

## Heidegger on Being and the World

Wednesdays at 1pm in 1008 B, Cathedral of Learning

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The course website, with a week-by-week schedule and all the readings, is available at:

<https://spaceofreasons.netlify.app/courses/heidegger-2026/>

Or by drilling down under the “Courses” tab from my Pitt website:

<https://sites.pitt.edu/~rbrandom/>

Week 5: September 23, 2026

### Mitsein, das Man, and the Social Character of Normativity

#### Plan:

- 1) Recap of Week 4: Using the flexibility of natural language in a regimented ontological vocabulary to overcome Wittgenstein’s principled skepticism.
- 2) A bifurcation of ontological vocabularies. Kinds of Being and kinds of modality.
- 3) Mitsein—§26.
- 4) Wittgenstein, Wright, and Haugeland on *axiological* norms implicit in social practices.
- 5) Das Man, and average, everyday Dasein—§27.
- 6) Dasein’s distinctive *deontic* kind of normativity: *commitment*.  
Heideggerian *authenticity* and Kantian *autonomy*.  
Instituting normative statuses by normative attitudes, on the model of Kantian autonomy, and on the Hegelian model of reciprocal recognition.

#### Proposal:

The three kinds of Being distinguished in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology can be identified and distinguished by the kinds of *modality* that articulate them:

*Vorhandensein* is articulated by *alethic* modal relations of subjunctive dependence, necessity, and possibility.

*Zuhandensein* is articulated by *axiological* normative modal statuses of propriety, appropriateness, and correctness.

*Dasein*’s kind of Being is articulated by *deontic* normative modal statuses of *commitment*, responsibility, and authority.

#### Historical Background:

The Southwest, Baden, or Freiburg Neokantians, Windelband and (Heidegger’s Doktorvater) Rickert were *axiologists*: ‘value-theorists’, focused on *Geltung* (value).

The Marburg neokantians, Cohen and Natorp, were *deontologists*, focusing on *Sollen* (ought).

Heidegger synthesized and reconciled their viewpoints by distinguishing the kinds of Being to which those kinds of assessments apply.

Passages:

But the 'indicating' of the sign and the 'hammering' of the hammer are not **properties** of entities. Indeed, they are not properties at all, if the ontological structure designated by the term 'property' is that of some definite character which it is possible for Things to possess [einer möglichen Bestimmtheit von Dingen]. Anything ready-to-hand is, at the worst, **appropriate** for some purposes and inappropriate for others; and **its 'properties' [Eigenschaften] are, as it were, still bound up in these ways in which it is appropriate [geeignet] or inappropriate**, just as presence-at-hand, as a possible kind of Being for something ready-to-hand, is bound up in readiness-to-hand. [§18 114-15]

If one is oriented primarily by Thinghood, these latter qualities must be taken as **non-quantifiable value-predicates** by which what is in the first instance just a material Thing, gets **stamped as something good**. But with this stratification, we come to those entities which we have characterized ontologically as equipment ready-to-hand. The Cartesian analysis of the 'world' would thus enable us for the first time to build up securely the structure of what is proximally ready-to-hand; all it takes is to round out the Thing of Nature until it becomes a full-fledged Thing of use, and this is easily done. [§21 132]

**Adding on value-predicates cannot tell us anything at all new about the Being of goods, but would merely presuppose again that goods have pure presence-at-hand as their kind of Being. Values would then be determinate characteristics** which a Thing possesses, and they would be **present-at-hand**. They would have their sole ultimate ontological source in our previously laying down the actuality of Things as the fundamental stratum. [§21 132]

In our previous analysis, the range of what is encountered within-the-world was, in the first instance, narrowed down to equipment ready-to-hand or Nature present-at-hand, and thus to entities with a character other than that of Dasein. This restriction was necessary not only for the purpose of simplifying our explication but above all because the kind of Being which belongs to the Dasein of Others, as we encounter it within-the-world, differs from readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand. Thus Dasein's world frees entities which not only are quite distinct from equipment and Things, but which also—in accordance with their kind of Being as Dasein, themselves are 'in' the world in which they are at the same time encountered within-the-world, and are 'in' it by way of Being-in-the-world. These entities are neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand; on the contrary, they are *like* the very Dasein which frees them, in that *they are there too, and there with it*. So if one should want to identify the world in general with entities within-the-world, one would have to say that Dasein too is 'world'. [§26 154]

**By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me**—those over against whom the "I" stands out. **They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too.** [§26 154]

We use the term "Dasein-with" to designate that Being for which the others who are [die seienden Anderen] are freed within-the-world. This Dasein-with of the Others is disclosed within-the-world for **a Dasein**, and so too for those **who are Daseins with us** [die Mitdaseienden], only because **Dasein in itself is essentially Being-with**. The phenomenological assertion that "Dasein is essentially Being-with" has an existential-ontological meaning. It does not seek to establish ontically that factually I am not present-at-hand alone, and that Others of my kind occur. [§26 154]

In Dasein's Being, the context of references or assignments which significance implies is tied up with Dasein's ownmost Being—a Being which essentially can have no involvement [Bewandtnis, equipmental role], but which is rather that Being for the sake of which Dasein itself is as it is.

According to the analysis which we have now completed, **Being with Others belongs to the Being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being. Thus as Being-with, Dasein 'is' essentially for the sake of Others.** [§26 160]

And, significance, as worldhood, is tied up with the existential "for-the-sake-of-which". Since the worldhood of that world in which every Dasein essentially is already, is thus constituted, it accordingly lets us encounter what is environmentally ready-to-hand as something with which we are circumspectively concerned, and it does so in such a way that together with it we encounter the Dasein-with of Others. The structure of the world's worldhood is such that **Others** are not proximally present-at-hand as free-floating subjects along with other Things, but **show themselves in the world** in their special environmental Being, and do so **in terms of what is ready-to-hand in that world.** [§26 160]

Wittgenstein, from discussion of "private language argument":

Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign 'S' and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation.—I will remark first of all that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated.—But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition.—How? Can I point to the sensation?—Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation—and so, as it were, point to it inwardly.—But what is this ceremony for? for that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign.—Well, that is done precisely through the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress upon myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation.—But 'I

impress it upon myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *rightly* in the future. **But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness.**

**One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'. [PI §258]**

BB: We should distinguish normative *statuses* (*being* right, appropriate, correct) from normative *attitudes* (*taking* some performance to be right, appropriate, correct).

Hence 'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same as obeying it. [PI §202]

Grasping a rule involves agreement not in opinions, but in a form of life (*Lebensform*). [PI §240]

'The Others' whom one thus designates in order to cover up the fact of one's belonging to them essentially oneself, are those who proximally and for the most part 'are there' in everyday Being-with-one-another. **The "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself [man selbst], not some people [einige] , and not the sum of them all.**

**The 'who' is the neuter, the "they" [das Man]. [§27 164]**

Yet because the "they" presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability. The "they" can, as it were, manage to have 'them' constantly invoking it. It can be answerable for everything most easily, because it is not someone who needs to vouch for anything. **It 'was' always the "they" who did it, and yet it can be said that it has been 'no one'.** In Dasein's everydayness the agency through which most things come about is one of which we must say that **"it was no one"**. [§27 165]

Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. **The "they", which supplies the answer to the question of the "who" of everyday Dasein, is the "nobody" to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-other [Untereinandersein].**

In these characters of Being which we have exhibited—everyday Being-among-one-another, distantiality, averageness, levelling down, publicness, the disburdening of one's Being, and accommodation—lies that 'constancy' of Dasein which is closest to us. This "constancy" pertains not to the enduring Being-present-at-hand of something, but rather to Dasein's kind of Being as Being-with. [§27 166]

Of course, the "they" is as little present-at-hand as Dasein itself...

Furthermore, **the "they" is not something like a 'universal subject' which a plurality of subjects have hovering above them...**

The "they" is not the genus to which the individual Dasein belongs, nor can we come across it in such entities as an abiding characteristic. [§27 166]

The "they" is an existentiale; and as a primordial phenomenon, it belongs to Dasein's positive constitution. [§27 167]

**The Self of everyday Dasein is the they-self, which we distinguish from the authentic Self—**that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way [eigens ergriffenen] . As they-self, the particular Dasein has been dispersed into the "they", and must first find itself...

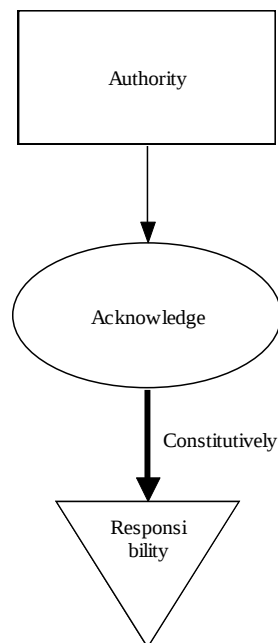
If Dasein is familiar with itself as they-self, this means at the same time that **the "they" itself prescribes that way of interpreting the world and Being-in-the-world which lies closest.**

Dasein is for the sake of the "they" in an everyday manner, and **the "they" itself Articulates the referential context of significance...**

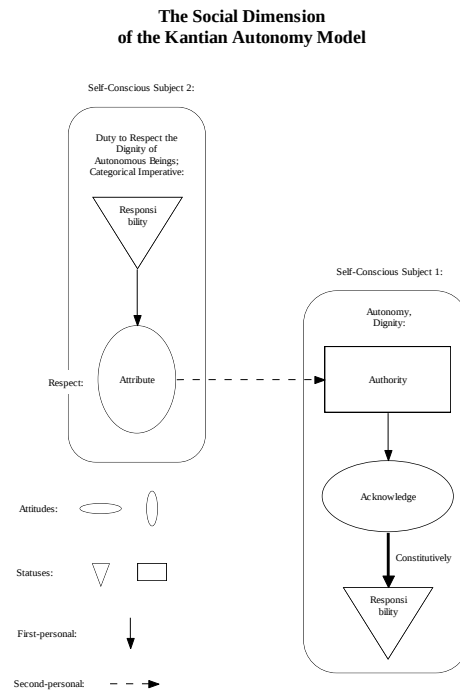
**Proximally Dasein is "they", and for the most part it remains so.** [§27 167]

**In the projection of the for-the-sake-of as such, Dasein gives itself the primordial commitment [Bindung]. Freedom makes Dasein obligated [verbindlich] to itself in the ground of its essence, or more exactly, gives itself the possibility of commitment.** (GA 26, p. 247/192—*The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, p. 192). Transcendental subjectivity, “the entity which is intentional,” is **not consciousness but commitment** . [Crowell p. 29]

### **Autonomy: The Basic Kantian Normative Status**



A *commitment* is a responsibility undertaken autonomously, that is, by exercising one's *authority* to *make* oneself responsible by *taking* oneself to be responsible—*undertaking* the responsibility by *acknowledging* it.



**Robust General Recognition  
is Attributing the Authority  
to Attribute Authority  
(and Responsibility)**

