For that purpose, to refine and develop views, I think it is fine, but not for polemical purposes, there close reading sympathetic interpretation and careful arguments are needed.

What about division in order to avoid suppression of thoughts and thereby to go from suppression to dialogue?

Yes, dialogue means that you are interested in knowing and understanding the view of the other person. Part of philosophy is to study the nature of dialogue – how do we communicate, how do we interpret the other one and so on. One important task is empathy, to understand the other and adjust our own views through encounter with the other. This is a central topic in Husserl. There are 40,000 pages of Husserl’s writings, and 6,000 of them are on intersubjectivity. A philosopher should really be a master of dialogue, so one should definitely not avoid it. However, dialogue does not consist of label-using, one should instead ask what exactly does the other person mean? Carnap and Heidegger had a heated discussion: Carnap criticized Heidegger, while Heidegger called Carnap a positivist. Heidegger was not reading what the philosophers of the Vienna circle were doing; he just stated that they were positivist. Carnap did not study what Heidegger meant, he just quoted him, and tried to show how hard it is to make sense of his writings. That is not dialogue.

**ON PHENOMENOLOGY**

For philosophers who are new to phenomenology, how would you concisely describe/define what Husserl’s phenomenology is meant to give an answer to – and how?

A key point in Husserl’s phenomenology is intentionality: the fact that when you are thinking and acting, our experience is directed towards something. At first, that does not seem to be very illuminating, but then you ask, “What does it mean to be directed?” Then you get into the complex set of anticipations that are involved in our experience of the world. Intentionality has to do with having a perspective on something. We all experience the world by living together in a common and joint world, and we experience it from different perspectives. Seeing a cup, for instance, can be done from different sides. This is not the case for cups only, but for everything in this world. We experience everything from a perspective – also one another. Through empathy we can try to grasp the other person’s perspective.

A blind person will not think that he lives in his own world that is invisible, while the others live in a world that is visible. The blind person will say, “I live in a world which I unfortunately cannot see, although it is visible. I cannot see it because there is something wrong with my eyes.” It is the same
with other aspects of the world; we compensate for differences in our perspectives, past experiences and so on. Husserl is very interested in intersubjectivity. The issue of intersubjectivity is very important not just in communication, but also in ethics. The basis of ethics is this kind of empathy. That is, the ability to understand how others experience the world and what happens, and how one’s actions affect others. If one knows how actions affect people and are experienced by them, one would be much more careful about what one does.

Empathy can work as a boundary condition for ethics. In perception, the boundary conditions of our theory of the world are what happen at the sensory organs. In ethics, Rawls, whose views I regard very highly, proposed that the boundary conditions for our ethical theory should be “considered judgments”: We grow up in a society and have some views on what is right and wrong, and then gradually, by reflecting, we adjust these views. One might, for example, grow up in a society where blacks are discriminated, and start reflecting on why some people are treated differently from others. According to Rawls it is through that kind of reflection and adjustment we arrive at what is right and what is wrong. This is where I disagree with Rawls. My view is that moral judgments are much more like science, where we seek new observations: We start observing, using methods of empathy – for instance by asking “If I do this, how would it be experienced by this or that person?” In other words, the boundary conditions of ethics are not what we learned when we grew up, but how those affected by an action experience what goes on.

Just as in science, one can try to systematically find out more about how things are experienced by others, and thereby expand the boundary conditions. Consequently, one can come to include in one’s considerations factors that one initially had not thought about at all. I sometimes use an example that does not strictly have to do with ethics: When they designed the buildings here at Blindern campus, they forgot to design access for wheelchairs. Those who sat in the building committee wanted of course to satisfy all requirements and needs of the users – they had learned through their lives that one should take into account others need. They wanted to make buildings that are beautiful and practical, but they never thought of users who are handicapped. The people in the building committee were not bad people, they just did not think about that group. Later, one discovered the needs of the handicapped and had to build ramps for wheelchairs, etc. at a much higher cost than if they had been thought of initially.

Ethics is a systematization of views of what one should do and what one should not do, carried out with a full awareness of how one’s actions, or omissions are experienced by everybody who is affected. Looking at what has happened through the history of mankind, there are many periods when large groups of people have simply been neglected and forgotten. For example, in the history of the relation between rich people and poor people, there may have been many warm-hearted rich people who never thought about the fact that what they did, or the society they supported, completely overlooked the needs of some others.

In almost all decisions we make we have to balance good consequences against bad ones. This balancing is often a difficult task, and it is important that we do not leave out people who are badly off. Often these are just the people who lack a voice and generally get little attention in media and in the political process.

In “Husserl’s Notion of Noema” you point out that in every intentional content there is an element playing the same role as the Sinn does in every semantic content, according to Frege’s analysis. Do you take this interpretation further, such as Hintikka does, and regard Husserl’s general structure of the intentional state to assimilate Frege’s general structure of a linguistic symbol?

Hintikka and I were colleagues at Stanford for many years and we discussed this. He was thoroughly familiar with Frege and then when he came to Stanford he became interested in Husserl. There are many similarities between Husserl and Frege, but also important differences. The basic idea in Husserl is the idea of intentionality – that we are experiencing objects. What Husserl is so interested in is that we have different perspectives on these object; we might be handicapped or lack experience with them. When we try to communicate about the objects we also have different no-
Husserl would say that we do our best to know the whole set of anticipations, but there will always be something unachieved, some anticipations that we are not aware of, even amongst our own anticipations. Husserl focuses on the process involved in getting a perspective, and regardless of how hard we try there will always be leeway. If we at least achieve a certain kind of similarity in perspective, we can manage to live together and we feel that we communicate and understand one another. What is interesting in Quine is that he, like Husserl, thinks of this as a process. But from a structural point of view, all of these – Frege, Husserl, and Quine – are thinking of an object that we are trying to get at, and there is the structure that directs us to the object (that is what Frege calls Sinn, meaning), and then there is the subject that has its perspective on the object. For Frege, however, the grasping of the Sinn is very much either-or: You either grasp it, or you don’t. Frege’s position is very straightforward and simple, but he never talks of the process of how we grasp the Sinn. He takes for granted that every expression in a language has a Sinn, and one who knows the language can grasp the Sinn, but what does “grasp” mean?

So this is one among many reasons why I find Husserl very interesting. Although Quine is very positive to Frege – which I am too – he saw that there is something very important that Frege does not go into.
cial attention in Norway just now: the number 2. This must be a very simple and straightforward object, one might think, it is 1+1 and also 3-1, and so on. However, until this year's Abel Prize winner, Andrew Wiles, discovered that Fermat's last theorem was true, we did not know whether 2 was the largest integer, n, for which there are three positive integers, x, y and z, so that \( x^n + y^n = z^n \) is true. Almost four hundred years ago the French mathematician Fermat (a friend of Pascal) claimed to have proved this, but we now know that it was unprovable with the means at his disposal. One suspected that 2 had that property, but Wiles was the first to prove it. Almost anything, even objects in mathematics, has unknown aspects. Even these simple notions transcend our understanding of them. For Husserl everything is so rich that it transcends our knowledge of it – even our own knowledge of ourselves transcends our grasp.

The word ‘transcendental’, which Husserl also uses frequently, means something quite different. It is used for the structuring activity of consciousness, which goes on without our being aware of it. In our “natural attitude” we attend to the objects of the acts and their properties. We are not aware of the complicated structuring that our consciousness is carrying out when we experience these objects. Phenomenology is the study of this structuring activity, that is, in phenomenology we are studying the transcendent. It sounds mysterious, but is something which we quickly notice and accept as being there, once we have been made aware that this structuring activity is going on and is characteristic of our consciousness.

The realist attitude has to do with Husserl’s idealism. When something is looked upon from the subject’s perspective, we are always structuring the world. In our structuring, we always think there is an object there, but we have only very partial knowledge about it, and it might be that we are wrong about the object. Intentionality can be described as follows: We have some conception of an object that has a lot of features – some that we know and some that we do not know. We can check and find out more and more about the object, but the object is transcendent, so regardless of how long we keep on there will be more to know. Sometimes we will discover that the opinions we had about the object is wrong, so that actually what we were looking for turned out maybe not to exist at all, but that we were misled. Other times we might find out that the opinions we had of the object in the beginning were right, but that we went astray at a later point.

And, of course, it could also be that from the very beginning there was no such object at all, but that we just thought it was an object. We conceive of the world as having these objects, and we then try to find out more and more about these objects.

One way of misreading Husserl is to think that all that exists is our stream of consciousness, and that there are no objects beyond it. Some idealist say that the whole idea of the world is a kind of illusion – that it is all a kind of illusion – but Husserl said that there are in fact these real objects, but our knowledge of them are always limited and could be wrong. If one says that there are no objects, that our belief that there are such objects is an illusion, what one is saying makes little sense. William James, whom Husserl studied when he started to develop phenomenology in the late 1890’s, seems to have a similar view. James says that the fact that our senses are affected by surroundings is the basis of our conception of reality. There is something that we are trying to get at, so that our sense of reality has to do with the fact that our body is affected in this way. That gives us the idea of what it means for there to be real objects, and Husserl expanded that to include also abstract objects. There are these abstract objects, although we might be wrong about them. We have not seen them, and we do not expect to see them – they are not visible, but visibility is not needed for existence. This is an important aspect to Husserl’s way of looking at the world.

Was his first way of using “idealism” meant to indicate that there exists a world?

The idealist component has to do with the fact that we are actively structuring the world. This active structuring is something the idealists have in common, but Husserl said that not only is there active structuring, but there is also something that we find out something about. This is where the passages from James help to understand Husserl. Some idealists deny that there is any reality, claiming that it is all some kind of projection from us. Some phenomenologists interpret Husserl this way, but there is ample textual evidence to show that this is not what he meant. My view is that Husserl used the word “idealism” in a way which is opposed to what we can call naïve realism. Naïve realism is that one is just passively receiving impressions of things. Many empiricists have been naïve realists, holding views similar to the view that I mention earlier in
connection with concepts, the idea that concepts are *impressed upon us* by the objects. Husserl is much richer in his idea of the structuring of what we are experiencing. The world with its objects is not impressed upon us, not passively received by us, but is actively structured. In his introduction of the label “idealism,” he says that “nobody can have the right view without being an idealist”. I see this as simply a way of stressing that he is not what we could call a naïve realist.

Later, he discovered that the term “idealist” was a bit misleading. Similar situations tended to happen with Husserl, as he was not very good at understanding what other people meant by their words. He could start out using words that were common in philosophy, and later discover, from misunderstandings that people had of what he was saying, that he really did not mean what other people had meant by those words. I think this is what happened with his use of the word “idealism,” and that is why he later wrote in a letter, “people call me an idealist, a term which I no longer use”. He does not say that he has given up a view, but that he has stopped using that term – and he continues, “but nobody could be more of a realist than I am”. Some think that the latter means that he gave up his idealism, and became a realist. That is one of the debates in Husserl scholarship: Did Husserl have a period in which he was an idealist, and then gave it up? I think it is much more plausible that he simply is not an idealist in the sense in which many others are idealists, but that he is an idealist in the sense that when we experience the world we impose a structure on it, a structure that has to be revised and updated as we together with others explore the world. That fits in with a lot of Husserl’s texts throughout his life from 1907, when he turned to idealism. I read these texts as confirming that from 1907 on Husserl had a conception of idealism involving active structuring of the world around us. He claims that we always have perspectives on the world, but he is a realist in the sense that there is a world that we have these perspectives on, it is not just an illusion.

Some philosophers point to similarities between Husserl and Kant, while others interpret the ideas of the two philosophers as essentially distinct. What is your view on the relation between Husserl and Kant?

I think that there are connections between Husserl and Kant, but partly because they were dealing with some similar issues. Husserl also read Kant and had contact with neo-Kantians, especially Natorp, who is considered one of the main neo-Kantians. Husserl’s teacher, Brentano, was skeptical of the German idealist tradition. He thought that the German idealists were unclear and on the wrong track, so he guided his students to instead study the British empiricists, especially David Hume, and John Stuart Mill. Brentano thought that Mill’s *System of Logic* ought to be translated into German, and he had one student who wrote very good in German (this student was not Husserl, but Sigmund Freud, who studied medicine, but he went to these Brentano lectures – a fact that few people are aware of.)
Husserl and Brentano’s other students in general took over some of that skepticism towards Kant and the idealists. Only gradually did it dawn upon Husserl that what he was working on was not that different from what Kant worked on. He reports on this development mainly in some of his letters, especially to the prominent neo-Kantian Natorp.

**ON QUINE**

*Your teacher, Quine, started out (in Word and Object, 1960) with the view that intentionality could not be accommodated in the language of first-order logic. In your doctoral thesis “Referential Opacity and Modal Logic” you present an argument for the inclusion of “intentional”, or “modal”, logic in the language of first-order logic. Quine accepted your modifications. Without going into the very technical details, could you explain the general line of thought that is argued for in your thesis?*

When I wrote my thesis, and had been Quine’s student, he published *Word and Object* in the fall of 1960. For many years Quine had tried to find an argument to show that there is something basically very wrong with modalities. “No entity without identity,” he stated, for instance. Quine had pointed to various difficulties, such as the fact that the identity criteria for modalities become very diffuse. Gradually, he found stronger and stronger arguments against the modalities. For example, he wrote in *From a Logical Point of View* that if you are accepting the modalities, you are committed to Aristotelian essentialism, which he could not accept. Therefore he had to get away from the modalities. And then, in *Word and Object*, he actually thought that now he had clinched his case, because now he gave an argument – a proof, actually – for the fact that if you accept the modalities, then you can go through a formal proof line by line and show that every true sentence is necessarily true. And then, of course, since the converse also is true there is no distinction to be made. Everything which is true is necessarily true, and conversely.

When I first looked at *Word and Object*, I thought that he had finally achieved what he tried to show, but then I looked more closely at the proof, and I saw that the proof is really too catastrophic because you can go through the same proof without using the normal modalities. If one takes any operator that singles out, from among the true sentences, a proper subclass (a subclass that is not comprising the whole set) it will lead to a collapse. But there are many operators in the language in addition to the modal ones that do single out such a subclass. For example, it is the case with ethical distinctions: If something is “obligatory” for instance, then everything that is happening is obligatory. Likewise, probability leads to the same kind of collapse. Everything that has a degree of probability can be shown to have any other degree of probability. It is also the same with causality. One simply undercuts all of science, which is something that Quine definitely would not do without. So there must be something wrong with that argument, I concluded.

In *Word and Object*, Quine just explains in an intuitive way how he goes about the argument. The first thing one can do if one wants to check an argument is to spell it out step by step in logical notation, so that every step is made explicit. When presenting arguments, one skips those steps that one thinks are obvious, and the steps that Quine had skipped were regarded as obvious by every philosopher at that time. One thing in particular that was needed for the proof was that one can go back and forth between singular terms and general terms. A singular term is a term that refers to an object; a general term is a term that is true of an object. Frege had the nice idea that sentences, general terms, and singular terms, all have a meaning and a reference. Singular terms refer to individual objects, general terms refer to properties, and sentences refer to truth-values. Frege’s semantics, which I called a one-sorted semantics, states that one has exactly the same semantics for all three kinds of expression in language. The singular terms, the general terms, and the sentences all express a meaning, and they refer to an object. This nice, unified semantics had been taken over by pretty much all philosophers, in a modified form it can also be found in Carnap’s philosophy and it was anticipated even by the Stoics. I argued that this view is what has to be given up.

The only way to block the argument I presented was to admit that singular terms behave quite differently from the others. Consequently, when one is using a proper name, the name does not relate to an object through properties of the object. A
name is much more like a label that does not attach to an object through its properties or any kind of Sinn. Following this argument, one has to give up the view that Frege and Carnap had – and that pretty much every philosopher in the philosophy of language had had – that the three kinds of expression all have a very similar semantics. My view was that singular terms – names would be an important kind of singular term, but singular terms also include, for example pronouns and indexicals, like ‘this’, ‘here’, ‘now’, etc. – refer directly to their reference, not via a Sinn. Thereby, the singular terms have very different semantics from the general terms and sentences. Although people had not seen it before, I could give arguments for why one should not really expect all three expressions to be similar, and that proper names and other singular terms refer directly to their objects, not via a Sinn. Since the referring relation is radically different from the semantics of general terms and sentences, I concluded that we need a two-sorted semantics. Singular terms, including names, pronouns and so on, refer directly to the object, not via a Sinn. General terms and sentences are the way Frege, Carnap and the rest conceived of them; they relate to the extension, or to the truth value, via Sinn. This meant that one had to look upon the whole notion of the relation of linguistic expressions to objects in a different way from what had been the traditional way.

One could show that from this conclusion follows Aristotelian essentialism, so Quine was right about this, but you cannot get around it – one has to accept Aristotelian essentialism. However, I argued that Quine was wrong in rejecting Aristotelian essentialism. However, later I also argued that he was right in rejecting a different notion of essentialism that was proposed later by Ruth Marcus and Saul Kripke. Similarly, and this was my main point, one has to accept that singular terms and names have a very different semantics than what people had thought. In the thesis I go into several consequences of this. The view presented is sometimes called the “new theory of reference.” Ten years later, Kripke proposed something very similar, but he called these terms “rigid designators.” It is just the same notion, the rigid designators stick to their objects, and the phrase “rigid designators” is an apt label for this kind of expression, which I had called ‘genuine singular terms’. By now, 55 years later this view has pretty much taken over. Almost all philosophers agree now, I think, that singular terms have the property that they stick to their reference.

Why could not Quine accept Aristotelian essentialism in the first place?

Because he found it hard to accept the idea that objects by themselves have some properties that are necessary. Carnap argued that what is necessary has to do with what kind of language we use to talk about the object; some ways of describing the object makes the properties necessary, other times it does not. Necessity, possibility, and so on, are consequences of our language and not something that has to do with the object itself. I argued in my thesis that one has to accept Aristotelian essentialism. Kripke and Marcus later used another notion of essence; according to them we can refer to objects because each object has some kind of property that is had by just that object, so that each object has an essence, which is different from other objects. According to them, we succeed in referring to that object because it has some kind of essence, and that is a quite different notion than the Aristotelian essentialism. Aristotelian essentialism is the view that when you refer to objects it does not matter how you refer to them, as you are referring to it. That is not because it has some essential quality – that would mean that every rain drop would have different essence – it has to do with individuation. Kripke and Marcus tried to explain the idea of rigid reference by saying that each object has an essence, and Aristotelian essentialism does not say that each object has an essence. Aristotelian essentialism just says that the object is one that we can refer to only directly, not via a sense, which is why it is sometimes called “direct reference theory”. I wrote a paper arguing that when Quine rejects essentialism, he really rejects the view that Kripke and Marcus had, and not Aristotelian essentialism. Rather, Quine has to accept Aristotelian essentialism in order to get around the collapse he derived
in *Word and Object*. Quine accepted that and saw that there was a distinction.
There has been a great deal of confusion regarding the name “essentialism”. Quine was right that according to the notion of essentialism that Kripke and Marcus talk of, as if *every* object has its particular essence, the word essence does not serve any function at all if one starts talking about raindrops, for instance. What is important is that when you are referring to an object, you stick to *it*, and not to something that is described in a certain way. This does not mean that the object has an essence. I refer to that raindrop and keep track of it, and maybe it pops away. In order to refer to it, I have to be able to track it, but that does not mean that the drop has some special essential quality.

**ON STUDENTS**

*Your student, Hubert Dreyfus, among others, argues for overcoming the Cartesian dualist picture. Is there a need to overcome the dualist worldview?*

Dreyfus wrote his dissertation on Husserl’s view of perception. He calls himself my student, but he was not really my student. We were good friends and talked a lot together at Harvard about Husserl. When I started teaching he followed my course on Husserl and also a course I taught on Heidegger. When he presented his thesis I was on his thesis committee because I was the only teacher at the university who knew anything about Husserl, so it was reasonable that they put me on the committee. Dreyfus conceives of Husserl as a kind of Cartesian, and Husserl did in fact point to parallels between himself and Descartes – and between himself and Leibniz, for that matter. But he is not Cartesian in the sense that Dreyfus claims. I think that what is so important in Husserl is the very rich relation between us and the things around us. We are not minds, but persons, with mental and bodily aspects.

The focus on the body is prominent in Merleau-Ponty, whom Dreyfus is very fond of, but it is also fundamental in Husserl. Merleau-Ponty, in his early works, expresses gratitude to the Husserl archive in Leuven for permitting him to read Husserl’s manuscripts. I regard Merleau-Ponty as carrying out ideas that Husserl had and developing them further. This applies especially to his work on the role of the body, which Dreyfus is strongly interested in. Especially in the posthumously published second and third volume of the *Ideas* – which Merleau-Ponty studied in Leuven – Husserl wrote in great detail on the role of the body. Even Quine has views on the role of the body that are to some extent similar.

Also, another theme that Dreyfus is fond of is human practices. That is, if you are a good craftsman...
you deal with materials in a certain way, and you can make distinctions that somebody who does not know the craft will not connect anything with. Also, you have skills that go far beyond theory and are acquired through practice. I agree with Dreyfus on that, it is just that you also find this in Husserl, but it is not as much emphasized. Especially from 1917 and on Husserl paid a lot of attention to practical activity and the way it leaves its sedimentation in our constitution of the world.

Is your view, then, that one can argue for much of the same as Dreyfus does, such as the emphasis on the practical coping and the body, without overcoming any dualism?

Yes, exactly. My disagreement with Dreyfus has nothing to do with me rejecting what he says of practice and the role of the body, but I reject his view that this is not in Husserl.

Do you have any advice to philosophy students on how to proceed in writing philosophy?

When I write philosophy, I like having a reader in mind. Writing in a vacuum is quite uninspiring, and I find it very difficult. But if I try to have somebody in mind, and then try to explain this to that person, it becomes easier to get the writing into shape. I see what I have to say in order to make it intelligible, for instance. One person I tend to write for is Quine. Quine was such a master of English. He is like Frege, extremely clear, but richer in his style than Frege. Quine had a very rich vocabulary, and he often coined words that are so well chosen that they have become part of English. One might think that writing English as a foreign language and having Quine as an imagined reader would be paralyzing, but Quine was, as a teacher and as a person, extremely stimulating. He listened and seemed genuinely interested in what people talked about. I have heard people who had views that were very different from Quine’s and who had expected him to simply reject their view, but were astonished when he listened and asked questions. That is the way he was. It does not mean that he had come to agree with you, but he really wanted to come to find out exactly what you meant. I think that this is probably a good writing procedure: find a person who has that combination of features – being genuinely interested in what you are working on, but also wants you to be clear on it and argue well for it. He sets certain kinds of standards, so he is not accepting whatever you say or whatever way you say it. On the other hand, it is not so that he is immediately down on you to criticize what you say, but he listens and tries to find out whether there maybe is something in the arguments.

If one has known Quine, he is an ideal person to write for; he was positive, open, but at the same time wanted clarity, and did not leave issues which he found problematic. One can see this characteristic of his in his attitude towards the “analytic/synthetic distinction.” He discussed it thoroughly with Carnap and thought that there is something there that had not been properly understood. He could ask “What about this or that?” and could be very stimulating in that way, and get you to think about your views again and see whether there might be flaws that you might not have thought about. Quine had these qualities that inspire you to do your best.

One could – if not having Quine – write for one’s wife or for one’s friend. The idea is to find a person who has some of these qualities, and try to keep this person in mind while you write. Not someone who is down on you immediately if you have done something poorly, but who stimulates and asks questions. I find it difficult to write for nobody, for a vacuum.

Several of your students have gone from philosophy to the arts, such as movie making or literature. What relevance does your philosophy have to art, do you think?

I think that the general relevance of my philosophy in film, pictures, and literature, is the emphasis on how we each have our perspective on what goes on. I think that very good art often gives an insight into a perspective that one might never have thought about.

Terrence Malick, who is a former student of mine, has several films that are very good illustrations of perspectives. For instance, Badlands centers on a woman who participated in a murder spree. Malick interviewed her in prison, and she describes to him what happened. In the movie, you hear her describing it, and you see what happens on the screen, and the discrepancy between the perspective you have on what happens and her perspective is fantastic. There are several filmmakers and painters who are able to bring out different perspectives and I am fascinated by this kind of art. What is
happening is experienced differently by different people. In *Badlands* Malick achieves this by having the visual and the auditive going parallel, but you can also present the perspectives after one another or in various other ways.

Also Malick’s *Days of Heaven* presents different perspectives in a rather interesting way. There is a young couple living in the slums of Chicago, who are unemployed and decide to go to a big farm in Texas, where, during the harvesting season, they need extra people. The owner of the farm is a lonely man, with no children, whose health looks bad. The young man suggests to his girlfriend to try getting the farmer interested in her, so that when the farmer dies she might inherit the farm. She is very reluctant and does not want to go into that kind of deceit, but the young man talks her into it. During the conversations with the farmer, her original perspectives are very much enriched. She comes to understand that the relation to her boyfriend is very poor, and she understands what it is like really to *meet* a person. The conversations with the farmer open a new world for her, and of course, she gets very attached to him – as a person. The farmer starts freshening up through the conversations with the woman. The boyfriend sees what is happening and of course he gets desperate. What is important is noticing how the perspectives change through interrelation between two people. In all the works of Malick, developments in perspectives are central.

If you look at art in general, you find that the notion of perspective is a good key to much of the best art – from pictorial art to literature. One reads a book where one suddenly gets a glimpse into a new perspective. For instance, in Tarjei Vesaas’ book *Fuglane*, the main character’s way of experiencing the world is brought across. The reader gets an insight into a way of looking at the world that is not very common, I think. This man is a little bit retarded, and Vesaas’ wife says that she thinks the book is somewhat autobiographical – Vesaas had his very special way of experiencing nature and surroundings. It is a very primitive way of experiencing, but in a way it is also a very rich way. That little book is a good illustration of the importance of perspective, which is so central in Husserl.