Heidegger on *das Man*

– Using Simmel to reconcile Dreyfus and Olafson

Section 1 establishes some key similarities between Heidegger and Georg Simmel in order to motivate the hypothesis that Simmel’s account of how society is possible can be used to give an account of *das Man* which reconciles the transcendently philosophical role emphasised by Dreyfus with the ethically negative features emphasised by Olafson. Section 2 elaborates the issue addressed in Ch. 4 of Division I in *Being and Time* and on this basis provides an account *das Man*, which, unlike Olafson’s, captures the status Heidegger gives it as a genuine *Existential*, but, unlike Dreyfus’, does not interpret it in a ‘socially normative’ sense. Simmel’s social ontology is then used (§ 3) to integrate into Heidegger’s account those features of *das Man* which lead Dreyfus to accuse Heidegger of illicit lapse into ontic social critique. Simmel’s usefulness is then shown to derive from the even-handed way he treats both the ‘inner’ and ‘intentional’ and the ‘outer’ and ‘social’, namely, as internally related, complementary moments of the individual. Since such even-handedness is inimical to the anti-mentalism underpinning Dreyfus’ Heidegger interpretation, Dreyfus cannot avail himself of Simmel in the manner undertaken here. Section 4 shows that Dreyfus’ reading of *das Man* fails to address what is at issue in Ch.4. Finally, (§ 5) the reading developed here is used to resolve the apparent contradiction in what Heidegger says about the relations between *das Man* and authentic being-a-self. It also suggests what stance is appropriate on the translational issue as to whether *das Man* is better translated as ‘the One’ or as ‘the They’.

§ 1: A New Way out of a Stand-off?

In the nineteen-nineties Frederick Olafson and Hubert Dreyfus each advanced two opposed readings of what Heidegger means by *das Man*. Both interpretations find themselves forced to attribute to Heidegger significant incoherence. According to Olafson, *das Man* is the false hypostasisation of public opinion which engenders conformism, thereby undermining possibilities for authentic selfhood. As such, it is not itself an essential feature or *ontological* character of selfhood but rather a distorted *ontic* form or manifestation of what is this, namely, being-with-others (*Mitsein*). Heidegger deals with *das Man* in *Being and Time* merely because *das Man* represents a potentiality inherent to Dasein, given that it can only ever be in the world with others. *Mitsein* is inherently such that under certain conditions Dasein exists inauthentically with others under the sway (*Botmäßigkeit*) of *das Man*. Unfortunately, Heidegger describes the *actuality*, and not the mere potentiality, of *das Man* as an ontological character: *das Man* “… is an Existential and belongs as a primordial
phenomenon to the positive ontological constitution (Verfassung) of Dasein.” (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 129; my translation)

Dreyfus, by contrast, acknowledges from the outset that das Man is a true Existential, hence condition of the possibility of Dasein. It is this, he maintains, because das Man is the source of “all significance and intelligibility,” “the end of the line of explanations of intelligibility.” Unfortunately, this conception of the positive ontological status possessed by das Man commits Heidegger to the thesis that there is no intelligibility beyond that provided by das Man. In consequence, he cannot consistently assert there to be any substantive kind of selfhood beyond that which is defined by its participating in some particular ontic realisation of das Man – what Heidegger calls the man selbst. But Heidegger asserts precisely this: beyond the man selbst there is eigentliches Selbstsein, that is, authentic or, as one might perhaps more accurately translate it, being-a-self as it ‘actually’ or ‘unequivocally’ is (wie es eigentlich ist, as one would say in German). Indeed, according to Heidegger not only is authentic being-a-self conceptually prior to being a man selbst; the latter, he says, is also an existenziell modification of the former – see Sein und Zeit, § 64, H 317.

Dreyfus has difficulty dealing with these latter claims. On the basis of his interpretation of das Man and indeed of Heidegger generally one can derive only a very thin notion of authentic or ‘unequivocal’ being-a-self. Nor can Dreyfus explain the status Heidegger gives the authentic self as conceptually, indeed ontologically prior to the man-selbst. Dreyfus can only say that the authentic self is that man selbst which has recognised and accepted that the everyday intelligibility secured by das Man is all the intelligibility there is. Since Heidegger clearly intends a richer notion of authentic selfhood, Dreyfus charges Heidegger with confusion as to the implications of his position. In particular, Dreyfus concludes that Heidegger’s characterisation of the man-selbst as an existentiell modification of the authentic self is both false and a contradiction of his earlier claim that the authentic self is an existentiell modification of das Man.¹⁴
In the meantime, Dreyfus has weakened his position. He still thinks that “for both Heidegger and Wittgenstein, the source of the intelligibility of the world and of Dasein is the average public practices articulated in ordinary language.” But, he goes on to say, in his original account he mistakenly concluded “from the basis of intelligibility in average understanding and ordinary language that for Heidegger, as for Wittgenstein, there was no other kind of intelligibility.” This concession is unavoidable since Heidegger never describes das Man as exhaustively fixing the bounds of anything like what Dreyfus means by intelligibility. Yet it raises a crucial question. According to Dreyfus, das Man is “the average way of acting,” which he also understands to be the “standards and rules” constitutive of “the taken-for-granted, average right thing” to do.” Note the normative language of these characterisations. Might not the anti-mentalistic thrust of Dreyfus’ Heidegger interpretation have forced him both to construe das Man in these normative terms and to conclude that das Man, thus understood, is all the intelligibility there is?

Clearly, if there is a conceptual connection between Dreyfus’ anti-mentalism and his original reading of das Man, then Dreyfus cannot make the concession he later thinks he can. And there is, I believe, a novel way of interpreting das Man which not only enables one to show just this but also more importantly avoids the stand-off between Dreyfus and Olafson. Dreyfus and Olafson assume that when in Chapter Four Heidegger says seemingly uncomplimentary things about das Man, he is drawing specifically upon Kierkegaard. But as Dreyfus recognises, this kind of cultural critique had become common in Heidegger’s times. Many thinkers other than Kierkegaard could have spoken about such “ontological characters of everyday being amongst others” as “Abständigkeit, Durchschnittlichkeit, Einebnung, Öffentlichkeit, Seinsentlastung und Entgegenkommen . . . .” (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 128) And they could have done so in similarly ambivalent fashion – on the one hand, insisting that there was something essential or inevitable to them, at least as features of
contemporary society, on the other hand, characterising them in a fashion which implied a negative assessment of them.

One such thinker, someone much more contemporary to Heidegger than Kierkegaard, is Georg Simmel (1858-1918). He identifies numerous structural features of at least contemporary mass society which are remarkably similar to these ontological characters of everyday being amongst others. Simmel describes these structural features as part of his effort to capture the sense in which entities are social when they are, as humans are, capable of thinking to themselves, “I am.” Although human beings are gregarious, precisely because they are self-conscious, moderately rational beings capable of the “I am,” they are not gregarious in the manner of bees. Their sociality is characterised by an essential quasi-Hobbesian diffidence towards one another: not merely is it objectively possible that in the course of social interaction the private interests of the actors involved can come into conflict and contradiction but, unlike the social interaction of bees, human social interaction is structured in advance by prior awareness of this possibility. In advance, each human being is mutually aware of this possibility and of the fact that others will act to prevent their interests suffering unduly as a result. In consequence, human sociality is essentially a “struggle between what is social and what is individual;” it is essentially ambivalent and agonistic in the sense that it is both enabling and potentially disabling of what and in particular who any given human individual is. This ambivalent, agonistic character carries over to Simmel’s account of certain structural features of human sociality which display remarkable similarity to what Heidegger calls Seinsentlastung, Abständigkeit, Einebnung, Entgegenkommen and Durchschnittlichkeit.

Thus, Simmel speaks of disburdening (Entlastung) when outlining the constitutive role for human sociality of fashion and imitation. Imitation (Nachahmung) is, he says, the child of thought and thoughtlessness, which disburdens us of the need to deliberate unnecessarily about what to do and how to do it: “Where we imitate, we not
only shift the demand for productive energy from us to the others, we also
simultaneously shift responsibility for it; in this way, imitation frees the individual
from the torture of choice and allows it to appear simply as a creature of the group, as
a container of social contents.”xiv (Die Mode, p.26 in Georg Simmel – das Werk; my
translation) The attraction of fashionability for the individual lies at least in part in the
way it relieves the individual of the need for reflection in the making of unavoidable
everyday decisions, not the least certain everyday ethical and aesthetic choices.xv
Thereby, fashion sustains the relevant social circle.

The term Abständigkeit (stand-offishness) is a Heideggerian neologism, hence not
used by Simmel. But Simmel speaks of reservedness (Reserviertheit) and this clearly
suggests stand-offishness. Reservedness is a constitutive feature of publicness
(Öffentlichkeit), understood as that openness to intersubjective scrutiny and
transparency which both complements and counteracts the diffidence displayed by
individuals without any particular intimate, private bond to one another. Precisely
because it is a structurally necessary complement to such diffidence, it can never be
total; publicness is impossible without a dimension of privateness and secrecy
(Geheimnis) in which otherwise public individuals hold both themselves and details of
themselves back from one another.xvi This tendency towards holding back or
concealment becomes particularly prominent and indeed necessary wherever there is,
as in the modern mass city, a well-developed, anonymous publicness:

The rational [geistige] stance of those living in large cities one may characterise,
from a formal perspective, as reservedness. If one were as often to give the same
inner response as one does in a small town, in which one knows almost everyone
encountered, to the continual outer contact with innumerable people, one would
inwardly atomise completely and degenerate into a quite unimaginable
psychological condition. Partly this psychological circumstance, and partly the
legitimate mistrust [das Recht auf Mißtrauen] we display with regard to those
elements of metropolitan life which touch us fleetingly, compels us to that
reserve as a result of which we often do not know what our long time
neighbours look like and which make us appear, to the inhabitats of a small
Note an important implication of what Simmel says here: reservedness is, particularly but not exclusively, in the modern mass city, necessary for the self’s identity as one and the same across time.Unless one holds something of oneself back, one loses one’s subjective sense of self, of who one is, and thereby one loses one’s objective identity as a self. Simmel describes this as a psychological circumstance, which suggests a certain empirical contingency. It is clear, however, from what he says that the contingent aspect of reservedness is the degree to which fleeting contact with innumerable individuals threatens coherence of self.\textsuperscript{xviii} That at some point it does so is structurally necessary, hence an ontological feature of being a self.

Just as he does not use the term Abständigkeit, so, too, Simmel does not speak of Einebnung (levelling); he prefers the terms Nivellierung and nivellieren. Nonetheless, he clearly means by his terms something very close to what Heidegger means by his. Thus, Simmel speaks of the tendency necessarily possessed by social groups to impose conformity on individuals, a tendency which individuals themselves tend to resist, thereby engendering “the struggle between what is social and what is individual.” (\textit{Die Mode}, p.46 in \textit{Georg Simmel – das Werk}; my translation) The large city is, he says, “the fertile ground for fashion because of the feckless inconstancy of experience and relationships within it, the flattening [Nivellierung] and simultaneous heightening [Pointierung] of individualities, the crowded-togetherness [Zusammengedrängtheit] of existence and the reserve and distance forced upon one thereby.” (\textit{Die Mode}, p.52 in \textit{Georg Simmel – das Werk})

Simmel also believes that something fairly described as accommodatingness (\textit{Entgegenkommen}) is an essential structural feature of human sociality. Accommodatingness constitutes what he describes as the third a priori principle for understanding the nature of sociality. According to Simmel, the phenomenal totality [of the distinctively human social order, synchronically considered] accommodates itself [\textit{sich … fügt}] to the purpose of the
individualities entering into it so to speak from outside; it offers the inwardly determined life-process of these individuals a site at which the particularity of this life-process becomes a necessary element in the life of the whole. As a fundamental category this [accommodatingness] provides the consciousness of the individual with the form which designates it as a social element. (Simmel 1992, p.61; my translation)

Only because the social order is characterised by a tendency to facilitate the realisation of the interests of at least sufficiently many individuals, to have catered at least to some sufficient extent in advance for such realisation, can there be social roles and occupations (Berufe) – see Simmel 1992, p.60. And only if there are social roles and occupation is there human sociality.

Finally, Simmel sees all these ontological characters as serving in the maintenance of the average (Durchschnitt). The expressions Durchschnitt and durchschnittlich occur frequently throughout Simmel’s writings, and he uses them to capture the character of distinctively human social behaviour as necessarily centred around, or oriented towards, a shared mean. It is also clear, as we shall later see, that being average can have for Simmel the negative connotations one might pre-theoretically associate with the notions of disburdening, stand-offishness, levelling and accommodatingness, namely, the evasion of responsibility, psychological coldness, mediocrity and the taking or having of things too easily. Those ontological characters of das Man which Heidegger, notwithstanding his protestations to the contrary, seems often to evaluate negatively, are indeed not at all features of modern life recognised solely and specifically by Kierkegaard. Indeed, Simmel not only describes these phenomena, he describes them much more fully and systematically than Kierkegaard.

If, therefore, one abstracts for all other considerations and takes into account only what Heidegger concretely says about das Man and its various structural features, one might just as legitimately take Simmel’s views as clues to what Heidegger is getting when he speaks of das Man. There is all the more reason for doing this as Simmel
provides, as we shall also see, much better resources both for interpreting the strictly ontological things Heidegger says about *das Man* and for integrating the apparently negative, perjorative things he says into the interpretation. In other words, by appeal to Simmel we can avoid having to say, with Dreyfus, that the positive function of the social allegedly taken by Heidegger from Dilthey constitutes a view opposed to the negative perspective allegedly taken from Kierkegaard (Dreyfus, p.143) which Heidegger, in *Being and Time* at least, failed to distinguish from the latter. And so we can mediate between Dreyfus and Olafson. Last but not least, the envisaged use of Simmel brings another crucial benefit with it: we find ourselves more readily able to interpret Chapter Four both in its entirety and with regard to the place it occupies within *Being and Time* overall.

Note that, logically speaking, this hermeneutic strategy entails no commitment to the claim that as a matter of historical fact Heidegger made any borrowings from Simmel in crafting his account of *das Man*. According to Gadamer, Heidegger highly admired Simmel’s later work:

As early as 1923 Heidegger had spoken to me with admiration of the late works of Georg Simmel. That this was not only a general acknowledgement of Simmel’s philosophical personality, but intimated substantive insight received from him, will be clear to anyone who today reads the first of the four *Metaphysical Chapters*, which draw together what the terminally ill Georg Simmel envisaged as the philosophical task. (Gadamer 1975, p.229, footnote 3; my translation)

Heidegger was also well aware of Simmel’s views generally, as is shown by his references to them. Even so, no claim is being made here that Heidegger’s account of *das Man* was directly or indirectly shaped by Simmel. Simmel’s views will be taken merely as a resource for providing a deeper and more subtle account of *das Man* and in particular of its apparently negative aspects.
§ 2: What Issue is Heidegger addressing in Chapter Four?

But before we can draw effectively upon Simmel’s views, we must first determine what Heidegger is out to do in the relevant chapter of *Sein und Zeit*, namely, Chapter Four in Division One. According to its title, the chapter seeks to explicate being-in-the-world as a unity of being-with and being-a-self. The title also makes explicit reference to *das Man*. So whatever Heidegger means by *das Man* precisely, the chapter is to show it to be a necessary condition for the unity of being-with and being-a-self. Note now that the first section of the Chapter, § 25, is titled “The Approach via the Existential Question concerning the Who of Dasein.” So Heidegger intends to address the topic of the whole Chapter, namely, the complementary character of being-with and being-a-self and the role of *das Man* as a condition of the possibility for this, by answering what he calls the question concerning the Who of Dasein. We must therefore understand this question properly and interpret Heidegger’s notion of *das Man* as an essential component in its answer.

So let us look first at § 25. It begins with the following passage:

> With the formal indication of the basic ontological characteristics of Dasein (cf. § 9) we seem already to have given an answer to the question as to who in each case this entity (Dasein) is. Dasein is an entity which in each case I myself am, its Being is in each case mine. (*Sein und Zeit*, § 25, H 114; my translation)

But, says Heidegger, this formal indication does not constitute a fully worked out account of Dasein’s ontological deep-structure. It needs elaboration and one needs to ensure that the elaboration of such pre-philosophically available intimations does not make a false start. One such false start is the following: one takes the question as to who Dasein initially and for the most part is as answering itself

> from out of the I itself, the ‘subject’, the ‘self’. The Who is that which maintains itself as one and the same in the flux of comportments and experiences, therein relating itself to this multiplicity [Mannigfaltigkeit]. Ontologically, we understand it [the Who] as occurring in a closed region for which it is always already and constantly present at hand, that which is, in an exemplary sense, underlying, as the *subjectum*. This has, as what remains the same in a
multifaceted otherness (Andersheit), the character of the self. (Sein und Zeit, § 25, H 114; my translation)

What exactly is Heidegger saying here? Dasein is the kind of entity we are, who, as his readers, are accompanying Heidegger on his fundamentally ontological journey. So the minimal characterisation of Dasein from which Heidegger’s investigation proceeds is that it is any entity which can think to itself, “I am.” As Heidegger puts it, “The first proposition is … “sum,” and this in the sense of “I-am-in-a-world.” (Sein und Zeit, § 43 b), H 211; my translation) Now as an entity which can think to itself, “I am,” it is, in a strictly formal-ontological sense, a unity across some kind of temporally extended difference or change, a unity, moreover which is aware of itself as such. But what form of temporal difference or change? In particular, what form of temporal difference or change is the primordial one, such that it is all there needs to be for the unity of it to be aware of itself as itself?

Just this constitutes at least the central core of what Heidegger means by the question concerning the ‘who’ of Dasein. That this is so becomes evident when Heidegger observes,

With the analysis of the specific movedness [Bewegtheit] and persistence [Beharrlichkeit] appropriate to Dasein as something which happens historicisingly [Geschehen des Daseins] the investigation comes back to the problem which was touched upon immediately prior to the laying bare [Freilegung] of temporality: to the question concerning the constancy [Ständigkeit] of the self, which self [das] we determined to be the Who of Dasein. Self-constancy [Selbstständigkeit] is a mode of being of Dasein and is therefore grounded in a specific temporalising of temporality. The analysis of historicising happening [Die Analyse des Geschehens] leads us to the problems of an explicit investigation of temporality as such. (Sein und Zeit, § 72, H 375)

Here, Heidegger is looking back to § 64, in which he claims to have shown that the constancy of the Who of Dasein – in effect, the unity of a self across time, formal-ontologically conceived – is ‘actually’ (eigentlich) self-constancy rather than what it was shown to be in Chapter Four of Division I, namely, the mere inconstancy, or rather non-self-derived constancy [Unselbst-ständigkeit], of the one-self [man-
One cannot make sense of this passage and in particular see how it fits into the overall argument of *Sein und Zeit* unless one understands the question concerning the Who of Dasein as concerning the way, or rather, as Heidegger here and § 64 makes clear, the ways, in which Dasein, *qua* an entity which can think, “I am,” is as a unity across time.

Of course, in Chapter Four of Division I, the question as to the Who of Dasein concerns the way in which Dasein *most originally* is as such a unity, i.e., the unity there must be, initially and for the most part, in order that what displays this unity might be aware of itself as itself. And the false start Heidegger mentions in the opening lines of § 25 concerns a very traditional answer to this question. Since Descartes, that ontology of the world of which Descartes is a first and certainly the paradigmatic representative has combined with Cartesian doubt to yield a very minimal answer to this question: the most primordial form of temporal difference is the flux of intentional states and experiences. The most basic way in which any entity capable of the “I am” exists is as a temporally structured bundle or a bearer of intentional states and experiences. Nothing more needs to be true of the ‘I’ than that it is a locus of intentional states and experiences. The “I” is most originally given to itself in the flux of intentional states and experiences.

With this, we have arrived at a relatively clear and deep understanding of what Heidegger is doing in Chapter Four. In the first instance, he is out to provide an alternative answer to that question which the tradition answers by saying that an entity capable of the “I am” is most originally aware of itself as existing in the flux of intentional states and experiences. In the second instance, however, he is out to identify the conditions of possibility for an entity which can think, “I am,” given this alternative account of how the “I” is most originally given to itself.
equipment-mediated social roles and relations— in which case being-a-self and being-with constitute an original unity. Finally, § 27 identifies das Man as something essentially presupposed by the existence of the entity which can think, “I am,” given that this entity most originally exists, and is aware of itself as existing, in the flux of equipment-mediated social roles and relations.

A closer look at Heidegger’s argument across §§ 26 and 27 confirms this account of Chapter Four. Section 26 opens with the following passage:

The answer to the question concerning the Who of everyday Dasein is to be gained in the analysis of that kind of Being in which Dasein initially and mostly maintains itself. The investigation takes as its orientation being-in-the-world, through which basic ontological constitution all modes of Dasein’s being are conjointly determined. If we correctly said that with the explication of the world given above the remaining structural moments of being-in-the-world have also already come into view, then in a certain sense what is needed for answering the question of Who must already be at our disposal.

The ‘description’ of the initial environing world, for example, the working world of the tradesman, yielded the result that the others for whom the ‘work’ is intended are ‘co-encountered’ in and through equipment in use. In the kind of Being possessed by what is ready-to-hand, that is, in its functional suitedness [Bewandnis] there lies an essential reference to possible wearers to whose ‘body’ the work is to be ‘cut to fit’. In similar fashion, the maker or ‘supplier’ of a material is encountered in the same, as he who ‘serves’ well or poorly. The field, for example, alongside which we pass when ‘outside’ walking shows itself as belonging to such and such, as well-maintained by him, the used book has been purchased from …, given by …, and the like. The boat anchored on the beach points away from itself in its Being-in-itself to an acquaintance who undertakes his trips with it, but also as a ‘boat unknown to one’ it shows others. The others who are thus encountered in the ready-to-hand, immediately surrounding matrix of equipment are not so to speak tacked on by thought to a thing initially only present-at-hand. Rather, these ‘things’ are encountered from out of the world in which they are ready-to-hand for others, which world is, from the outset, also always already my world. (Sein und Zeit, § 26, H 117-118; my translation)
The previous analysis of world and worldhood has shown that to be an entity capable of the “I am” is primarily to be an entity self-evaluatingly wielding equipment for certain typical others in certain typical scenarios of use in a certain form of life. So this entity primarily occupies a social role vis-à-vis others and stands in social relation to them. But it does not make sense to speak of something as possessing social roles and relations singly and statically; I am not just an academic, but a husband, an environmentalist, a devotee of native plants, an admirer of German culture, etc., etc., and I cycle through these and the social relations they implicate according to situation. So any entity which can think, “I am” to itself is primarily a locus of different social roles and relations through which it cycles across time.

The “I” is thus originally given to itself as itself not as ‘thinking’ in Descartes’ and Husserl’s broad sense of the term, but rather as acting out different social roles and relations. Or to put things in a fashion which more explicitly captures the temporal character so crucial to the point at issue, the “I” is originally given to itself not in the flux of intentional states and experiences, but in the flux of social roles and relations. And this “is no mere taking note [keine bloße Kenntnisnahme] of one’s self which merely accompanies all of Dasein’s comportings [alle Verhaltungen des Daseins].” (Sein und Zeit, § 75, H 387-388; my translation and bolding) Insofar as it is a self in the traditional sense of being a locus of intentionality, Dasein is also a self in the sense of being a self-evaluating acting out of diverse social relations and roles in the more or less typical use of equipment. As Heidegger himself puts it,

one ‘comes across’ … one’s own Dasein precisely in looking away from, or rather not even ‘seeing’ ‘lived experiences’ [Erlebnisse] and a ‘centre of acts’ [Aktzentrum]. Dasein finds “itself” initially in what it pursues, needs, expects, prevents – in that which is, as ready-to-hand in the immediate environment, initially taken care of. (Sein und Zeit, § 26, H 119; my translation) 

Being-a-self, i.e., an entity capable of the “I am,” is most primordially a matter of an entity concernfully engaged with entities that are ready-to-hand in the immediate
environment, which engagement is essentially undertaken “with, for or against … others.” (*Sein und Zeit*, § 27, H 126)

But what *is* the flux of equipment-mediated social roles and relations? In particular, how must it be if it is to ‘give’ this entity, not just to others, but to the very entity which acts them out (*as* itself)? With this, we come to § 27. If the flux of social roles and relations is to give one’s identity as an “I” both to oneself and to others, it must evince across time a coherent identity of self. And I would not display, either to myself or others, any coherent identity of self across time and the flux of my various social roles and relations were I not able to identify when it is time to stop acting out one and begin acting out another. Being an academic entails not only knowing how to do *proficiently* the various things typical of engaging in this social role. It also consists in knowing when it is and is not *prudent*, *socially appropriate* or even *ethically right* to engage in this role. I know, for example, that it is both imprudent and ethically wrong to engage in this to exclusion of my other roles and social relations – as when individuals are so consumed by ambition to climb the greasy academic pole that they harm their health and underperform in their role as, say, parents. Similarly, I know that it would be ethically wrong and potentially imprudent to permit the loyalty I feel towards a friend to influence the way I behave when sitting on a committee charged with deciding my friend’s job application. If I had no beliefs of these diverse kinds, or rather, if I did not act mostly in conformity with such beliefs, I would display no coherent identity of self across time; the more incoherent and confused my behaviour is in this regard, the more I literally dissolve as a self, not just for others, but also for myself.

Naturally, the beliefs I have about when it is and is not time to do this rather than that are *shared*. I am, after all, most originally in a flux of *social* roles and relations. I can therefore only actually be in this flux, hence given to myself, if I am given to others. I must be recognisable to others as coherently or rationally mediating the demands of my various roles and relations. And for such recognition to be possible,
my beliefs as to when it is and is not time to do this rather than that must be shared. Indeed, I must share many other beliefs with them – not only about what it is ceteris paribus prudential, appropriate, right or good to do in such and such circumstances, but also about what individuals like us do as a matter of brute fact in such and such circumstances and situations. I am only a self in the most ontologically basic sense of the term, that is to say, aware of myself as the locus of diverse equipment-mediated social roles and relations, insofar as I exist, not just alongside others, but positively with others in the sense of sharing with them an understanding of what ‘people like us’ do in such and such circumstances. I can only think, “I am,” hence only be as the self-conscious self I am, insofar as I am as acting vis-à-vis certain others in the light of shared belief that in our group, i.e., the group defined in part by this very shared belief, one typically does such and such, e.g., has breakfast before going to work, can read and write, holds one’s fork in the left hand at dinner, and so on.\textsuperscript{xxix}

In summary: my very existence as an ego presupposes my sharing in a sense of what one typically or averagely does or indeed is. This shared sense of the typical or average binds me to certain others; it lets me genuinely be with rather than simply located alongside them. Just this shared sense of the typical or average is what Heidegger means by \textit{das Man}. And the notion of typicality or averageness – what Heidegger calls \textit{Durchschnittlichkeit} – is to be understood neither in a normative or evaluative sense, nor in any crudely statistical sense, as what is actually true of more than fifty percent. Rather, in the sense intended here something is typical or average in the way in which Australians typically or averagely live on quarter-acre blocks. Blocks of this size are neither what Australians in any sense ought to live on, nor indeed what most actually live on, as opposed to what most believe most live on.\textsuperscript{xxx}

The typical or average in this sense is indeed both “everyone, although not as a sum” (\textit{Sein und Zeit}, § 27, H 127) and “no one”. (\textit{Sein und Zeit}, § 27, H 128) Only as being with others in this sense, as belonging to a group defined by such a shared sense of the average or typical, am I initially aware of myself. As Heidegger himself puts it,
“Initially, I am ‘given’ to ‘myself’ from out of [the One] and as this [i.e., as the One portrays the typical, everyday self to be, namely, a One-self].” (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 129; my translation)

So we see here at least that much of what Heidegger means by das Man which captures its existential-ontological status – that part of what Heidegger means by the term which licenses translation of it as ‘the One’. Pace Dreyfus, das Man in its existential-ontological capacity is not a set of norms or social practices. Nor is it shared belief merely about the average right way of acting. Rather, it is shared belief as to the typical or average way of acting and being simpliciter, which is not to deny, of course, that the typical or average way of acting and being properly includes the average right way of acting. As the body of shared belief which fixes that shared sense of the average or typical which defines a group, it is an instance, indeed the central instance, of a phenomenon once characterised by David Lewis as common knowledge (in Lewis 1974) and by Stephen Schiffer (in Schiffer 1972) as mutual knowledge*. Just this similarity raises a crucial question: Does this interpretation of das Man commit Heidegger to infinitely iterated belief states of the kind described by Lewis and Schiffer? Not if one is prepared to acknowledge self-referential belief states along the lines described in Christensen 1997b. Two subjects $S$ and $A$ then have shared belief that $p$ if and only if (i) $S$ has a belief $b$ that ($p$ and $A$ knows that ($p$ and $S$ has $b$ and $b$ counts as knowledge)); and (ii) $A$ has a belief $b'$ that ($p$ and $S$ knows that ($p$ and $A$ has $b'$ and $b'$ counts as knowledge)). The shared beliefs which constitute das Man will have this form except that for the most part they will involve quantification roughly of the form “All (or most or many or some) within such and such a group have the shared belief that . . .”

Note two important implications of this account of das Man and Chapter Four generally: firstly, it permits a ready elaboration of Heidegger’s insistence that one must not think of the self or the person on the model of a present-at-hand thing. “The ontological question concerning the Being of the self must,” he says, “be rescued
from the interpretative predisposition [Vorhabe] continually insinuated by the dominant pre-occupation with ‘I’-saying, the predisposition, namely, to treat it as a persistently present-at-hand self-thing.” (Sein und Zeit, § 64, H 323; my translation) For when das Man is understood as suggested here, and in particular when the question which the notion of das Man is meant to address is understood as suggested here, then it becomes clear why the self and its unity are not ‘thing-like’: the existence of a present-at-hand thing does not presuppose the existence of other such things with which it shares a sense of what such things typically are and do, this because it does not need to display who and what it is to other things in order to be what it is. The unity of a thing is not an accomplishment in the way in which it is for a self.

Secondly, this account of das Man makes very clear that Heidegger is not out to deny that any entity capable of the “I am” is always a locus of intentionality. Not this claim is the target of his attack, but rather, as § 25 indicates, the traditional idea that an entity capable of the first person is most originally given to itself, hence most originally exists, as a locus of intentionality. In order to undermine this idea, it suffices to show that existence as a locus of intentionality is merely a constitutive aspect or moment of what it is to be an entity capable of the “I am.” What the tradition takes to be the ‘essence’ of the “I” is in fact a mere dependent part or moment. This is not to deny that this dependent part or moment is still very much there, as a genuine feature of Dasein – always there, of course, since “the “I” is an essential determination of Dasein … .” (Sein und Zeit, § 25, H 117; my translation)

Of course, simply to say that das Man is shared belief as to the typical or average is not to capture those negative elements in Heidegger’s account of das Man which suggest critique of contemporary social existence and which license the standard translation ‘the They’. Initially, therefore, it might appear that our alternative interpretation of das Man is subject to the same difficulties as Dreyfus’. But we shall see in next section that this need not be the case.
§3: Using Simmel to integrate the Negative Connotations of *das Man*

But can the reading of *das Man* provided in previous section permit us to integrate into Heidegger’s fundamentally ontological account of *das Man* the ambivalence which attaches to the various ontological characters Heidegger attributes to *das Man*? These characters are *Abständigkeit* (stand-offishness), *Seinsentlastung* (the disburdening-of-one’s-being), and *Entgegenkommen* (accommodatingness). To one degree or another, Heidegger insinuates that they all involve at least a potential stifling of authentic or true selfhood.

So let us look more closely at the most interesting and prominent of these ontological characters in order to identify a way in which its ambivalence might be captured without this constituting an extraneous evaluation with no proper place within a fundamental ontology of Dasein. I will begin by interpreting what Heidegger means by stand-offishness. I will then return to Simmel’s account of this phenomenon in order to show that he speaks of this both ontologically and ontically. This dual ontic-ontological character will then be identified in Heidegger’s account and shown to be motivated by Heidegger’s phenomenological method. In the light of this, the apparently negative claims Heidegger makes about *das Man*, which would otherwise seem to be extraneously ontic judgements with evaluative force, can be integrated into his overall ontological project.

Heidegger writes,

> In taking care of what one has undertaken with, for or against the others, there persistently resides care about difference from the others, whether it be care merely to remove difference from the others or, having lagged behind, to catch up with them, or to preserve one’s superior position by keeping them down. Being-amongst-others (*Miteinandersein*) is, in a fashion hidden from itself, unsettled by care about this distance. Expressed existentially, it has the character of stand-offishness (*Abständigkeit*). (*Sein und Zeit*, § 27, H 126; my translation)

Underlying this is, I suggest, the following ontological thought: given that Dasein initially and for the most part exists, and is aware of itself as existing, as a locus of
social roles and relations, it necessarily exists at some point on a scale of greater or less distance from the average or typical way of doing things implicit in its social roles and relations. That is, whether at any given moment it is or is not conforming to the average or typical way of doing things, it is at all times oriented towards the typical or average in the sense that this constitutes the default – precisely what one does unless something renders the specific situation an exception. At this point, it becomes clear that das Man constitutes what Dasein is or does unless in the particular circumstances some reason for not so being or doing is evident to it. Furthermore, when some such reason is evident to it, it is able to give an account to others of why in this case it makes sense not to conform to the average or typical way of doing things.

It is in this ontological spirit that a sentence with much potential for misunderstanding is in the first instance to be understood. Heidegger says, by way of illustrating the point he wants to make, that “(w)e enjoy and amuse ourselves as one enjoys; we read, see and judge about literature and art as one sees and judges; we seek refuge from the “crowd” (großen Haufen) as one seeks refuge; we get “indignant” (wir finden empörend) about what one gets indignant.” (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 126; my translation) Notice that in and of itself there is nothing normative in this sentence. It is simply saying that for the most part we habitually and unreflectingly do what others do; of an evening we go to the pictures or theatre for relaxation or stimulation – as any averagely intelligible, predictable individual does. We go out to dinner with our friends, as any averagely intelligible, predictable individual does. And so on, for all the activities Heidegger mentions and more.

In fact, this sentence is non-normative in two distinct senses. Firstly, it is non-normative in the sense of not being a statement that such and such is acknowledged as a behavioural norm by such and such individuals, or by such and such a group. It makes no sense to suggest that current social existence is subject to a norm requiring us to enjoy or amuse ourselves by going to the pictures or to the theatre rather than to,
say, a mud-wrestling match. In general, no norms or rules ‘govern’ the ‘practice’ of enjoying oneself because enjoying oneself is not a norm- or rule-governed practice at all. This remains true even when, as a matter of brute fact, individual forms of enjoyment find themselves overlain with all sorts of normative and axiological judgements – as when, for example, one deems mud-wrestling to be culturally inferior. Secondly, the sentence is non-normative in the sense of not necessarily constituting a negative evaluation on the part of someone who asserts it. When taken simply on its own terms, the sentence does not insinuate any ethical evaluation of our habitually and unreflectingly doing what others do. It then simply articulates the solely ontological feature of Dasein articulated above: initially and for the most part, Dasein is engaged in various kinds of typical behaviour, but not blindly so. Initially and for the most part Dasein acts unthinkingly out of shared belief as to what one does and is, but it occasionally it diverges from the average and when it does, it can be aware of this fact and indeed has frequently chosen to diverge – which choice it can justify as rational to those others who share in its sense of the average. So the mere fact of Dasein’s divergence justifies others in thinking that it will be able to provide an account of the divergence. In this non-normative, ontological sense, Dasein necessarily exists at some distance or other from the average it shares, and knows itself to share, with others.

Yet the whole passage containing this sentence clearly does have negative connotations, hence is normative at least in the second sense. That this is so is shown by the reference to Dasein’s attempt to preserve its superior position by keeping others down. And by the end of the passage, things have become normative in the first sense: das Man is described as prescribing or demanding average everydayness:

The more inconspicuous this mode of being [i.e., stand-offishness] is to everyday Dasein itself, the more stubbornly and primordially it takes effect.

The stand-offishness which belongs to being-with entails, however, the following: Dasein stands, as everyday being-amongst-others, at the bidding [Botmäßigkeit] of the others. Not it itself is, the others have taken on its Being
for it. The whim of the others disposes over Dasein’s everyday possibilities of being. At the same time, these others are not specific others. On the contrary, every other can represent them. Decisive is only the inconspicuous rule of the others, which Dasein has, as being-with, inadvertently made its own. One belongs oneself to the others and reinforces their power. Those whom one calls “the others” in order to hide one’s own essential belonging to them are they who initially and for the most part “are there” in everyday being-amongst-others. The Who is not this one and not that, not one self, not several and not the sum of all. The “Who” is the neutrum, the One.

Previously it was shown how always already in the nearest surrounding world [Umwelt] the public “surrounding world” is ready-to-hand and conjointly taken care of. In the using of public transportation, in availing oneself of the media (the papers) each other is like the other. This being-amongst-others dissipates Dasein completely in the mode of being “the others “, indeed in such a way that the others disappear all the more in their differentiatedness and explicitness. In this inconspicuousness and inability to be tied down the One unfolds its true dictatorship. We enjoy and amuse ourselves as one enjoys; we read, see and judge about literature and art as one sees and judges; we seek refuge from the “crowd” [großen Haufen] as one seeks refuge; we get “indignant” [wir finden empörend] about what one gets indignant. The One, which is nothing determinate and is everyone, although not as a sum, prescribes the mode of being of everydayness. (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 126-127; my translation)

Note the slide in this passage: the non-normative sense in which Dasein’s everyday concernful activity involves situating oneself at some contextually appropriate distance or other from the average has passed over into something richer, namely, the character of Dasein’s existence as subject to the expectation of “the others” that one will not put oneself at any distance to the average. It now looks as if it is part of Dasein’s very being to be subject to this expectation. Correlatively, it now looks as if it is inherent to das Man, in virtue of the ontological character of stand-offishness, to demand typical existence and typical behaviour – in which case, of course, it must be described in terms which are normative in the first sense. Given this, however, it is quite reasonable that das Man should be described in terms which are negatively normative in the second sense, i.e., constitute the passing of negative ethical judgement on it.
How, then, are we to take this richer, normative sense of stand-offishness, with its insinuations of a stand-off, that is, an unresolved tension between being-with and being-a-self in the most unequivocal sense of the term? It is surely not plausible to take it as ontological. As much as certain ontic realisations of das Man might exert the envisaged pressure to conform, this hardly seems a necessary condition or consequence of Dasein’s being. Is it then simply an ontic, indeed a social-psychological or sociological claim about a specific realisation of das Man, that form, namely, which is taken by Dasein’s being-towards-the-average in late modernity? Then we would be trapped in the oscillation between Dreyfus and Olafson, for now we would be accusing Heidegger of conflating genres, that is, of failing to distinguish between a claim about the essentially social character of Dasein as such and a perhaps true but peripheral claim about the form this social character takes in particular psychological, cultural and historical circumstances. Clearly, in order to escape this dilemma, we need to show some internal connection between ontological and ontic pronouncements in Heidegger’s texts, a connection which explains why certain ontic claims must occur in Heidegger’s text.

At this point it is useful to look more deeply at Georg Simmel’s views on the nature of distinctively human sociality. As we have already seen, the notions, if not the termini, of stand-offishness, disburdening-of-one’s-Being and accommodatingness occur in Simmel’s account of distinctively human sociality. We shall now see that Simmel gives these notions a dual reading, as characterising both the human condition in general and, in particularly extreme form, the human condition in late modernity. In other words, he reads them both ontologically and ontically. Just this provides a clue as to how there might be an internal connection between the ontological and the ontic. And this internal connection between the ontological and the ontic permits us to identify an extent to which negative assessment of these essential, hence ontological features of human sociality is legitimately present.
Simmel insists repeatedly on the ambivalent, agonistic character of human sociality: on the one hand we cannot be without others. Yet on the other, because we are entities with a sense of, indeed a care for, our own selves, our being-with-others inherently tends to engender conflict and contradiction between conforming to what one does and being our own individual selves. According to Simmel a tendency to conflict and contradiction is inherent to our being-with-others as a result of the essential diffidence towards others which we, as entities capable of the “I am”, must display. Evidently, this Hobbesian diffidence occurs at the ontological level, in which case the reserve which this diffidence engenders must also be ontological.\textsuperscript{xxxvi}

Our being-with is therefore fraught. This is not to say that it is fragile – as if it were finely balanced on a knife-edge, always on the verge of tipping over into chaos.\textsuperscript{xxxvii} One can only think this if one thinks of social existence as standing in contrast or opposition to all conflict and contradiction. But Simmel maintains that “… dispute [\textit{Streit}] itself, irrespective of what follows from it or accompanies it, is … a form of socialisation.” (Simmel 1992, p.284; my translation) Antagonism can have a positive, integrating capacity – see Simmel 1992, p.284f. In general, claims Simmel, “Just as the cosmos needs “love and hate,” forces of attraction and repulsion, in order to have a form, so, too, society needs some quantitative relationship between harmony and disharmony, association and competition, favour and misfavour in order to attain determinate shaping.” (Simmel 1992, p.286; my translation) Our being-amongst-others is thus a system neither stolidly homeostatic nor chronically on the verge of collapse. Rather, it is a system dynamically robust precisely because it is a unity of counteracting tendencies to fragmentation and consolidation.\textsuperscript{xxxviii}

Yet crucially although he buys into a Hobbesian conception of human sociality as ontologically fraught, Simmel does not buy into Hobbes’ methodological individualism. In general, Simmel rejects all forms of social theory which construe the self as prior to society. “Just as little as we have, as natural beings, a being-for-ourselves [i.e., self-consciousness], … just as little do we, as social beings, live
around an autonomous centre, but are, from moment to moment, composed out of reciprocal relations to others … .” (Simmel 1992, p.55; my translation) Our being entities capable of the “I am” is bound up with our being-with-others, and it is so for precisely the same reason as it is for Heidegger: the self primarily exists as a principle of unity in the flux of social roles and relations, hence can only be given to itself as such a unity insofar as it is given to others as such a unity and they are reciprocally given to it as such unities. Simmel’s agonistic account of the distinctively self-conscious, reason-wielding way in which humans are social is thus a genuinely ontological conception not just of human sociality, but of human existence itself.

With this, we have integrated diffidence into the fundamental ontology of Dasein. And so we have built a tendency to stand-offishness in the richer sense of a stand-off into the way in which entities capable of the “I am” are social. For the essentially rational response of others to Dasein’s diffidence will be the demand that it maintain itself as thoroughly transparent to them.

Being-amongst-others [Miteinandersein] in das Man is not at all a closed-off, indifferent alongside-one-another [Nebeneinander], but a tense, ambivalent watching of one another, a secretive mutual eavesdropping. Behind the mask of a for-one-another [Füreinander] there lurks an against-one-another. (Sein und Zeit, § 37, H 175; my translation)

In its strictly ontological capacity, das Man must tend to convert shared belief that one typically does such and such into shared belief that one is expected (by others) to do such and such; a disposition or tendency towards conformism is integral to it. There is therefore an internal connection between the general ontological account of human sociality and subjectivity; and those ontic forms of it which are normatively negative in both the first and the second senses to the extent to which this inherent disposition or tendency is realised in them. The repressive character of certain ontic forms of das Man is the realisation of a possibility genuinely inherent to it in virtue of what it is, which in turn is a function of what Dasein itself is. An exploration of Simmel’s accounts of fashion and privacy would permit us similarly to integrate into das Man
those dispositions or tendencies towards superficiality, haste, prurient curiosity and restlessness (*Aufenthaltslosigkeit*) of which Heidegger speaks in his account of falling and fallenness (*Sein und Zeit*, §§ 35-38).

It is, of course, true that when Heidegger describes *das Man* in negative ways, he takes himself to be describing *actualities*, not mere *potentialities*. But here, too, Simmel provides a clue as to why this is legitimately so. Simmel takes himself to be describing, in a manner he himself sometimes calls phenomenological, how human sociality *in general* or *as such* is possible by understanding and interpreting the structure and dynamic of *actual* human societies, in particular, his own late modern one.\[^{xl}\] Evidently, Heidegger is and must be doing something analogous. On the one hand, Heidegger is describing the ontological constitution of Dasein *as such*. On the other, he is deriving this description from, and feeding it back into, the interpretation of an entity *which actually is*. The analytic of Dasein requires this interplay of the ontological and the ontic.

It is clear why this is so. Dasein is the entity who *we ourselves are* – we who are, under Heidegger’s guidance, conducting the investigation which is *Being and Time*. This reflexivity is essential to the ‘method’ of fundamental ontology, which is phenomenological in Heidegger’s sense, namely, the methodologically controlled return to ‘the’ everyday, i.e., *our* everyday. Through this return, the general, ontological constitution of Dasein becomes available to us *as it is realised in our own case*. We are therefore accessing what *das Man* is *in general* through accessing what it is *in our own case*. And in our own case, or at least so Heidegger thinks, the negative potentialities of *das Man* are markedly realised.\[^{xli}\] So Heidegger’s not distinguishing clearly between actuality and potentiality is neither oversight nor simply literary device.\[^{xlii}\] Rather, it reflects the *self*-explicative character of his investigation, in which ontic specifics and ontological generalities differentiate themselves out from one another in one and the same process of philosophical cognition.\[^{xliii}\]
Simmel’s social ontology thus provides a very effective guide as to how one might integrate the negative things Heidegger says about *das Man* into a genuinely ontological account of Dasein. In so doing, it permits one to mediate between Dreyfus and Olafson. With Dreyfus and against Olafson one can say that *das Man*, and not just *Mitsein*, is a genuine existential; with Olafson and against Dreyfus one can say that *das Man* has a genuinely agonistic, ambivalent character, as a phenomenon to which at least a tendency towards conformism and related ills is inherent. This tendency is not an illicit, psychologising imposition from without upon the genuinely ontological project. For it is a genuine, ontological structural feature of the sociality, the being-with, enabled by *das Man*.

But what has allowed us to use Simmel’s thought in this way? That is, what assumptions from his social ontology must we extend to Heidegger in order to mediate in the fashion indicated between Dreyfus and Olafson? Simmel rejects all methodologically individualist conceptions of society which see no essential connection between being-a-self and being-with. Equally, however, he rejects the position diametrically opposed to this, namely, that the self-conscious subject is a mere function of social existence in the sense of being capable only of those concepts and conceptual frameworks by appropriating which from its culture and tradition it has emerged as such a subject in the first place. Repeatedly Simmel insists that human beings are not completely social; just as constitutive of us as human beings and indeed of the way humans are social is the fact that, as self-conscious subjects, we have a private domain which is not readily intelligible to others. Moreover, we have an inherent tendency or impulse to assert ourselves as individuals who are not simply numerically distinct but qualitatively distinguish themselves from other individuals. To be social in the manner of humans is to be irreducibly both in a group and not (completely) in it:

(E)very element of a group is not only a part of society, it is also in addition something more. This functions as a social a priori insofar as that part of the individual which is not turned towards society, which is not completely
absorbed by it, does not simply lie unrelatedly next to its socially significant part, is not merely something outside [ein Außerhalb] of society which this latter, willing or unwilling, finds a place. Rather, that the individual is, in certain aspects of its being, not an element of society constitutes a positive condition for the individual’s being, in other aspects, an element: the manner of the individual’s being socialised is determined or co-determined through the manner of its being not socialised. (Simmel 1992, p.51; my translation)

The reason why human beings are not completely social has to do with their character as self-conscious. We have already encountered one sense in which Simmel believes that the self-conscious character of human sociality entails the incompleteness of this sociality: this character generates diffidence amongst humans because it entails shared belief about the real possibility that every so often the interests of some members of the group will stand at odds with the interests of others. Human sociality is not unconditional, but comes with a degree of reserve. But Simmel endorses a second sense in which self-consciousness makes for merely partial sociality. For he believes that self-consciously being amongst others, i.e., not merely belonging to a group, but knowing oneself thus to belong, requires that one not completely belong to it. In order to grasp oneself as in a group, one must also be beyond it, i.e., not exhaustively defined in one’s identity by membership of the group. This being-simultaneously-within-and-without a group is required if any group, up to and including society itself, is to stand over against an individual as something to which this individual itself belongs:

That social formations are composed of beings which are simultaneously inside and outside of them is the basis for one of the most important sociological formings: that, namely, a relationship can obtain, perhaps indeed does persist, openly or latently, between a society and its individuals as a relationship between two parties. In this way, society engenders perhaps the most conscious, and certainly the most universal elaboration of a basic form of life as such: that the individual psyché [Seele] can never stand within a bond without also simultaneously standing outside of it, that it can never be located within an order without simultaneously finding itself as standing over and against it. (Simmel 1992, p.53; my translation and emphasis)
In other words, distinctively *self-conscious* social existence presupposes that individuals are more than just a product of their social existence. While an entity capable of the “I am” must necessarily exist in social relation to others, precisely because it is capable of the “I am,” it is never defined entirely by its social relations. The self-conscious subject must exist in society, must indeed emerge as such through initiation into the concepts and conceptual frameworks of a shared culture and tradition. But precisely because it is self-conscious, it is never restricted to these initial concepts and conceptual frameworks. The existence of a human being thus

… stands under the fundamental, forming, irreducible category of a unity which we cannot express otherwise than as through the synthesis or the simultaneity of the two logically opposed characteristics of being a member [Gliedstellung] and being for itself, of being produced and comprehended by society and of being life out of the centre and for the sake of its own centre. (Simmel 1992, p.56; my translation)

Consequently, a human being is always capable of *transcending* the initial concepts and conceptual frameworks by initiation into which it emerges as self-conscious in the first place.\footnote{xliv}

Thus, Simmel is only able to get stand-offishness and diffidence into the general *ontological* picture of human selfhood and its sociality because he assumes from the outset that the human individual is not simply or solely what Heidegger calls a one-self (*man selbst*). For him the one-self is a *dependent moment or aspect* of the total self; it is no more capable of standing alone than is on Heidegger’s account the self in the traditional sense of a self-aware locus of intentional states and experiences. This conception of the human self as both depending on, yet also transcending, its character as a social actor reflects what Simmel wishes to take from methodologically individualist thinkers like Hobbes. Such thinkers err in maintaining that the self-conscious, deliberating self could exist *prior to* engagement in social roles and relations. Yet they maintain this false belief for a sound reason: such thinkers see no way of accounting for distinctively human sociality without reference to the inner, the
deliberate and the self-conscious. Note that this sound reason is perfectly consistent with the anti-methodologically-individualist claim that the inner, the deliberate and the self-conscious all presuppose engagement in social roles and relations.

So we were able to use Simmel to mediate on Heidegger’s behalf between Dreyfus and Olafson because Simmel does not share Dreyfus’ pragmatist, even behaviourist hostility to the inner, the deliberative and the self-conscious. In order for the mediation to succeed, we must therefore attribute this lack of hostility to Heidegger. That is, we must attribute to him Simmel’s even-handed, neither Cartesian nor pragmatist conception of the relation between ‘inner’ subjectivity and ‘outer’ public behaviour. But nothing in Chapter Four or, as I believe, elsewhere in Being and Time prevents us from doing this. Dreyfus encounters difficulty in integrating the negative characters of das Man, and therefore das Man in its entirety, into Heidegger’s ontological account of being-in-the-world because the underlying hypothesis of his Heidegger interpretation denies him what is needed for this integration. Note a crucial implication of this: Dreyfus cannot simply concede, as he later thinks he can, that for Heidegger average, everyday intelligibility is not all the intelligibility there is.

§ 4: Normative versus non-normative Readings of das Man

The difficulties Dreyfus has in explaining how Heidegger can on the one hand attribute apparently negative features to das Man yet on the other deny that this is tendentious evaluation inconsistent with his fundamentally ontological project raises the question of whether his account of das Man is correct. Dreyfus characterises das Man as “the average way of acting,” which consists in being subject to “standards and rules”xlv constitutive of “the taken-for-granted, average right thing” to do.xlvi According to him das Man is the totality of social practices which make up the particular form of life within which Dasein must exist.xlvii The reading suggested here differs from this interpretation in two respects. Firstly, it construes das Man as a totality of shared belief, not of social norms or practices. Secondly, while this shared
belief concerns, at least in part, the average way of acting and indeed of being, the average way need not be exclusively the average right way.

Just how significant these differences are becomes apparent once one appreciates why Dreyfus speaks of the average right way of acting. Dreyfus must avoid identifying das Man with any form of intentionality, for otherwise his reading of Heidegger as radically anti-intentionalistic, even behaviouristic, would collapse. So he identifies it with something behavioural, namely, the average way of acting. But this creates a problem of its own: the average way of acting must not be average in a merely statistical sense. In other words, it must not be mere behavioural regularity. And so Dreyfus identifies the average way of acting with the conventionally right way of acting. Dreyfus’ socially normative reading of das Man is thus required by his central claim that Heidegger is attacking intentionalistic conceptions of the self from Descartes to Husserl.

A lot hangs, therefore, on how one reads Heidegger on das Man. So let us ask whether Dreyfus’ reading is a good one. In particular, can it be plausibly read as addressing the question driving Chapter Four, the question, namely, concerning the Who of Dasein? In order to determine this, we must first consider what Dreyfus regards Heidegger’s notion of das Man as accomplishing when it is understood in the way he recommends. Ultimately, of course, on Dreyfus’ reading no less than any other, das Man serves to make Dasein possible. But now we are asking how specifically, on Dreyfus’ reading, it does this. Dreyfus answers as follows:

Norms and the averageness they sustain perform a crucial function. Without them the referential whole could not exist. In the West one eats with a knife and fork: in the Far East one eats with chopsticks. The important thing is that in each culture there are equipmental norms and thus an average way to do things. There must be, for without such averageness there could be no equipmental whole. (Dreyfus 1991, p.153)

Das Man is thus an existential because it is a condition of the possibility of the referential whole, i.e., of the interlocking matrices of spatially organised equipment
which constitute the ‘sites’ of practical involvement within which any entity capable of the “I am” must initially and for the most part exist.

But how can Heidegger’s account of das Man, when it is read in this way, constitute an answer to the question concerning the Who of Dasein? How can any putative demonstration that human being implicates participation in shared, norm-governed social practices reveal anything, at least in any direct way, about how the “I” is most originally given to itself? Has Dreyfus understood what is going on in § 25 specifically, and thus in Chapter Four as a whole? Dreyfus quotes the decisive passage in § 25:

If the “I” is an essential characteristic of Dasein, then it is one which must be interpreted existentially. In that case the “Who?” is to be answered only by exhibiting phenomenally a definite kind of being which Dasein possesses. (Sein und Zeit, § 25, H 117; as quoted by Dreyfus at p. 146)

But he assumes, on the basis of what Heidegger has said earlier in § 25 about the givenness of the “I”, that in this passage Heidegger is rejecting the idea that transcendental philosophy must start with “I” in any sense at all. And so Dreyfus goes on to conclude that a genuinely existential interpretation of the “I”, which interprets it in terms of “what it [i.e., the “I”] does, uses, expects, avoids – in the environmentally available with which it is primarily concerned” (Sein und Zeit, § 26, H 119, quoted in Dreyfus 1991 at p.147), must be conducted “in opposition to the interpretation of man as essentially a subject … .” (Dreyfus 1991, p.147) In other words, Dreyfus reads Heidegger as counterposing a genuinely existential interpretation of the “I” to one which starts with the “I” and its givenness in any sense at all. This permits Dreyfus to claim that Heidegger is out to identify something required for the existence of an “I”, subject or self in any sense at all. This is, of course, das Man, understood as the totality of social practices, or again, the average right way of acting.

If, however, one reads a little more of the passage Dreyfus quotes, one sees that Heidegger is not opposing the idea of starting with the “I”. In particular, he is not trying to ground the character of Dasein as an “I” in any sense at all in something
other than either the “I” itself or its givenness to itself, for example, non-representational coping, social practices or language – however much, of course, participation in social practices may prove to be implicated in the existence of any entity capable of the “I am.” For Heidegger immediately goes on to say, “If Dasein is in each case only existingly it itself, then the constancy (Ständigkeit) of the self requires, just as much as its possible ‘inconstancy’, an existentially ontological posing of the question, as the only adequate way of approaching the problem of Dasein and its selfhood.” (Sein und Zeit, § 25, H 117; my translation) The question referred to here is the question concerning the Who of Dasein and it is clear from the passage that one only answers this question if one spells out what the selfhood of Dasein is and in particular the distinctively self-like way in which it exists as one and the same across time.

So Heidegger is not saying that we need to turn our attention away from the “I”, self or the subject entirely, in order to identify something other than the self in which the “I”, self or the subject in any sense at all is grounded. Rather, he is saying that we need to turn our attention away from the “I”, self or subject in the traditional Cartesian and Husserlian sense of the term, namely, the self-conscious locus of intentionality. And we turn away from the “I” in this sense in order to start properly with the “I”, namely, with what it is when interpreted existentially. What the “I”, self or subject is when interpreted existentially is, as § 26 reveals, already implicit in the preceding analysis of world and worldhood: it is the self-conscious locus of social relations, roles or, as one might, in a Pufendorfian and indeed Brandomian spirit say, a self-conscious locus of personae (masks). Only if one understands the notions of “I”, self or even subject from which one must start in this way will one ever truly understand the distinctively self-like, unthingly way in which Dasein, precisely because the “I” is essential to it, exists as one and the same across time. It does not exist as one and the same across time in the manner of something merely present-at-hand but initially and for the most part in the sense of constancy (Ständigkeit des
Man-selbst) and ‘actually’ (eigentlich) in the sense of self-constancy – what Heidegger in Division II calls Ständigkeit des Selbst, with its ‘Lutheran’ connotation of Standgewonnenhaben, as in “Ich kann nicht anders, hier stehe ich … ” For this reason, Chapter Four concludes with a claim which points to and positively requires first the discussion of anxiety in § 40 of Division I and then the discussion of guilt and conscience in Division II: “The self-sameness of the truly existing self is … separated ontologically by a chasm from the identity of the ‘I’ which maintains itself in the manifold of lived experience.” (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 130)

With this, we may draw four conclusions. Firstly, Dreyfus, because he does not see clearly what the question concerning the Who of Dasein is, conflates it with the different question of what enabling condition must be in place in order for there to be an “I”, self or subject in any sense at all. Secondly, while Heidegger certainly does believe that social practices, at least in some sense of the term, are a condition of the possibility of Dasein, he is not concerned in Chapter Four to make this point – in which case Dreyfus’ claim that das Man is the average way of acting, understood as the totality of social practices, cannot be right. Thirdly, the alternative reading offered here of what Heidegger means by das Man, because it has been formulated from the outset with a view to what Heidegger means by the question concerning the Who of Dasein, genuinely does address the topic of Chapter Four. For this reason alone, it is to be preferred to Dreyfus’ reading. Fourthly and finally, Dreyfus’ general approach to Heidegger relies on being able to read Heidegger’s notion of das Man as the totality of social practices. Since this reading is incorrect, Dreyfus’ general approach stands on shaky ground.

Of course, none of this entails that there is and must be some such thing as das Man as this has been interpreted here. Is then a shared sense of the average really an ontological condition of that sense of the “I”, self or subject in which this latter is originally given to itself, namely, as that which maintains itself in the flux of social roles and relations? The resolution of this issue clearly depends on whether our most
original encounter with the world – the most original way in which entities can and must be given to us – is as described in the previous analysis of world and worldhood. For this analysis entails that the most original form of the “I” is precisely the self-conscious locus of social roles and relations. If, however, we grant the correctness of this analysis, then the claim that das Man is such a condition becomes very plausible. There are good reasons for thinking that the “I” qua locus of personae can only exist as participating with others in shared belief concerning what one typically does, and in particular, about what it is typically prudent, courteous, aesthetically tasteful, morally right or axiologically good for one to do in such and such typical circumstances.

Indeed, if this is the most original form of the “I” or self or subject, then it seems incorrect to describe shared belief about these things as merely a condition of possibility. Talk of das Man as a mere condition of possibility insinuates that das Man, as much as it obviously cannot exist without there being some Dasein, nonetheless exists separately from any particular Dasein. But when das Man is interpreted as suggested here, namely, as shared belief constitutive of one’s being-with-others, then it is a structural moment or aspect of the Being of each and every Dasein. The interpretation of das Man recommended here thus better captures the intimacy Heidegger clearly has in mind when he describes das Man as an existential. For in saying this, he is indicating that das Man is more than a mere condition of the possibility; he is indicating that it is precisely an inseparable aspect or dimension of the Being of each Dasein. Precisely for this reason, Heidegger goes on to say that das Man “belongs, as an original phenomenon, to the positive ontological constitution of Dasein.” (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 129)

There is another way of seeing that the interpretation of das Man offered here is right in itself. No doubt any “I”, self or subject must participate in a totality of social practices. But why must one speak here of a totality of social practices? Because social practices do not come singly, as if there might conceivably be one single social
practice only.\textsuperscript{lii} Not only, however, do social practices not come singly, the totality they constitute displays a certain coherence and integration. One passes, after all, from one social practice to the next in some at least minimally coherent fashion, according to whether it is, say, prudent, morally right or axiologically good to do so.\textsuperscript{lii} The coherently interlocking character of social practices thus lies in the coherence of the transitions actors make from one social practice to the next. So what enables the “I”, self or subject both to be, and to know itself to be, a coherent unity across time of diverse social roles and relations is at the same time a condition of the possibility of the coherent interlocking of the totality of social practices. Shared belief about what one typically does in such and such typical circumstances is thus no less a condition of the possibility of any individual social practice and the totality thereof as it is a condition of the possibility of the “I”, self or subject which passes through these social practices.

Thus, what Heidegger means by \textit{das Man} turns out to be ontologically\textsuperscript{liii} more primordial or original even than social practices since it holds all social practices together. As such, it could not simply \textit{be} a set of norms and values or nor could it be shared belief \textit{simply} about norms and values. Rather, it is shared belief about precisely \textit{typical} or \textit{average} ways of behaving and indeed being in the non-normative but also not crudely or factually statistical sense indicated in the preceding section – including, of course, those typical or average behaviours which consist in the ways members of the group \textit{evaluate}, thereby regulating, other kinds of behaviour, both their own and that of others. Social practices are indeed implicated in, that is to say, implied by, the very Being of Dasein. But precisely for this reason they are ontologically conditioned by \textit{das Man}, as that which is implicit in the unity of being-a-self and being-with-(other selves). Precisely because a social practice only exists as engaged in by entities which know when it is time to stop or start engaging in it, the intelligibility secured by \textit{das Man} must precede all social practice and ability to engage in such. Social practices are not the ontological bedrock they are so often taken to be.
§ 5: Tying up Loose Ends

The results of sections three and four suggest that once we adopt a more even-handed view of the relation between ‘inner’ subjectivity and ‘outer’ public behaviour, we encounter no difficulties in reconciling Heidegger’s claim that beyond being-a-one-self there is authentic or true being-a-self. There is then no problem of accounting for how there can be, and how Heidegger can think there to be, so-called intelligibility beyond the average and the everyday. For the notion of a self which is not just a one-self is no longer a contradiction in terms once one renounces Dreyfus’ pragmatist, even behaviouristic conception of the relation between the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’, which ties the self too closely to the social context, and thus to that specific form of das Man into which it is contingently thrown.

Of course, once one has in this fashion secured the notion of authentic being-a-self, it becomes easy to remove the seeming contradiction between Heidegger’s claims that the authentic self is an existentiell modification of das Man and that the one-self is an existentiell modification of the authentic self. Dasein is a self in the ‘actual’ sense of the term (im eigentlichen Sinn) only by emerging as such out of its existence as a one-self. This process is obviously ontic. Moreover, it is a process which involves coming to see what is existentially (existenziell) important in the specific, perhaps unique situation. Consequently, it is the kind of pre-philosophical event upon which, as interpreted in literature, history and past philosophy, the philosopher can phenomenologically reflect in order to extract insights into the nature of self-conscious subjectivity and its rationality. In other words, it is existentiell. Finally, the process involves transcending the understanding of one’s current situation supplied in advance by that form of das Man in terms of which one’s character as a one-self is defined. So the authentic self is indeed an existentiell modification of das Man.

Equally, however, according to § 38 of Being and Time, to be a one-self is to be ‘fallen’, or rather continually ‘falling’ – falling back into line with the One. In other words, to be a one-self is to be disposed to default, simply in order to get on with
things, to what one typically does or is. Now defaulting to the average is *ceteris paribus* the perfectly rational thing to do; indeed, to the extent it is done *ceteris paribus*, it is *constitutive* of rationality. It contains, however, the inherent risk of not being done *ceteris paribus*, but rather slavishly – as when one fails to see or at least fails to act upon clashes objectively existing between one’s factical, thrown being-in-the-world and one’s being-in-the-world as one believes it ideally and wants it to be, i.e. one’s ownmost being-in-the-world. Moreover, since one is always implicitly aware of the possibility of such a clash, one is inherently anxious about whether to default in order to preserve self-coherence in the face of the looming dissolution which the clash embodies. One is thus *ontologically* disposed not to heed the conscientious call of one’s authentic self to one’s inauthentic one-self.

But either way, as a one-self, with an inherent disposition to default to the average, one is disposed not to seize all possibilities for critical reflection and action in principle available to one as a self. This ontologically necessary disposition to default thus explains why the natural attitude is the natural attitude. One is *inherently* what is very unfortunately translated as inauthentic since one is *inherently* a limiting or constraining of one’s full potential for the critical reflectiveness and independence of action characteristic of selfhood. In this sense, to be a one-self is to be an *existentiell modification*, indeed an existentiell *modifying*, of true or full being-a-self – *eigentliches Selbstsein*, which, although one can only ever be it exceptionally, is nonetheless the point of orientation for the philosopher who would understand the nature of self-conscious selfhood and its rationality. Note that when ‘inauthentic’ selfhood is understood in this way, it is what Dasein *must* initially *and for the most part* be. It is not necessarily or always ‘irrational’ or ‘bad’ since going with the flow is *typically* the rational, even ethical thing to do.

Finally, we can mediate even at the level of translation. Because his general approach prevents him from building a tendency to certain negatively evaluable ontic phenomena into his account of *das Man*, Dreyfus thinks we should translate the term
literally, namely, as ‘the One’, since this better reflects its strictly ontological character. Macquarrie and Robinson, by contrast, translate it in rather more ‘existentialist’ fashion as ‘the They’. If, however, we read Heidegger’s account of das Man in the agonistic fashion we have taken from Simmel, we can see that, from case to case, one or the other translation may be right, that indeed this variability nicely reflects the mix in Heidegger’s discussion of the generally ontological and the specifically ontic. Wherever Heidegger is speaking in strictly general, hence strictly neutral ontological terms about das Man, Dreyfus’ translation is to be preferred. We have seen, however, that for Heidegger the social existence enabled by das Man is characterised at the ontological level by a pressure to conform which constitutes a tension between being-a-self and being-with-(other selves). At certain times and places, under certain conditions, e.g., late modernity with its technologically complex, capitalist economy, this agonistic relation between the individual and ‘the Others’ could manifest itself as a stifling conformism against which Dasein rebels with a fatuous and narcissistic individualism. Heidegger explicitly allows for this possibility: having said that das Man is an existential, he immediately goes on to say,

    It [i.e., das Man] has itself different possibilities with regard to the concrete form it assumes in relation to Dasein. The intensity and explicitness of its rule can vary historically.” (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 129; my translation)

So in those places in the text in which Heidegger is focussing upon this inherent possibility, the more ‘existentialist’ translation used by Macquarrie and Robinson is appropriate.

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Because there is disagreement as to how Heidegger’s neologism das Man should be properly translated; and because, more importantly, as we shall see at the end, either contender can on occasion be appropriate, I will leave the term untranslated.


The adverb ‘actually’ has, of course, connotations of actualitas which Heidegger would reject. But in English we can hardly render the normal meaning of eigentlich in any other way.

This claim is made at two points in Being and Time, namely, § 27, H 130 and § 54, H 267.

Dreyfus 2000, p.156.

Dreyfus 2000, p.156.


Dreyfus 2000, p.163.


Some of the passages from Simmel cited here are drawn from the CD-Rom Georg Simmel – das Werk; see the references for bibliographic details.

In correspondence Nick Blake has pointed out that in contemporary English the noun ‘diffidence’ and its cognate adjective ‘diffident’, although deriving from the Latin diffidere (‘not to trust’), now seems to be associated with ‘lacking confidence in one’s self’, i.e. ‘lacking self-confidence’, rather than ‘lacking confidence in others’. Since I am using the term ‘diffidence’ in the latter, rather more archaic sense used by Hobbes, I speak here of a Hobbesian diffidence.

See Simmel 1992, p.56, and pp.58-71, where Simmel speaks of the third a priori principle of sociality, namely, that even where the factual social relations of an individual prevent it from being the individual it personally is, they are nonetheless oriented towards a form of sociality in which the relevant social relations facilitate the individual’s being the individual it is.

See also Simmel 2008, p.104.

See Die Mode, p.57 in Georg Simmel – das Werk.
Chapter Five of Simmel 1992 is explicitly devoted to the constitutive role of secrecy. In \textit{Sein und Zeit}, § 27, H 127, Heidegger refers to \textit{das Geheimnis} and the elimination by \textit{das Man} of everything secret, i.e., not open to public view! See also the 1907 essay “Das Geheimnis. Eine sozialpsychologische Skizze”, in Simmel 2008, pp.184-189.

Simmel goes on to claim, “Indeed, if I am not deceiving myself, the inner side of this outer reserve is not merely indifference, but rather, more frequently than we bring to consciousness, a quiet aversion, a mutual alienness and repulsion which any close contact, however occasioned, would instantly turn into hate and conflict.”

Simmel in fact explains the heightened sense of individual self, the concern to be an individual self different from others, characteristic of modern mass society as a response to the way such society fragments, through its ever-increasing division of labour, social relations, thereby making the task of retaining a coherent sense of self all the more difficult – see Simmel 2008, pp.330-333. For this reason, fashion becomes very important in modernity, indeed, it becomes an industry in its own right. Fashion is precisely “\textit{a quite particular one amongst those forms of life through which one seeks to induce a compromise between the tendency to social egality and the tendency to promote individual difference.”} (Simmel 2008, p.104; my translation) Note that the German word for fashion, viz., \textit{die Mode}, derives from the Latin \textit{modernus}.

See one such protestation precisely at the end of Heidegger’s enumeration of these characters \textit{(Sein und Zeit}, § 27, H 128).

See the WS 1919-20 lecture \textit{Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie}, § 2, H 10; the SS 1920 lecture \textit{Phänomenologie der Anschauung und des Ausdrucks}, § 3, H 15; \textit{Sein und Zeit}, Footnote 1, § 49, H 249; and \textit{Sein und Zeit}, § 72, H 375. These references are admittedly not particularly complimentary.

One might see this passage as motivating the following formal structure: \textit{Ständigkeit} is the distinctive way in which Dasein, \textit{qua} an entity which can think, “I am,“ specifies the most abstract formal-ontological notion of unity across time. It thus stands in contrast to that other way of specifying this formal ontological notion which consists in the persistence of a present-at-hand thing across time. But \textit{Ständigkeit} can take two forms, either \textit{Selbstständigkeit} or \textit{Unselbst-ständigkeit} – see \textit{Sein und Zeit}, § 64, H 322. The former is the unity of a self \textit{in maximally self-like form}, the self as it ‘actually’ \textit{(eigentlich)} is, i.e., when it is \textit{not} existing as a \textit{man-selbst}, in which aspects of full selfhood are suppressed. (It is, of course, unfortunate that in English one can only \textit{literally} translate the adverb \textit{eigentlich} as...
‘actually’, with all those connotations of actualitas which Heidegger would reject.) By contrast, the latter is the unity of a self in the modus of everydayness; as such it displays a unity across time which, while self-like, hence a form of constancy, is not a constancy it has made its own but has simply taken over from its particular das Man. Note how this fits rather well with Heidegger’s claim that in the ontological characters of standing-offishness and the like there lies “die nächste Ständigkeit« des Daseins.” (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 128)

Note that, strictly speaking, this does not entail something Descartes clearly would endorse, namely, that possibly nothing other than I myself qua locus of temporally ‘flowing’ intentional states and experiences exists (without detriment to the coherence of this flux). For one might want to argue that the nature of intentionality is such as to entail a coherent flux, which in turn requires existence of a self in a world of objects and possession by this self of a body in the sense of a locus of abilities-to-do (Vermöglichkeiten) through which the self can act out the horizontal implications of its perceptual experience vis-à-vis the objects of this experience. This is how Husserl sees things. Similarly, one might want to argue, in an externalist vein, that the nature of intentionality is such as to entail that the objects of intentional experience are, by and large, the causes of such experience. This is how Davidson sees things. Here we see that the issue in fact concerns the transcendentally philosophical role and significance of in-each-case-mineness (Jemeinigkeit): ultimately, Heidegger wants to maintain that the ‘I’ cannot be most originally given to itself in the flux of intentional states and experiences, but rather in the flux of social roles and relations because only in the latter flux does it acquire and sustain a sense of its own self and identity and only if it has such a sense of who, empirically speaking, it is, can it be truly given to itself at all. If this is so, then to adopt the philosophical standpoint and attitude of the transcendental ego cannot involve, as Husserl believes, the methodological assumption of anonymity. We touch here upon what Heidegger genuinely objects to in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology.

„Denn in dieser Wesensverfassung des menschlichen Daseins, daß es von Hause aus Mitsein mit Anderen ist, liegt, daß der faktisch existierende Mensch sich notwendig faktisch schon immer in einer bestimmten Weise des Mitseins mit ... d.h. in einem Mitgehen bewegt. Aus mancherlei und z.T. wesentlichen Gründen ist nun aber dieses Mitgehen miteinander ein Auseinander- und Gegeneinandergehen, oder aber, zunächst und zumeist, ein Nebeneinanderhergehen. Gerade dieses unauffällige, selbstverständliche Nebeneinanderhergehen als bestimmte Weise des Miteinander und des Versetztseins ineinander, dieses Nebeneinanderhergehen
The concept of das Man, as mused by Heidegger, involves a phenomenon of double consciousness, as the one who experiences something is also aware of experiencing it. This duality of being-for-others and being-for-one-self is central to understanding the nature of human existence.

Heidegger’s analysis of this concept is grounded in Simmel’s idea of subjective consciousness. The human being is always a relational being, always in the process of becoming aware of oneself. This self-awareness is not a static state but rather an ongoing process of reflection and self-acceptance.

In everyday life (Alltäglich), one understands oneself and one’s existence from out of what one pursues and takes care of. One thus understands oneself from out of this because Dasein finds itself initially in the things. It requires no observation on its own part, no spying upon the ‘I’ in order to have the self; rather, in its character as immediately and committedly [leidenschaftlichen] given over to the world, Dasein’s own self is reflected back to it from out of the things. . . . Initially and for the most part we take ourselves just as the day brings; we do not ponder and
analyse an internal psychic life [Seelenleben]. When we understand ourselves in everyday fashion, we understand ourselves, as we may here terminologically stipulate, not actually [nicht eigentlich] in the strict sense of the word, not constantly from out of the most individual and extreme possibilities of our own existence. Rather, we understand ourselves unactually [uneigentlich]. We do indeed understand ourselves but in a manner in which we are not originally and truly our own [nicht zu eigen], in which we have rather, in everyday existence, lost ourselves in the things and in people. ‘Not actually’ means: not in that manner in which we are, at bottom, able to be our own selves. But this being lost possesses no negative or derogatory connotations, but rather connotes something positive, something belonging to Dasein itself.” (Basic Problems of Phenomenology, § 15, H 225-228; my translation)

Heidegger is indirectly getting at or presupposing this when he says that “the ‘Here’ of an ‘I-here’ [and thus the ‘I’ itself] always understands itself from out of a ready-to-hand ‘There’ in the sense of concernful Being towards it, which brings it near and directs itself out to it [in Sinne des entfernd-ausrichtend-besorgenden Seins zu diesem]” (Sein und Zeit, § 28, H 132; my translation)

Heidegger here goes on to say, “Understanding means casting oneself [Sichentwerfen] with regard to the currently accessible [die jeweilige] possibility of being-in-the-world, that is, it means existing as this possibility. Understanding thus also constitutes, as everyday intelligibility [Verständigkeit] the inauthentic existence [die uneigentliche Existenz] of the One. What everyday taking-care-of encounters in public intercourse [im öffentlichen Miteinander] are not only equipment and the work, but at the same time that which transpires in and through equipment and the work [was sich damit »begibt«]: the »dealings«, undertakings, incidents, accidents.” (Sein und Zeit, § 75, H 387-388; my translation) Naturally, by these dealings, undertakings, incidents and accidents, Heidegger means my dealings, undertakings, incidents and accidents, which are often enough also our dealings, undertakings, incidents and accidents.

Note an interesting implication of this claim: the self-evaluatingly self-regulating acting out of distinctively social relations and roles clearly requires language. Yet according to Heidegger this acting out of social relations and roles is mediated via equipment in the sense of artefacts; this mediation and indeed ‘appresentation’ through what is ready-to-hand and indeed present-at-hand just is the fact that the other “is neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand, but rather is in such a way as the Dasein which gives it free [so to be] …”; the other is thus essentially “also and conjointly there.” (Sein und Zeit, § 26, H 118; my translation)
So Heidegger’s position is this: any entity which can think, “I am,” to itself necessarily occurs in networks of labour and linguistic interaction.


Crucially, the shared belief which constitutes das Man also includes in its content what Heidegger calls “the ‘one dies’” (Das »man stirbt« – see § 51, H 253)

How Dreyfus’ reading of das Man can accommodate this is not easy to see. That Heidegger speaks of “the ‘one dies’” suggests that das Man is precisely a matter of public opinion, not of social norm. That this is so is confirmed by Heidegger’s characterisation of das Man as a matter of Gerede (doxa!) – see Sein und Zeit, § 35, esp. H 168, and § 51, H 252.

So typicality or averageness is in effect what is commonly and pre-philosophically meant by stereotypicality. Note the inherent ambivalence in the everyday notion of a stereotype: a stereotype is not eo ipso a bad thing but it is always on the verge of being one.

This interpretation is confirmed by what Heidegger says about das Man in Heidegger 2002 – see in particular, § 9 c), H 62-64. I am indebted to Will McNeill for this reference.

Note that in order to turn this into an ‘analysis’ of shared knowledge that p, one would have to add the further condition (iii) that b and b’ do in fact each count as knowledge. Note, too, that the truth of S’s belief b entails the presence of A’s belief b’; and conversely that the truth of A’s belief b’ entails the presence of S’s belief b. This is as one would expect.

A group partly defined, of course, by its members’ possessing sufficiently many of this set of shared beliefs. Note that when one cashes this quantified kind of shared belief out in terms of the definiens just given, one obtains a reference to the others in the group (as others of the group), as in, for example, “All members in such and such group have a belief b that (p and all other members in such and such a group knows that (p and … and (ii) all other members in such and such a group have a belief b’ that (p and all members in such and such a group knows that (p and … .” This suggests that nice thought that awareness of myself (as myself) is initially awareness of others as others, i.e., others to me – an awareness one only has in and through participating in some das Man.

Precisely because he does not deny this, Heidegger can say, “Perhaps indeed what is given in simple, formal reflective attending to the ego [das schlichte, formale, reflektive Ichvernehmen] evident. This insight opens indeed the way to a phenomenological problematic of its own, which, as the “formal phenomenology of consciousness“, has its fundamental, stage-setting significance [ihre
The paragraph from which this passage is drawn makes quite clear that Heidegger is criticising Husserl’s conception of that with which philosophy should begin, namely, with the pure transcendental ego, which has been transcendentally reduced precisely to a locus of intentionality. Heidegger’s earliest criticism of Husserl was that this latter sought to start with the pure ego whereas in fact one needed to start with what Heidegger then called the historical ego. It is evident that in § 25 Heidegger is alluding to this criticism – which only confirms that Heidegger is not objecting either to starting with the ‘ego’ as such or indeed to the status of what one starts with as transcendental. Rather, he is objecting precisely to the pureness which Husserl regarded as necessary for a genuine beginning – a pureness which ensures that the ego is anonymous, hence has no sense of who it is. Heidegger’s insistence on the Who of Dasein as something to be factored into the transcendentally philosophical equation reflects his critique of Husserl. Having a sense of who one is (Jemeingkeit), which sense of personal identity one can only have insofar as one is a man selbst, that is, exists, and knows oneself as existing, in relation to some form of das Man, is a constitutive part of being rational. It cannot, therefore, be excluded from what Husserl calls the phenomenology of reason.

Had Heidegger really wanted to understand the One in Dreyfus’ normative sense, he would arguably have used the subjunctive, not the indicative since in (admittedly rather old-fashioned, elevated) German it is the subjunctive (“Das mache man nicht!”) and not the indicative which expresses normative evaluation (judgements of propriety and impropriety, appropriateness and inappropriateness, as opposed to judgements of prudence and imprudence). In English the neutral third person pronoun ‘one’ is used with the indicative to express normative evaluation, mainly because there is very little true subjunctive left in English. In German, by contrast, the use of this pronoun with the indicative tends to express something quite non-normative, what, namely, is captured in English by the use of the third person plural pronoun ‘they’: “They say there is a warrant out for his arrest”, “Man sagt, es besteht ein Haftbefehl gegen ihn.”

For this reason, it is too strong to say that for Simmel our being-with is out-of-kilter or off-balance – see Blake, 2008b, p.7. The subtlety of Simmel’s position consists in the claim that precisely because it has a tendency to conflict, an anti- or at least a-cooperative element to it, our being-with is actually very robust.

In this spirit, Simmel says, “The a priori of empirical social life is that life is not wholly social, we form our reciprocal relations not only with the negative
reserve of a part of our personality which does not enter into these relations: not only does this part influence social processes in the psyché [Seele] through universal psychological connections generally, but also precisely through its formal character of standing outside these relations it determines the nature of this influence.” (Simmel 1992, p.53; my translation)

In a passage with strong Heideggerian overtones, Simmel says, “Precisely from out of the full singularity of a personality we form a picture of this personality which is not identical with its reality [Wirklichkeit] yet is also not a universal type, but rather the picture which the individual would present if he were so to speak wholly himself, if he realised, in either positive or negative form [nach der guten oder schlechten Seite hin], the ideal possibility which is in every person. We are all fragments, not only of universal human being, but also of ourselves. Not only are we incipient beginnings [Ansätze] to the type ‘human being’ in general, to the typically good and bad and the like, we are also incipient beginnings to that – in principle no longer characterisable [benennbaren] – individuality and singularity of ourselves which surrounds our perceptible reality as if it were drawn with ideal lines [wie mit ideellen Linien gezeichnet]. But the look of the other completes this fragmentary character to what we never purely and wholly are. Not at all can the other see the actually given fragments as simply existing alongside one another. Rather, just as we unconsciously compensate for the blindspot in our visual field, so, too, we make out of what is fragmentary the completeness of its individuality.” (Simmel 1992, p.49; my translation) Note here the insinuations of authentic being a self – authentic precisely in Heidegger’s sense of eigentlich, i.e., true, full and/or actual. Note, too, how Simmel says here that the look of the other completes us in our selfhood.

See Simmel 1992, p.46, for a general intimation of this dual ontological-ontic character.

Which is not, of course, to say completely realised. Indeed, they could never be completely realised since this would constitute the dissolution of being-with. Analogously, a society in which everyone lied would be impossible.

There is, of course, the literary device of describing a potentiality in terms of its actuality and Heidegger may well be availing himself of this as well.

Note how this insinuates the possibility of imparting to fundamental ontology an inherently critical character: in order effectively to differentiate between the ontological and the ontic, we must characterise what the ontic is in our own case. And so we must evaluate it with regard to how fully it permits Dasein to be fully what it is, namely, a self. Here the meta-philosophical and methodological
significance of the notion of authentic, or rather, true or fully realised being-a-self, shines through.

This, one might add, is a condition of the possibility of its existing historically.

Dreyfus 2000, p.161. Elsewhere Dreyfus tells us something slightly different, namely, that “das Man denotes the shared norms that determine both equipmental use and the point of such use which Heidegger calls significance.” (Dreyfus 1995, pp.424-425)

Presumably, to say that this totality is a condition of the possibility of Dasein is to say that any Dasein must be able to participate in at least sufficiently many of the members of this totality.

According to Dreyfus, Heidegger’s notion of das Man can be seen as entailing “a sort of behaviourism, the sort found in Wittgenstein, and perhaps in Gilbert Ryle, as long as one remembers that the behaviour in question is not meaningless physical movements of some object, but the directed, significant, concernful comportment of human beings going about their business in a meaningful social world.” (Dreyfus 1991, p.147)

“Averageness is not merely statistical.” (Dreyfus 1991, p.153)

That eating is, as a matter of brute historical fact, overlain by such norms of courtesy and etiquette is indisputable. And we may grant, at least for the sake of the argument, that there would be no genuinely self-conscious existence, and thus for this reason no equipmental wholes, unless some artefacts were thus overlain. But Dreyfus is saying something considerably stronger than this, namely, that artefacts as such are bound up with ‘norms’. And he takes precepts of courtesy and etiquette to be representative cases of what he means by ‘norms’. So Dreyfus can only be read as saying that it is intrinsic to the very being of artefacts, at least of entities capable of the “I am,” that they be subject to norms of this kind. This only highlights how implausible Dreyfus’ central claim becomes when one attempts to make unambiguous sense of it. Alternatively put, it highlights how unclear and equivocal Dreyfus’ use of the notion of a norm is.

Dreyfus supplies very little textual evidence for this central claim. In a later article he quotes Heidegger as concluding that “the “one” itself articulates the referential context of significance” – see Dreyfus 1995, p.425. But quite apart from its not being clear how this conclusion is equivalent to the claim Dreyfus wants to make, namely, that das Man positively enables or sustains the referential context of significance, Dreyfus is relying here on a mistranslation. Heidegger in fact says that “the One-self, for the sake of which Dasein is in everyday fashion, articulates
the referential context of significance.” (Sein und Zeit, § 27, H 129; my translation)

And it is crucial not to confuse *das Man* with the *man-selbst* since the latter is Dasein in its capacity as existing in everyday fashion, in which it acts out its various social roles and relations by drawing upon the resources provided by its particular *das Man*. That these are two distinct, albeit interrelated notions is already clear from the fact that it makes no sense to describe *das Man*, whether understood as Dreyfus recommends or as is here recommended, as something for the sake of which Dasein exists. In fact, in this passage Heidegger is saying the following two things: firstly, Dasein exists as oriented towards being as much as a normal everyday self, i.e., a *man-selbst*, as possible since this is what it is to be a coherent self recognizable as such both to others and crucially also to oneself; and secondly, as an everyday self Dasein exists as articulating the significance for its activity of how entities within the world are deployed.

Note that this is actually inconsistent with what Heidegger at one point says: “If the *cogito sum* is to serve as point of departure for the existential analytic of Dasein, then it requires not only the inversion, but also a new ontologically phenomenal proving of its content. The first proposition is then *sum* [inversion], and indeed *sum* in the sense of ‘I-am-in-a-world’ [the new ontologically phenomenal proving].” (Sein und Zeit, § 43 b), H 211; my translation)

See Sein und Zeit, § 64, H 322.

Luther, WA 7, 838, 9.

This latter part of the content of the shared belief in which *das Man* consists may be put in more general form. Let us say that the “I”, qua locus of social roles and relations, can only exist, indeed is defined as such by its existing, as sharing with certain others, for some set of notions *E* by which these others evaluate and regulate their interactions, knowledge as to what behaviours in what circumstances typically satisfy some *E*.

One is tempted to say that social practices no more come singly than do individual acts of rule-following. But here one must be careful: it is not obvious that the constitutive importance of social practices and the social norms implicit in them entails that there can be no private rule-following in any sense of the term.

This oversimplifies Heidegger’s position. In fact, what is required for the effective, coherent passage through social practices and contexts is not just a sense of what it is prudent, morally right or axiologically good to do, but a sense of *the self one would ideally be* – what Heidegger will later call one’s ability to be (in the world). In other words, one needs to be orientated towards a life good for oneself as the individual one is – not the good life in general but that life which constitutes an
optimal synthesis of one’s own individual interests and concerns with the constellation of norms and values (*ethos*) into which one is contingently thrown. A sense of the self one would ideally be is needed in order to render intelligible how selves transition from one social practice to another, and thus how social practices themselves hang together. *In* a social practice or role I am subject to criteria of proficiency – ‘good’ in the sense of being good at what I am doing (*techné*). But in moving between practices I am subject to criteria of optimality – ‘good’ in the sense of a felicitous synthesis between what is right and good in general and what is good for me. The generation of this synthesis is guided precisely by a sense of the self one would ideally be. This sense of who one ideally is can take two forms: factical ability to be in the world and that *ownmost* ability to be in the world which one has appropriated for oneself.

*lvi* Which is not, of course, to say temporally, as if *das Man* and the individual instance of Dasein bound together by it could pre-exist social practices.

*li* I owe this point to discussions with Nick Blake and Alexander Karolis.