

Das Man and Distantiality in *Being and Time*

DAVID EGAN

Oriel College, University of Oxford, UK

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ABSTRACT *Heidegger's discussion of das Man (often translated as "the 'They'") in Being and Time is notoriously inconsistent, and raises a number of interpretative issues that have been debated in the secondary literature. This paper offers two arguments that aim to make for a consistent and charitable reading of das Man. First, unlike Dasein, das Man's way of being is not existence: das Man lacks Dasein's particularity (it offers only general norms, and cannot address Dasein's unique situation), unity (das Man is not a unified set of norms, but rather an often inconsistent one) and distinctness (the boundary that fixes the concept of das Man is fuzzy). Second, this paper proposes that we read das Man as standing in contrast with Abständigkeit, or distantiality. Das Man is the socially constituted set of norms that we necessarily belong to, and distantiality is the equally inescapable difference that sets us apart from others. Together, they provide a framework within which Dasein is constituted by norms without inhibiting the possibility of authentic existence.*

I. Introduction

One of the more intriguing, and perplexing, moments in *Being and Time* comes in §27 with Martin Heidegger's discussion of *das Man*. What he says about *das Man* is notoriously inconsistent, and much ink has been spilled over how best to interpret him. Without claiming that the inconsistencies can be satisfactorily resolved, I propose to spill a little more ink by investigating the nature of *das Man* itself and by drawing into that debate a second concept that is often overlooked, and that stands in revealing contrast with *das Man*: Heidegger's concept of *Abständigkeit*, or distantiality.

My claim is, roughly, as follows: *das Man* and distantiality are both existential, structural features of Dasein, which stand in contrast with one another.

Correspondence Address: David Egan, 5584 Mackenzie Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6N 1H2. Email: davidegan@gmail.com

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Das Man is the socially constituted set of norms to which we necessarily belong, and distantiality is our equally inescapable awareness of the difference that sets us apart from others. Every one of us is somewhat like others and somewhat unique. As a set of general norms, *das Man* does not have the particularity of Dasein's existence, and so its status as an existentiale does not inhibit Dasein's individuality. I begin by sketching Heidegger's presentation of *das Man* and the interpretative issues surrounding it (Section II) before offering a more detailed consideration of *das Man*'s way of being (Section III). I then introduce distantiality and argue for the role it plays in §27 of *Being and Time* (Section IV), and briefly consider a possible objection relating to Heidegger's discussion of authenticity (Section V).

A quick note on the translation of *das Man* before I begin. The translations both by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson and by Joan Stambaugh render this term as "the 'They'", which is unsatisfactory because it suggests that *das Man* is other people from whom Dasein is somehow distinct. Literally rendering the term as "the one", as Hubert Dreyfus and Taylor Carman do, carries confusingly Messianic connotations, while, as Dreyfus (1991, p. 152) points out, "we" and "anyone" fail to "capture the normative character of the expression. *We* or *Anyone* might try to cheat the Internal Revenue Service, but still, *one* pays *one's* taxes". The difficulty in translation here (and in fact with a great deal of Heidegger) stems in part from the fact that German is a much more noun-centric language than English, whereas verbs do more of the semantic heavy lifting in English. I leave *das Man* untranslated in this paper, but aim to bring out the implications of Heidegger's usage by using verbs with either the neutral third person singular or the passive voice: *das Man* speaks to what *one* does or what *is* done.

II. The interpretation of *das Man*

The first and most detailed discussion of *das Man* in *Being and Time* is the culmination of the fourth chapter of Division I, which purports to deal with "Being-in-the-World as Being-with and Being-One's-Self" (BT, p. 113/149).¹ This chapter investigates the "who" of Dasein: Dasein is importantly a third kind of entity, distinct from present-at-hand objects and ready-to-hand equipment, with its own distinctive kind of Being: Dasein *exists*. This existence is importantly different from the being of present-at-hand entities and ready-to-hand equipment because the world is intelligible to Dasein. Heidegger's existential analysis of Dasein aims at uncovering those ontological features—Heidegger calls them *existentials*—that constitute the necessary conditions for the world showing up intelligibly to Dasein.

Heidegger deliberately chooses the neologism of *Dasein* so as not to prejudice his investigation of existence: he does not want us to assume that Dasein is the same thing as the human being studied by anthropology, biology, or psychology, or that it can be picked out by one of the traditional conceptions of

personal identity. One crucial feature of Heidegger's analytic is that we are not Dasein alone, but exist essentially in this world *with* others. Heidegger explicitly links the self, or the "who" of Dasein, with its social aspect: "The world of Dasein is a *with-world*. Being-in is *being-with* Others" (BT, p. 118/155). Just as we encounter tools proximally and for the most part *as* tools, and not as present-at-hand objects whose significance we must subsequently infer, we encounter other people proximally and for the most part as Dasein, and not as the sealed-off enigmas that the problematic of other minds scepticism presents to us. I do not encounter other individuals and then infer that they are people rather than automata; rather I encounter other people as other people and only subsequently can I even entertain the thought that they might be automata rather than people. The way of being in the world that Heidegger calls "Being-with" is prior to, and a condition for the possibility of, questioning the existence of other minds. Our own sense of who and what we are is shaped by our engaging with others whom we deem to be our fellows.

The traditional conception of the self as an isolated consciousness is inadequate on Heidegger's view because the self does not have a prior existence that it then learns to accommodate to a world full of other selves and entities. Rather, Dasein comes into its Dasein-hood as Being-with-one-another: the "who" of everyday Dasein is not the isolated individual, but the individual constituted by social norms. Being-with is an *existentiale* because it is a condition for the possibility of the kind of articulated, intelligible world that is characteristic of Dasein. While each of us makes sense of the world in our own way, the very notion of making sense of the world in the first place, as well as the concepts with which we make sense of the world, are things we articulate together.

If Being-with is a constitutive feature of Dasein's existence, then Dasein's existence is largely constituted by features that are not uniquely its own. One feature of tools' readiness-to-hand is that they are ready-to-hand for others as well. A shoe is only a shoe if anyone with the same sized foot can wear it. My shoes are available to me *as* shoes only insofar as they are available as shoes to others as well. This promiscuous availability is part of what makes a shoe a shoe: it is available to many people indiscriminately because there is a way that *one wears shoes* that applies across the board. As Being-with, Dasein is constituted by a wide range of norms that dictate what *one* does, which Heidegger calls *das Man*. *Das Man* is not an individual, nor a group, nor even (as I will argue) a particular mode of existence, but it "articulates the referential context of significance" (BT, p. 129/167). *Das Man* does not simply articulate the norms according to which one wears shoes, but renders shoes intelligible as shoes in the first place. By highlighting the existential role of Being-with and *das Man*, Heidegger emphasizes that the intelligibility of Dasein's world involves sharing and shaping this intelligibility in concert with others. This claim is stronger than simply saying that I am inevitably a creature of my times. I am not simply *of* my times, but in an important sense,

I am my times: the social norms of my milieu are a constitutive feature of who I am, even if I react against them. We might say that Heidegger has an externalist conception of the self.³

However, Heidegger also finds in *das Man* something more sinister than basic intelligibility. Heidegger is interested in what *one* does, not because one has decided to do things this way, but simply because this is how things are done. The passive voice is revealing: we accord ourselves with *das Man* passively, rather than actively choosing to do so. For the most part, Heidegger suggests, we accord ourselves with *das Man* unthinkingly, allowing our actions and opinions to be dictated to us by what *one* does or thinks, reneging on our freedom to take responsibility for these actions and opinions. This accord with *das Man* enables a great cover-up, presenting our forms of life to ourselves as binding and necessary. In according ourselves with what *one* does, we do not simply choose not to find our own way of doing things, but we avoid acknowledging that there is even a choice there to be made.

Heidegger's discussion of *das Man* is notoriously confusing and inconsistent. It is one thing to say that shoes are available to many others indiscriminately, and another thing altogether to say that we subsume our actions and opinions to groupthink. Two related questions stand out in the secondary literature on *das Man*. First is the question of whether our accord with *das Man* constitutes just an unproblematic conformity or a more problematic conformism, and the extent to which these two can be separated. And the second, which feeds the first, is a seeming inconsistency in the text of *Being and Time* itself: is *das Man* an existentielle, of which authentic Dasein is an existentiell modification, or is the reverse true?

The debate about conformity versus conformism is in a sense a debate between two of Heidegger's main influences, Wilhelm Dilthey and Søren Kierkegaard, and a good point of entry comes in Dreyfus's commentary on Division I of *Being and Time*. Dreyfus sees Dilthey and Kierkegaard pulling Heidegger in different directions as concerns our constitution by *das Man*:

... whereas Dilthey emphasized the positive function of social phenomena, which he called the "objectifications of life", Kierkegaard focused on the negative effects of the conformism and banality of what he called "the public". Heidegger takes up and extends the Diltheyan insight that intelligibility and truth arise only in the context of public, historical practices, but he is also deeply influenced by the Kierkegaardian view that "the truth is never in the crowd". (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 143)

Dreyfus claims that Heidegger's discussion of *das Man* fails to distinguish between conformity and conformism. Talking about the "dictatorship" of *das Man*, Heidegger describes the conformism it induces: "We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *one* takes pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *one* sees and judges" (*BT*, pp. 126–27/164).⁴ The sorts of judgments

that involve conforming with the popular views on literature and art are a far cry from the sorts of conformity that constitute our social existence. Ludwig Wittgenstein is particularly interesting on this latter kind of conformity, and readers like Dreyfus draw significantly on Wittgenstein when emphasizing the conformity aspect of *das Man*. In *Philosophical Investigations* §241–42, Wittgenstein emphasizes the importance of people already sharing agreement in language, “form of life”, and basic judgments in order to communicate, and in *On Certainty*, he discusses propositions such as “the earth existed for a long time before my birth” not as empirical propositions, but as something akin to logical propositions, propositions we must accept in order to be able to communicate at all. We might be seen as compromising our individuality by conforming to popular tastes in art simply because these are the opinions *one* holds, but we surely do not compromise ourselves greatly by conforming to basic norms of intelligibility. More to the point, if *das Man* just denotes conformity, we should not be too troubled at the thought of its pervasiveness, but if Heidegger also intends to denote conformism, its pervasiveness should be deeply troubling.

Against Dreyfus and Carman, Frederick Olafson (1994a; 1994b) insists that *das Man* be understood not as social norms generally, but as a specific kind of levelling conformism that Heidegger takes to be neither desirable nor necessary, and which, Olafson claims, plays only a marginal role in Heidegger’s overall philosophy at the time of *Being and Time* (it receives no mention in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, for instance). Carman (1994) and Dreyfus (1995) answer Olafson, arguing that Heidegger introduces *das Man* as an *existentiale*, and that treating it as such—and taking *das Man* to denote conformity in general rather than just a more rigid conformism—provides a more consistent reading of *Being and Time*. However, both note that Olafson’s reading is not unsupported by the text, which is itself inconsistent, allowing for conflicting readings.

The inconsistency concerns the ontological status of *das Man* and the possibilities of authentic or inauthentic existence. Heidegger’s introduction of *das Man* in §27 of *Being and Time* supports the Dreyfus/Carman reading: Heidegger treats *das Man* as part of the essential structure of *Dasein*, and tell us that it “*is an existentiale; and as a primordial phenomenon, it belongs to Dasein’s positive constitution*” (BT, p. 129/167). Later, Heidegger makes the priority of *das Man* over authentic *Dasein* even more explicit: “Authentic being-one’s-self takes the definite form of an *existentiell* modification of *das Man*; and this modification must be defined existentially” (BT, p. 267/312). Puzzlingly, Heidegger later still seems to say the reverse, describing “the one-self, which is an *existentiell* modification of the authentic Self” (BT, p. 317/365).⁵ This later point is bolstered by a passage that seems to reject the earlier discussion as provisional: “*our existential analysis of Dasein up till now cannot lay claim to primordiality. Its fore-having never included more than the inauthentic being of Dasein, of Dasein as less than a whole*”

(*BT*, p. 233/276). While I do not think the inconsistency is an illusion, I also do not think it is as glaring as Carman and Dreyfus make out. I will now try to show how, first by offering some reflections on the nature of *das Man* and then by positioning it in contrast to Heidegger's concept of distantiality.

III. The way of being of *das Man*

Much of the commentary on *das Man*—and indeed, Heidegger's own writing on the subject—characterizes *das Man* as having a similar existential status to Dasein. Heidegger defines *das Man* as the “who” of everyday Dasein, and Dreyfus (1991, p. 158) characterizes *das Man* as a “Substitute Dasein”. Whether it is an existentielle or an existentiell modification of Dasein, *das Man* is portrayed as a way that Dasein could or must *be*. However, we should be careful not to describe the being of *das Man* as too closely analogous with the being of Dasein. I will focus on three disanalogies: that *das Man* lacks particularity, that it lacks unity, and that it has fuzzy boundaries. Having laid out these disanalogies, I will offer some positive reflections on how we might make sense of *das Man*'s way of being.

The most straightforward disanalogy between Dasein's way of being and *das Man*'s is that we cannot always speak about what *one* does analogously with how we speak about what *I* or *you* or *he* or *she* does. We can talk about impersonal norms in the first person singular or the third person neutral singular with equal ease: “I look people in the eyes when toasting” versus “one looks people in the eyes when toasting”. However, references to what *one* does by their nature lack particularity: I can say that *I* want the Canucks to win the Stanley Cup or that *she* wants the Canadiens to win the Stanley Cup, but the most that one can say for *das Man* is that *one* wants one's favourite (or perhaps home) team to win the championship.

Precisely in its impersonality, *das Man* lacks the crucial particularity that is a central feature of Dasein's existence. Dasein's social and historical situatedness opens certain possibilities and closes off others. In the modern West, one can choose to be an academic or a carpenter or an estate manager, but one cannot choose to be a conquistador or a warp drive engineer. *One* can choose some things and not others, but the particular choice—the existential space that Heidegger calls the Situation—is made by each individual Dasein in its particularity. We might say that *one* can choose, but we cannot say what *one* in fact chooses, since *das Man* lacks the particularity to make this choice.

This claim—that *das Man* lacks Dasein's particularity—invites two objections. The first is that Dasein also lacks particularity. I have been writing as if Dasein is coextensive with individual human beings, but Heidegger rarely speaks of “a Dasein” or refers to Dasein in the plural. John Haugeland (1982) argues that “Dasein” denotes not individual people but a way of life. However, in emphasizing the “mineness” of Dasein (*BT*, pp. 41–43/67–69), Heidegger emphasizes precisely the particularity of Dasein's existence.

Although Heidegger wants us to attend to the constitutive role of shared norms in Dasein's existence, he also wants us to attend to the particularity of each existence.⁶

The second objection to my claim that *das Man* lacks Dasein's particularity is that Dasein's Situation arises only in a condition of authenticity. If we understand *das Man* as an inauthentic way of being then it stands to reason that *das Man* lacks the particularity to make particular choices. Heidegger seems to suggest as much when he talks about everyday Dasein choosing *das Man* for its hero (*BT*, p. 371/422). However, even if we accept this existentiell conception of *das Man* we can see that *das Man* is of a different kind from Dasein. Dasein's existence is constituted by the possibilities of both authentic and inauthentic existence. By virtue of its lacking particularity, *das Man*—*das Man* itself, and not Dasein lost in *das Man*—is constitutionally incapable of achieving authenticity. Dasein might fail to achieve authenticity, but *das Man* could not fail to achieve it since authenticity is not something *das Man* could hope to realize. Unlike Dasein, *das Man* is not the sort of thing we can talk about in terms of authenticity.

Heidegger's talk of choosing *das Man* for its hero is problematic for a further reason: *das Man* lacks unity. *Being and Time* itself, and much of the secondary literature, often speak of *das Man* as a unified set of norms that we might identify with to greater or lesser extents, as if there were one particular way in which *one* behaves. This conception of a unified *das Man* is misleading, however. First of all, any stratified society has more than one *das Man*: how *one* behaves in the upper middle class differs from how *one* behaves in the working class. Not only that, but different norms apply to the same person as he or she occupies different roles: how *one* behaves in seminar differs from how *one* behaves at a drinks party, which in turn differs from how *one* behaves on a crowded bus or train. Neither of these points in itself shows that *das Man* cannot be a unity: our code of social norms might be inordinately complex, making different kinds of demands on different people in different circumstances, while still being univocal in its demands. However, these points draw our attention to our essential distance from other people, and help us recognize an individuality that emerges from the way we occupy distinctive roles.⁷

More important, though, social norms do not dictate all our behaviour even within particular social roles. One does not take tea with salt or maple syrup, but one might take it with milk and/or sugar, or even honey or a twist of lemon. If there were a single way in which *one* takes tea, there would be no need to ask "milk or sugar?" when serving it. Proverbs, the quintessential repository of common wisdom, are notoriously contradictory. Should one look before one leaps, or remember that he who hesitates is lost? Do many hands make light work, or do too many cooks spoil the broth? Even if we wanted to subsume all our decisions to the dictates of the impersonal authority of social norms, we could not live on auto-pilot: these norms point in many

different directions at once. We are constituted by norms, but these norms still leave room for variation.

As a constitutive set of norms that is nevertheless not comprehensive in its dictates, *das Man* works in close analogy with rules in games. On one hand, a sport like association football is constituted by its rules, and we are not playing football if we do not follow the rules. On the other hand, the rules of football still allow for—indeed, impose—a certain amount of freedom. Within the framework provided by the rules, the number of possible actions of the players is restricted and yet still infinite. Players cannot do whatever they like on the field—and given sufficiently outrageous forms of behaviour they would cease to be players—but the rules define the aims of the game and place some restriction upon how those aims can be achieved without placing any absolute demands on exactly how to set about achieving them.⁸ Similarly, *das Man* provides a framework for the sorts of aims one might have in life (though obviously being far less univocal than any game as to what these aims are) and how one might appropriately set about achieving them, but the life that *das Man* constitutes is more like football than connect-the-dots: the rules do not tell us what to do. Every game unfolds differently for every distinct player, such that what he or she does at any given moment is at least partly determined by his or her unique character, instincts and capacities.

Life is not a game, of course, and two particular differences stand out in the present context. The first, alluded to above, is that life does not have a single, definite aim: Dasein can project itself toward a variety of possible futures, and this projection need not be defined by any single goal. Second, the socially constituted norms of *das Man* are less clearly defined than the rules of a game. Life does not come with a book of rules. Some norms are more coercive than others, but no sharp line distinguishes the sorts of conformity that make social life possible from the conformism of certain social habits. Heidegger can speak disparagingly about the Dasein who shares popular tastes in art and literature because Dasein can lead a coherent and socially acceptable life without giving in to such conformism, but he could not as easily disparage Dasein's agreement with others that the earth has existed for a long time. However, no sharp line separates the latter kind of agreement from the former.⁹ Not only is *das Man* not a unity, but its boundaries are also fuzzy.

I have highlighted three ways in which *das Man* is unlike Dasein: it lacks Dasein's particularity, it lacks Dasein's unity, and it lacks Dasein's clear boundaries. This third point becomes particularly pertinent if we press beyond these points of disanalogy and ask what *das Man* is. If *das Man* is what can be described in terms of what *one* does, an exhaustive catalogue would include features that constitute a mere conformity to the most basic structures of intelligibility as well as features that constitute the most craven conformism. I offer below a classification of the sorts of norms and forms of behaviour comprised by *das Man*, more in order to provide a sense of

the diversity such norms and forms of behaviour than to provide a perfect taxonomy:

- (a) *Agreement in definitions*: In order to have language at all, we must share a sense of what our words mean. What one's words mean is determined by the norms of a shared language.
- (b) *Agreement in basic judgments*: The sorts of propositions that interested G. E. Moore and the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty*: that the earth has existed for more than five minutes, that I have hands, and so on. That is, the sorts of propositions about which agreement is necessary before rational debate can even begin.
- (c) *Use of equipment*: Equipment is ready-to-hand for any Dasein indiscriminately, and there are particular ways in which one uses hammers, wears shoes, turns doorknobs, etc.
- (d) *Social and historical situatedness*: One's particular cultural and historical situation opens up certain possibilities, makes certain options live, and closes off other possibilities that might be open to other people at other places and times.
- (e) *Coordination principles*: What side of the road one drives on is largely arbitrary, but it is important that everyone in a given country drive on the same side of the road to avoid collisions. A great deal of our social life depends on such simple norms for coordination.¹⁰
- (f) *Social conventions*: Recall Dreyfus's earlier example of "one pays one's taxes". Social conventions range from such official rules to norms like "Don't address your teacher by his or her first name". These conventions are imposed by authority.
- (g) *Moral norms*: Between the ages of five and eight, children learn to distinguish social conventions from moral norms, the former drawing on authority, and the latter holding independent of any authority (one characteristic of psychopathy is the failure to recognize the difference). While one only pays one's taxes because the government requires it, one is expected not to need the imposition of authority in order to keep one's promises.
- (h) *Relations to kin and non-kin*: One of the central areas of interest to anthropologists is the kinship structures within a society: who counts as family and what sorts of relations are appropriate between different members of one's family. We can include here also one's relations to those outside one's family structure. Norms also dictate how one relates to strangers, and what levels of intimacy are appropriate in what circumstances.
- (i) *Etiquette*: In the West, one greets with a handshake or a kiss on the cheek; in Japan, one greets with a bow. Principles of etiquette are somewhat weaker than moral norms, but still shape and ease a great deal of social interaction.

- (j) *Ceremonies*: From religious rituals to birthday parties, we have various ceremonial means of expressing and affirming our solidarity, and there are more or less strict guidelines for how one participates in such ceremonies.
- (k) *Common wisdom and proverbs*: Discussed above, our common stock of wisdom is hardly consistent, but it still provides general guidelines for how one ought to behave.
- (l) *Behaviour appropriate to specific roles*: Particular occupations have their own particular norms: that one turn out the lights and lock up if one is the last to leave the office, that one leave the driver's area tidy for the next bus driver, and so on. The same can be said for the various non-professional social roles that people take on, whether it be behaviour appropriate to one's class, gender, age, and so on.
- (m) *Common modes of thought, behaviour, and feeling*: A very broad class, which can include everything from what one thinks of a film to what one feels on hearing the news that a friend's parent has died to one's gait when walking down the street.
- (n) *Common modes of expression for thought, behaviour, and feeling*: What one thinks of a film is one thing; how one talks about it is another. What one feels upon hearing bad news is one thing; how one expresses that feeling is another. Also, while the fact that one wears clothes is covered by c) above, what kinds of clothes are fashionable fall under this category.

Heidegger's seeming inconsistency as to whether *das Man* represents conformity or conformism reflects the broad spectrum of norms *das Man* covers. Some items toward the top of this list are necessary for any kind of social existence at all—one could not renounce one's participation in the shared norms of linguistic usage without renouncing language itself—but they seem to be in the minority. While one's social existence would be significantly hampered by rejecting certain basic forms of etiquette and interpersonal relations, one would not thereby forfeit the very possibility of Being-with-one-another.

Although following the latest fashions is hardly a necessary or constitutive feature of the intelligibility of Dasein's world, this list still provides good grounds for treating *das Man* as an *existential*. Whether any particular Dasein adheres to a given norm or not, the fact of its social existence means that it lives in a society that has norms about how one dresses, how one expresses opinions, what kinds of opinions are acceptable, and so on. What passes as a norm, and the stringency of its demands, lack clear boundaries: at what point an innovation becomes a trend and a trend a cliché are open to debate. That there are norms, however, is undeniable, and these norms are an inescapable aspect of Dasein's Being-with. Even deviation from social norms is understood as deviation only in its relation to these norms.

Norms of conformism can be part of Dasein's existential structure because *das Man*'s way of being is not existence. Because *das Man* lacks particularity,

unity, and distinctness, and Dasein has all three of these features. Dasein cannot simply adopt the way of being of *das Man*. One consequence of these disanalogies is that *das Man* cannot be the source of the intelligibility of the world, as Dreyfus (1991, p. 154f) claims. *Das Man* provides a normative structure that is an essential feature of Dasein's existence, but this structure does not provide the whole story on intelligibility.¹¹ We do better, I propose, to consider *das Man* as one—but only one—aspect of Dasein's existential structure. Equally important, though mostly unremarked upon in the secondary literature on Heidegger, is distantiality.

IV. Distantiality

Heidegger's discussion of *das Man* is prefaced by a discussion of *Abständigkeit*, a term both Macquarrie and Robinson and Stambaugh render as "distantiality".¹²

In one's concern with what one has taken hold of, whether with, for, or against, the Others, there is constant care as to the way one differs from them, whether that difference is merely one that is to be evened out, whether one's own Dasein has lagged behind the Others and wants to catch up in relationship to them, or whether one's Dasein already has some priority over them and sets out to keep them suppressed. The care about this distance between them is disturbing to Being-with-one-another, though this disturbance is one that is hidden from it. Existentially expressed, Being-with-one-another has the character of *distantiality*. (BT, p. 126/163–64; translation modified)

Heidegger defines distantiality, like *das Man*, as an existentially: it is not a feature that Dasein may or may not have at any given moment, but an essential feature of Dasein's constitution. Thus it cannot be "a kind of diffidence, an inhibition of personal rapport, a kind of social skittishness", as Carman (1994, p. 219) has it, but something more abiding. What kind of "something more," however, is unclear, and Heidegger gives us very little to go on.

According to Dreyfus (1995, pp. 427–28), distantiality is "our essential tendency to minimize the distance between ourselves and others by subtle coercion or co-option, especially when we are not aware of doing so" and "denotes an essential structure of all *Dasein's* activity that inconspicuously reduces difference and so performs the ontological function of establishing norms and thus opening up a shared human world". This account conflates two separate aspects of Dasein's constitution. Dreyfus tells us that (a) we have an awareness of our difference from others, and (b) this awareness of difference prompts a tendency to minimize this difference. Heidegger's talk about "constant care" lends some plausibility to the conflation, but I believe we do better to understand distantiality as consisting only of (a) and not also of (b).

Four reasons incline me toward this reading, two textual and two interpretative. First, Heidegger's neologism *Abständigkeit* derives from the German *Abstand*, which means a gap or a distance between things. The term connotes the fact of our distance from one another and not our response to that fact. Second, though Heidegger talks about the care we have for our distance from one another, he introduces distantiality as a feature of Being-with-one-another *simpliciter*, not as a feature of a particular kind of Being-with-one-another, as Macquarrie and Robinson's translation misleadingly suggests.¹³ Third, phenomenologically speaking, Dasein is constantly aware of its difference from others, but it is not constantly making efforts to minimize this distance. We may unthinkingly and for the most part coordinate ourselves with others, but we also sometimes foster and accentuate our differences from others in some respects. We may describe people who do so habitually as eccentrics, but we do not thereby deny their personhood. Our tendency to minimize our distance from others is an existentiell modification of a more pervasive and existential distantiality: only (a), and not (b), is an existentielle. Fourth, reading distantiality as just an awareness of distance from others makes for a cleaner reading of some of the interpretative issues surrounding *das Man*. On this reading, *das Man* and distantiality are a contrasting pair, and the contrast diminishes some of the worries that might arise from treating *das Man* as an existentielle.

Though *das Man* steals the limelight in the secondary literature, it is but one of two existentials that Heidegger introduces in §27 of *Being and Time*, the other being distantiality. I maintain that they are best understood as complements to one another, together revealing Dasein as suspended between two poles, never entirely itself alone and yet never entirely given over to socially constituted norms. On one hand, Dasein is inescapably constituted by the norms of *das Man*, but on the other hand, Dasein is equally inescapably unique: an ineradicable distance separates Dasein from others. Despite Heidegger's dire talk of being lost in *das Man*, we can no more erase all traces of individuality than we can live entirely free of norms.

To return to our football analogy, we saw that play is constrained and constituted by rules while also leaving the players with sufficient freedom that "following the rules" gives only the barest indication of what one is to do. Given our taxonomy of the various kinds of norms that constitute *das Man*, we can see the working of *das Man* in more than simply the constitutive rules of the game. Beyond the rulebook, football consists of many informal maxims and principles with greater and lesser degrees of importance: one ought to spread one's players out across the pitch, one ought to use the flanks to move the ball upfield, one ought to create triangles for passing, and so on. These maxims and principles are necessarily general: they are only worth enunciating because they apply relatively often. Every game, however, is unique, and players are inevitably forced, in the particularity of their situations, to take action in ways that are not dictated by norms of any kind. Call their actions

guided by rules or general principles their constitution by *das Man* and call the fact of their unique particularity their distantiality.

Lostness in *das Man* is not a matter of conforming with *das Man* in every particular, nor could it be, since *das Man* is not particular. The mode of existence Heidegger associates with lostness is not *das Man*—which is not itself a mode of existence—but the one-self. This is the inauthentic mode of being that suppresses its awareness of its distantiality from *das Man*, that minimizes its sense of how much room for individuality there is within the normative structure of *das Man*. Heidegger describes Dasein's absorption in *das Man* as an existentiale, which he calls Falling. We are inescapably absorbed in *das Man* to the extent that we belong to a world of publicly constituted norms. However, this existential Falling is distinct from the contingent flight from anxiety by which Dasein inauthentically embraces the norms of *das Man* as providing its most primordial way of relating to itself.¹⁴ Heidegger calls this one-self (*Man-selbst*), and not *das Man* itself, an existentiell modification of authentic Dasein.

Problems of consistency remain: in calling the one-self an existentiell modification of authentic Dasein, Heidegger still seems to promote authentic Dasein to the level of an existentiale, and the initial discussion of *das Man* still speaks of it in troublingly scathing terms, but this reading seems to be the least inconsistent of the available options. *Das Man* and distantiality are both existential and constitutive features of Dasein, while authentic Dasein and the one-self of inauthentic Dasein are both existentiell modes of this being, modes of relating to *das Man* and distantiality in different ways.

Besides *das Man*, the other term to which *Abständigkeit* stands in revealing contrast is its counterpart, *Ständigkeit*, or constancy. In Division I (the matter becomes more complicated in Division II, as we will see), Heidegger associates constancy with presence. Dasein for Heidegger is a radically incomplete project: unlike present-at-hand entities, which are always themselves, Dasein is always open to a future toward which it projects itself. This future is inescapably its own. Which future possibilities are open to Dasein is already determined by the world into which it is thrown, and how Dasein relates to these possibilities is largely constituted by *das Man*, but no two lives are identical. On one hand, Dasein cannot escape its constitution by *das Man*, but on the other hand, *das Man* is not so comprehensive as to dictate its every move. Thus Dasein is doubly distanced from any kind of constancy: neither is it a self-sufficient and unchanging entity, nor is it held constant in the thrall of *das Man*. This distance from constancy—this lack of *Ständigkeit*—is manifest in Dasein's distantiality—its *Abständigkeit*.

V. Authenticity and constancy

Before concluding, I will briefly address a potential objection to my reading of distantiality: in Division II of *Being and Time*, *Ständigkeit* occurs as a

positive feature of the constitution of authentic Dasein. The contrast between this *Ständigkeit* and distantiality would lend some plausibility to the standard reading of distantiality that I have been moving against: the suggestion that distantiality consists of a constant care to narrow the distance between one-self and others, and thus a tendency toward lostness in the one-self. Answering this objection requires taking a particular stand on the nature of Heideggerian authenticity.

We can read Heidegger's conception of authenticity in two contrasting ways. On one reading, authentic Dasein, in taking ownership of itself, achieves a kind of stability and unity in its selfhood that inauthentic Dasein fails to achieve in its dispersal in *das Man*.¹⁵ On the other reading, far from achieving stability or unity, authentic Dasein differs from inauthentic Dasein precisely in acknowledging and accepting its instability.¹⁶ I will argue for this second reading, but first I will say why the first reading might seem attractive.

First of all, Heidegger's term for authenticity, *Eigentlichkeit*, literally means something like "ownness", implying that authentic Dasein takes ownership of itself. Furthermore, as Carman (2003, p. 265) notes, following Charles Taylor and Isaiah Berlin, Heidegger's talk of authenticity falls within a tradition dating back to Rousseau and Herder and leading through Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Dilthey, and it would seem natural to assume Heidegger conforms to this tradition that reads authenticity as complete self-realization. On this reading, authentic Dasein differs from its inauthentic counterpart in seeing its life as a unified whole and taking responsibility for the completeness and coherence of its biographical narrative. Heidegger's language reinforces this contrast, describing inauthenticity as lostness from the self, as a "not I" (*BT*, p. 116/152) which supposedly contrasts with the unified self of authentic Da-sein.

Furthermore, and more important to the contrast I drew earlier between constancy (*Ständigkeit*) and distantiality (*Abständigkeit*), Heidegger invokes constancy in Division II, not in reference to the stability of present-at-hand entities, but to the resoluteness of authentic Dasein. Contrasting Dasein with present-at-hand entities, Heidegger claims Dasein's "'content' is not founded in the substantiality of a substance, but in the 'self-constancy' of the existing self whose being was conceived as care" (*BT*, p. 303/351).¹⁷ He later takes this self-constancy as characteristic of authentic Dasein: "The constancy of the self, in the double sense of steadiness and steadfastness [*beständigen Standfestigkeit*], is the authentic counter-possibility to the non-Self-constancy which is characteristic of irresolute falling" (*BT*, p. 322/369).

Also worth noting is that, if we remove the hyphen from Heidegger's *Selbst-ständigkeit* we get the standard German word for independence. Understanding the self-constancy of authentic Dasein in terms of independence lends some credence to reading authenticity in terms of the stability that comes with independence from external demands or norms.

However, Heidegger's constancy is explicitly not "the substantiality of a substance": the constancy of authentic Dasein is not a matter of complete and autonomous subjecthood. Instead, Heidegger closely associates constancy with resoluteness, which he defines as "*the reticent self-projection upon one's ownmost Being-guilty, in which one is ready for anxiety*" (BT, pp. 296–97/343). The constancy of resoluteness, then, does not free Dasein from guilt or anxiety, but rather remains resolute in the face of guilt and remains ready for anxiety. In the previous section, I alluded to Falling, Dasein's existential absorption in *das Man*, and distinguished this existiale from Dasein's inauthentic flight from anxiety. Authentic Dasein is still absorbed in the public norms of *das Man*, but in anxiety, Dasein confronts the groundlessness of these norms. This groundlessness is a fundamental feature of Dasein's existence. Anxiety and guilt are not features of a stable and autonomous self, but are rather precisely ontological features of a Dasein that is never entirely itself. Dasein's existence, constituted as it is by shared social norms (*das Man*) but not exhaustively so (distantiality/*Abständigkeit*), is fundamentally unstable. Dasein is rooted neither entirely in *das Man* nor in itself alone, it is thrown into a world that it did not choose, and it faces the burden of choice as to how it will project itself into the future. Unlike present-at-hand entities, Dasein lacks the constancy (*Ständigkeit*) of simply being what it is. The term Heidegger gives for this instability is *Unheimlichkeit*, uncanniness or unsettlingness. Dasein is fundamentally not at home in the world. This uncanniness is disturbing (or indeed unsettling), and Dasein is tempted to cover it over. Uncanniness can be suppressed but it cannot be escaped: "Uncanniness is the basic kind of Being-in-the-world, even though in an everyday way it has been covered up" (BT, p. 277/322).

By contrast to the one-self, authentic Dasein acknowledges this uncanniness by being ready for the anxiety that it induces. Heidegger speaks of the ontological guilt of being "the (null) ground of a nullity" (BT, p. 285/331):¹⁸ Dasein is thrown into its world, and so the basis of its existence is not one of its choosing or design (it is a "null ground") and in projecting itself into the future, it must always negate the possibilities it does not choose (it is a "nullity").¹⁹ This double nullity is inescapable: Dasein cannot choose its past, and in leading just a single existence it cannot avoid negating other possibilities. Authenticity for Heidegger, then, is not a matter of escaping from guilt or the anxiety that brings us face-to-face with it. Rather, it is a matter of owning up to this guilt resolutely, of Dasein accepting its guilt and not taking that guilt as an excuse to renege on its responsibility to make its own choices. These choices are necessarily conditioned by *das Man*, but authentic Dasein does not thereby deny its responsibility for these choices. Despite being a null ground of a nullity, despite being constituted by norms that are not of its own choosing, authentic Dasein resolves to take ownership over its existence, becoming its own Dasein (the *eigen* of *Eigentlichkeit*) rather than deferring to the one-self.

In this respect, then, the self-constancy of authentic Dasein does not represent a fixity that stands in contrast with distantiality, but rather reflects precisely Dasein's resolute acceptance of its dual constitution by *das Man* and distantiality, never given over exclusively to one or the other.

VI. Conclusion

This discussion has sought to bring some clarity to Heidegger's concept of *das Man* with two different lines of argument. First, I have claimed that *das Man*'s way of being is not existence, and explored the structural differences between *das Man* and Dasein. And second, I have suggested that we understand *das Man* as standing in contrast with distantiality. The upshot of these two lines of argument is that we should understand *das Man* as a set of structural norms that lack the particularity, unity, and distinctness of Dasein's existence, and as a result cannot provide Dasein with more than general guidelines that are never fully responsive to any particular situation. Dasein's particularity is manifest in its distantiality, and while it is similar to others and constituted by its shared life with others, it cannot even in principle subsume itself entirely to this shared life.

Two principal aims motivate this argument: to offer a coherent interpretation of Heidegger's text, and to offer a charitable interpretation of Heidegger's text, that is, the one that I think gets things right. I accept that there is no fully consistent way of reading Heidegger on *das Man*, but I submit that my reading lessens the force of some of the disagreement in the secondary literature. If we take Heidegger at his word that *das Man* accounts for what *one* does, we find that *das Man* includes shades of both conformity and conformism. However, in treating *das Man* as an existentiale (again, taking Heidegger at his word in his most extensive discussion of the concept), we do not condemn Dasein to inauthentic conformism. If *das Man* is not a mode of existence, then its conformism is simply a structural feature of Dasein's Being-with-one-another, and not one that Dasein's existence can conform to in all its particulars.

If we recognize distantiality as an existentiale, and one that consists simply of our awareness of our distance from others and not also of our concern to close that distance, then setting it alongside *das Man* diminishes further the worry that treating *das Man* as an existentiale condemns us to conformism. The conformity of *das Man* is only half the story: Dasein is constituted by the norms it shares with others and which make its social existence possible, but it is equally constituted by its awareness of its distance from these norms and from others. Seeing *das Man* as only one pole of a dyad helps us appreciate the possibility of authenticity in the face of conformity. Dasein cannot free itself from its socially constituted norms—nor should it want to—but in its difference from others it can carve out its own distinctive way of living through its socially constituted situation.

As for my second aim—to offer a reading that is true not just to Heidegger but to the correct existential analysis of Dasein—I must allow what has come before to speak for itself.²⁰

Notes

1. References to *Being and Time* in this paper use the abbreviation *BT* followed by the original and then the English pagination.
2. This frequent Heideggerism is Macquarrie and Robinson's translation of *zunächst und zumeinst*. Stambaugh has it as "initially and for the most part". *Zunächst* can mean either "initially" or "proximally", depending on context. As it is used in *Being and Time*, both translations are appropriate: Heidegger emphasizes that we are ensconced in the world in an engaged manner *before* we can contemplate it in a disengaged manner, and we encounter the world in this way because the equipment and others in it are ontically *closest* to us (*das ontisch Nächste*) (*BT*, p. 43/69).
3. Taylor Carman (1994; 2003) describes Heidegger as a "social externalist".
4. I have altered Macquarrie and Robinson's translation, rendering *man* as "one" instead of "they".
5. I have modified Macquarrie and Robinson's translation, rendering *Man-selbst* as "one-self" instead of "they-self".
6. Carman (2003, pp. 35–43) provides an illuminating discussion of this point. However, Carman also claims that *das Man* shares Dasein's kind of being, whereas I am engaged in drawing out important disanalogies between Dasein's kind of being and *das Man*'s.
7. Carman (1994, pp. 219–22) argues something along these lines.
8. An excellent, and delightful, discussion of the nature of games and the role of rules in constituting them is to be found in Suits (2005).
9. The critique of the analytic/synthetic distinction in W. V. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" is pertinent to this point, but closer to Heidegger's own line of thought is Wittgenstein's: cf. Wittgenstein (1969, §§96–99), where he compares empirical propositions to water flowing in a more hardened "river-bed" of unshakeable propositions, but grants that "there is not a sharp division of the one from the other" (§97).
10. The *locus classicus* for discussions of such coordination games is Lewis (1969).
11. Pierre Keller and David Weberman (1998) provide a cogent critique of the notion that *das Man*, or any other existentials, can be the source of intelligibility.
12. Carman translates this term as "standoffishness", which I think is inappropriate. In his translation of *The History of the Concept of Time*, Theodore Kisiel renders it felicitously as "apartness". I will stay with "distantiality" for the ease of familiarity that this term will have with readers of *Being and Time*, and because, unlike "the 'They'", I do not think the term is misleading.
13. Macquarrie and Robinson render the last sentence from the block quote above as follows: "If we may express this existentially, such Being-with-one-another has the character of distantiality". In the original German, Heidegger writes: "Existenzial ausgedrückt, es hat den Charakter der Abständigkeit", where the "es" denotes the "Das Miteinandersein" from the previous sentence. That is, it is Being-with-one-another, and not just the particular kind of Being-with-one-another that is disturbed by its care for its distance from others, that has the character of distantiality. Stambaugh's translation is more accurate on this point.
14. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing the importance of this distinction to my argument.
15. The two most prominent defenders of this reading are Charles Taylor and Charles Guignon. Cf. Taylor (1985; 1995) and Guignon (2000; 2006).
16. The most prominent defender of this reading is Taylor Carman. Cf. Carman (2003, ch. 6; 2005).

17. I use Stambaugh's translation here, which is consistent in rendering *Ständigkeit* as "constancy".
18. I follow Stambaugh's translation here, as it is more faithful to the original.
19. Heidegger's word for this projection is *Entwurf* which is also the German word for "draft". In projecting itself into the future, Dasein is constantly drafting and re-drafting itself, never coming to completeness.
20. I am grateful to Stephen Mulhall, Aaron Wendland, Stephen Reynolds, Joseph Shear, and three anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and discussion.

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