

# RULE FOLLOWING, ANXIETY, AND AUTHENTICITY

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## Abstract

This paper argues that the problematic of rule following in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and Heidegger's analysis of anxiety in *Being and Time* have analogous structures. Working through these analogies helps our interpretation of both of these authors. Contrasting sceptical and anti-sceptical readings of Wittgenstein helps us to resolve an interpretive puzzle about what an authentic response to anxiety looks like for Heidegger. And considering the importance of anxiety to Heidegger's conception of authenticity allows us to locate in Wittgenstein's later philosophy a covert appeal to something resembling Heideggerian authenticity.

## I. Introduction

Although they worked in different philosophical traditions, and seemed mostly ignorant of one another's work,<sup>1</sup> the Heidegger of *Being and Time* and the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* share a surprising amount in common. The body of scholarship in Anglophone philosophy exploring these

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware of five instances in which Wittgenstein or Heidegger refers to the other. For Wittgenstein on Heidegger, see Waismann (1979), p. 68–69, Wittgenstein and Waismann (2003), p. 69–77, and Wittgenstein and Rhees (2015), p. 48. For Heidegger on Wittgenstein, see Heidegger and Fink (1993), p. 17 and Heidegger (2003), p. 35.

points of contact is still small but growing.<sup>2</sup> This sort of comparative work finds particular purchase among scholars of Heidegger who bring tools from the analytic tradition to their treatment of Heidegger.<sup>3</sup> The primary focus of this comparative work concerns the priority both authors give to practically engaged activity over detached, theoretical reflection and the holistic approach they take in these investigations. Both are read as powerful anti-Cartesian voices that break down traditional dichotomies between subject and object, self and world.

The aspects of Heidegger's work most frequently evoked in these comparisons are prominent in Division I of *Being and Time*, where he conducts an analysis of what he calls the 'average everyday' existence of Dasein, 'Dasein' being his term of art for entities with the distinctive mode of being of human beings. Less remarked on in the literature is the possibility of finding moments in Wittgenstein's later philosophy that share similarities with the existential themes of death, conscience, and authenticity that are particularly prominent in the first two chapters of Division II.<sup>4</sup> This lacuna is curious when one considers that these existential themes arise naturally from Heidegger's

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<sup>2</sup> Work in the last few decades that compares Wittgenstein and Heidegger includes Guignon (1990), Mulhall (1990, 1994, 2001), Rorty (1993), Brandom (1994), Taylor (1995), Glendinning (1998), Rudd (2003), Braver (2012), Kuusela (2018), Egan (2019) and the essays collected in Egan, Reynolds, and Wendland (2013). Rorty (1979) can be seen as anticipating much of this later comparative work, even if its influence is somewhat faint.

<sup>3</sup> Hubert Dreyfus is the guiding spirit here. Other notable Heidegger scholars to invoke Wittgenstein in their engagements with Heidegger are Taylor Carman, Charles Guignon, Denis McManus, and Stephen Mulhall. See, e.g., Guignon (1983), Dreyfus (1991), Carman (2003), Mulhall (2005), and McManus (2012), although we find references to Wittgenstein across much of their work on Heidegger.

<sup>4</sup> An important exception in this regard is Mulhall, whose reading of Wittgenstein is influenced by Cavell's. Cavell finds Wittgenstein's later philosophy to be deeply engaged with problems of modernity and the nature of the self. Cavell (1988) touches on points of comparison between Wittgenstein and Heidegger but Mulhall takes the engagement much further. McManus (2015b) also uses Wittgenstein as a lens to focus on more existential aspects of Heidegger's philosophy.

account of Dasein's practical comportment in the world, his treatment of anxiety serving as a bridge between the two. If strong parallels hold between Wittgenstein's later philosophy and many of the main themes in Division I of *Being and Time*, it makes sense to ask whether Heidegger's treatment of anxiety and authenticity might find parallels in Wittgenstein's later philosophy as well.

Addressing this question becomes all the more pressing when we consider that the existential themes of Division II complicate and deepen the account of Dasein's everyday comportment in Division I. Heidegger characterizes this 'average everyday' existence as either inauthentic or undifferentiated in its character, and only develops his account of authentic existence in any detail in Division II. If Wittgenstein is sensitive only to our average everyday comportment, a Heideggerian could reasonably reproach Wittgenstein for failing to register the possibility of authentic existence.

We don't find any overt appeal to authenticity in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, so finding one there would not be a trivial achievement and doing so would open up an important dimension to Wittgenstein's later philosophy. *Philosophical Investigations* doesn't have even the terse remarks on death, God, and the meaning of life that we find in the *Tractatus*, and yet it is clear that Wittgenstein took his work to have a broader cultural, ethical, or spiritual significance than it is accorded in the bulk of the secondary literature on his work.<sup>5</sup>

This paper offers an interpretive route for uncovering the theme of authenticity in Wittgenstein's later philosophy by developing important parallels in Wittgenstein's treatment of rule following and Heidegger's treatment of anxiety. Both of these treatments raise interpretive problems of their own, so that tracing the parallels requires taking strong stands regarding interpretive issues in the secondary literature. One upside of this exercise is

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<sup>5</sup> Consider, for instance, the Foreword to *Philosophical Remarks*, where Wittgenstein characterizes the spirit of his work as 'different from the one which informs the vast stream of European and American civilization in which all of us stand' and expresses the wish to say 'This book is written to the glory of God', but feels that statement would be misunderstood in the context of such a civilization.

that noting the congruent structure of Heidegger's treatment of anxiety and Wittgenstein's treatment of rule following helps to navigate some of these interpretive issues.

The structure of my argument is as follows. In sections 2 and 3, I give fairly exegetically neutral accounts of the two moments I want to focus on: Heidegger's analysis of anxiety and Wittgenstein's rule following problematic, most notably his parable of the wayward pupil at *PI* §185. Section 4 presents Kripke's (1982) controversial sceptical reading of Wittgenstein on rules and spells out an analogous interpretation of Heidegger on anxiety. Section 5 articulates an anti-sceptical alternative to Kripke's reading and section 6 shows how an analogous reading of anxiety helps us to resolve some interpretive difficulties in Heidegger. That section concludes by showing how these interpretive parallels help us find an appeal to authenticity in Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

## **2. Worldliness and Anxiety in *Being and Time***

Throughout Division I of *Being and Time*, Heidegger contrasts two ways of thinking about the world, a naturalistic and a phenomenological one, and advocates the priority of his phenomenological approach over the naturalistic one. A naturalistic account characterizes the world as furnished with self-standing objects in Cartesian space whose essence can be characterized piecemeal and atomistically. On this account, the primary mode of encounter between subject and object is epistemic: the knowing subject represents to itself objects that it perceives by means of the senses. This account finds its paradigmatic expression in the natural sciences, but Heidegger argues that its central assumptions have deep roots in the philosophical tradition and also find expression in many of our pre-theoretical pronouncements about the world.

The problem with this naturalistic account, according to Heidegger, is that it presupposes the basic significance of the world: the fact that we can make sense of objects as the objects that they are in the first place. His phenomenological account takes as its starting point not the so-called objective world of the natural sciences but rather the way that the world is accessible to

Dasein as significant. On this account, the world consists not primarily of self-standing objects but of what Heidegger calls ready-to-hand (*zubanden*) equipment (*Zeug*) that is essentially situated within a holistic network of involvements (*Bewandtnis*). Central to this account is the claim that we are not primarily detached knowing subjects but are rather, '*proximally and for the most part*' (*BT* 16/37),<sup>6</sup> pragmatically engaged with equipment: Dasein is the nerve centre, as it were, of the holistic network of involvements. Equipment has the significance that it has because of Dasein's concern (*Besorge*) for it.

Heidegger's phenomenological account of a holistically integrated world has a teleological structure. Dasein pursues ends-oriented projects and equipment has its ready-to-hand character in virtue of the way it contributes to these projects. My laptop shows up to me *as* a laptop because it serves as a tool in the pursuit of projects that matter to me. These projects also give equipment its holistic character by relating different tools to one another: the laptop sits on a table that makes it easy to type on, it sits under a roof that protects it from the elements, it's constructed from metals and plastics that were extracted, processed, and manufactured in various part of the world, its battery is charged through a plug that connects it to the power grid, it's connected by the Internet to other computers and other people who might take an interest in my work, and so on. Accounting for the way that the laptop has a place in my projects – and hence for the way that it shows up to me *as* a laptop – brings with it the rest of the world.

Projects have a nested structure, where the pursuit of larger projects consists of a series of smaller projects. Typing on a laptop might serve the immediate project of sending an e-mail, while sending the e-mail might serve the further project of arranging a meeting, which might in turn serve the further project of planning a budget for the coming fiscal year, and so on. If we follow

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<sup>6</sup> In this paper I use the following abbreviations for citations of works by Heidegger and Wittgenstein: *BT* for *Being and Time* followed by the page number in the original German and then in the Macquarrie and Robinson translation, and *CV* for *Culture and Value*, *OC* for *On Certainty*, *PI* for *Philosophical Investigations*, *PPF* for *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment*, and *Z* for *Zettel*, in these last three cases using section numbers rather than page numbers.

this chain of projects up far enough, we come to what Heidegger calls a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ (*Worum-willen*; BT 84/116): these projects contribute to realizing a distinct possibility of Dasein’s being.

Dasein’s world of equipment involved in nested projects has a rational structure. Having a particular project constitutes a *reason* for acting toward the realization of that project. If I want to build a cabin in the woods, I have a reason to purchase wood and nails and start sawing and hammering. Those activities – the purchasing, sawing, and hammering – make sense in light of the larger project to which they contribute. Higher-order projects consequently give reasons for pursuing lower-order projects: the higher-order project of planning a budget for the coming fiscal year is a reason for undertaking the lower-order project of arranging a meeting of the relevant people. Ultimately, then, the rational structure of these projects falls back on Dasein’s for-the-sake-of-which.

Anxiety brings about a collapse of the nested structure of ends-oriented projects by driving Dasein’s attention to the top of this nested structure. Each project I pursue is given significance by the higher-order project that it contributes to. But what about the highest-order project, the for-the-sake-of-which? The problem here lies not with the significance of some particular possibility but with the logical structure of these nested projects. If any given project has significance by appeal to some higher-order project, we face either an infinite regress of projects nested within projects nested within projects, or we arrive at a project whose significance is not grounded in its contribution to some higher-order project. But if there is no reason for pursuing *that* project, then there is no reason for pursuing any of the lower-order projects that contribute to it. Heideggerian anxiety arises from the recognition of the ultimate groundlessness of all our activities.

The consequences of anxiety are profound. If equipment acquires its equipmental character by being involved in projects, then the collapse of our projects in anxiety also means the collapse of the significance of equipment. In anxiety, things no longer show up as ready-to-hand equipment but rather as present-at-hand (*vorhanden*) ‘in just *such* a way that it does *not* have *any*

involvement *whatsoever*, but can show itself in an empty mercilessness' (*BT* 343/393; see also *BT* 187/231). In making questionable the significance of equipment, anxiety makes questionable the very significance of Dasein's world. Anxiety does not simply call into question this or that project. In anxiety, it ceases to be clear how *any* project could *possibly* be worth pursuing.

### 3. Rule Following and Scepticism in *Philosophical Investigations*

Wittgenstein's treatment of rule following exhibits a similar structure to Heidegger's treatment of anxiety. Just as we comport ourselves with equipment unreflectively for the most part, we also follow rules unreflectively: in order to follow a signpost, obey a command, perform an arithmetical calculation, I need to act, not to reflect on the grounds for my action. But Wittgenstein's investigations question the grounding of our rule following practices. The canonical confrontation is the parable of the wayward pupil that Wittgenstein rehearses at *PI* §185, in which he imagines a teacher instructing a pupil in various series of natural numbers:

Then we get the pupil to continue one series (say '+ 2') beyond 1000 – and he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012.

We say to him, 'Look what you're doing!' – He doesn't understand. We say, 'You should have added *two*: look how you began the series!' – He answers, 'Yes, isn't it right? I thought that was how I *had* to do it'. — Or suppose he pointed to the series and said, 'But I did go on in the same way'. – It would now be no use to say, 'But can't you see. . . ?' – and go over the old explanations and examples for him again. (*PI* §185)

To understand the force of Wittgenstein's example here, it's important to note that everything in the training that the pupil was given is compatible with him going on in this way. Wittgenstein imagines the teacher accounting for the pupil's departure from the expected procedure by saying, '[T]his person finds it natural, once given our explanations, to understand our order as we would

understand the order “Add 2 up to 1000, 4 up to 2000, 6 up to 3000, and so on” (*PI* §185). And if, in our training, we had made *that* point clear, there are infinitely many other ways in which the pupil might have diverged from us. No training can exhaustively dictate how we should extend a practice in every case.

The parable of the wayward pupil presents the worry that there is *no good reason* for following the rule ‘Add 2’ in the way that we do. Wittgenstein deliberately chooses a rule that is simple and seemingly obvious: if *any* rule is going to be straightforward and unambiguous, this one should be. Just as anxiety confronts Dasein with the paralyzing thought that our highest order project – that project whose significance gives significance to all the lower-order projects it comprehends – is groundless, Wittgenstein’s parable of the wayward pupil confronts us with the paralyzing thought that our most basic rule-following practices – the ones that secure the regularity of all our other practices – are groundless. And Wittgenstein’s investigation of this puzzle produces a similar experience in his interlocutor of a loss of significance. The ‘paradox’ that Wittgenstein has arrived at by *PI* §201 finds expression as follows: ‘no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule’. Rules, it seems, can’t serve as any kind of guide to our actions.

Although Wittgenstein’s rule following considerations lack the explicit existential import of Heidegger’s analysis of anxiety, the scope is similar. Both of them are concerned with activities for which there are success conditions and both raise worries about the very possibility of such activities. Heidegger’s category of the ready-to-hand comprises entities for which there are norms for correct and incorrect use: there are right and wrong, standard and non-standard, ways of holding a fork and knife, using a smartphone, or playing a musical instrument. Wittgenstein’s treatment of rule following focuses primarily on the use of words and mathematical operations but the former focus indicates that Wittgenstein takes these considerations to apply as broadly as do Heidegger’s. For instance, at *PI* §80, he entertains the idea of a chair that disappears and reappears unexpectedly, asking whether we should call this mysterious entity a chair. At stake here is not just the meaning of a



word but the intelligibility of an entity: a chair is a chair because we have standards for what it means to use a chair, to sit in it, and so on, and Wittgenstein's imagined scenario presents us with an entity that disrupts the standards for its normal use.

In effect, both Wittgenstein and Heidegger call into question our very status as intentional agents. If intentional action means having reasons for acting, and if having reasons for acting means acting according to standards to which our actions may or may not conform, then our capacity for intentional action rests on the setting of those standards. Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger push on the question of how those standards are set in such a way that the setting of those standards seems groundless. And the apprehension of groundlessness has a cascading effect: if there is no good reason for the standards being set in the way that they are, there is also no good reason for adhering to the standards.

#### **4. Kripkenstein and Kripkendegger**

One way of reading Wittgenstein, famously advocated by Kripke (1982), has him embracing the sceptical upshot of this reasoning. Wittgenstein presents us with a dilemma between Platonism and scepticism, on Kripke's reading, and grasps the sceptical horn of the dilemma. To the question of what justifies us in saying that, say, the correct continuation of the rule 'Add 2' beyond 1000 is 1002, 1004, and so on, Kripke's Wittgenstein endorses the sceptic's answer: nothing. The scepticism at work here cuts deep. At issue, Kripke insists, is not merely the epistemological question of how I might *know* what someone – or even I myself – means by the word 'plus'. At stake, rather, is the very question of whether there is any fact at all regarding the meaning of the word 'plus' that could be known, even by an ideal knower. 'There can be no fact as to what I mean by "plus", or any other word at any time' (Kripke 1982, p. 21), Kripke concludes.

Kripke's Wittgenstein provides what he calls, following Hume, a 'sceptical solution' to the sceptical problem as presented. That is, rather than arguing that the sceptical conclusion – in this case, that there are no facts with

regard to meaning – is unwarranted, a sceptical solution ‘begins on the contrary by conceding that the sceptic’s negative assertions are unanswerable’, but that ‘our ordinary practice or belief is justified because – contrary appearances notwithstanding – it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable’ (Kripke 1982, p. 66). The sceptical solution that Kripke provides to this Wittgensteinian puzzle about meaning is to jettison the idea of truth conditions in favor of assertion or justification conditions, which are licensed by the collective behavior of a community. There may be no fact about the ‘correct’ continuation of a rule, but there are facts about how a community of language users proceeds. On Kripke’s reading of Wittgenstein, our behaviour is licensed not by its accord with a standard of correctness in the rule itself, or in the mind of the rule-follower, but by its accord with the behaviour of our fellows.

Three features of this reading warrant particular attention. The first is the way that Kripke frames the problem: as a dilemma between Platonism and scepticism. The second is that Kripke reads Wittgenstein as seizing the sceptical horn of the dilemma. And the third is the nature of the ‘sceptical solution’ that Kripke sees Wittgenstein endorsing: that the ground for our talk of justification and correctness is the brute fact of agreement between people.

Kripke’s reading of Wittgenstein is idiosyncratic enough that it has come to be dubbed ‘Kripkenstein’. Consider how a parallel reading of Heidegger might run – a Kripkendegger, if you will. The first feature of Kripkendegger’s reading presents anxiety as a dilemma: either our projects have some external and objective source of grounding or they’re ultimately ungrounded. Second, Kripkendegger accepts that anxiety reveals a profound and important truth: there really is no good reason for pursuing the projects we pursue. And third, Kripkendegger assures us that this groundlessness is not the crisis it might appear to be when we are in the grip of anxiety. On this reading, the intelligibility of our projects amounts to no more – but no less – than the fact that they cohere with the projects of others.

Although some find Kripkenstein to be a plausible *Doppelgänger* for Wittgenstein, none would take Kripkendegger to represent Heidegger’s own

position. The third feature of the reading gives expression to what Heidegger calls an inauthentic mode of existence. Heidegger first introduces the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity in characterizing Dasein as ‘in each case mine’ (*BT* 42/67): how Dasein interprets the meaning of its Being is its inalienable responsibility. Although Dasein cannot *not* interpret the meaning of its Being, that interpretation can be more or less true to Dasein’s nature as self-interpreting. Inauthentic Dasein turns to the self-interpretation that is nearest to hand, making sense of itself and the projects it pursues in terms of how ‘one’ typically does things. What is problematic about this mode of self-interpretation, according to Heidegger, is precisely that it disowns Dasein’s status as self-interpreting: it attempts to pawn off its responsibility for self-interpretation on others. The attempt can never be successful – in interpreting itself in accordance with common conventions, Dasein is nevertheless interpreting itself – but the attempt manifests a kind of self-blindness that Heidegger calls inauthentic.

To the extent that Kripkenegger avoids the worrying consequences of anxiety by embracing the harmonization of Dasein’s projects with those of others, he manifests what Heidegger calls a fleeing from anxiety into inauthenticity (*BT* 189/233–34). Although Heidegger disavows making any evaluative judgments in his analysis of Dasein,<sup>7</sup> he clearly takes fleeing to be an undesirable response to anxiety. The third of the three features of a Kripkeneggerian response to anxiety is clearly not a Heideggerian one.

The first two features of the Kripkeneggerian reading – that Heidegger presents us with a dilemma and that he embraces the ultimate groundlessness of our projects – has some currency, however. On this account, Heidegger endorses a brand of decisionism, according to which there are ultimately no good reasons for pursuing the projects that we pursue and at the bottom of our projects is an existential choice that is itself groundless. We have no ultimately rationally compelling grounds for pursuing the projects we pursue, according to the decisionist reading, but the free exercise of the individual will, free of

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<sup>7</sup> For such disavowals, see e.g. *BT* 43/68, 167/211, 175/220, and 222/265.

self-deception or bad faith, is all the grounding we need.

Burch (2010) identifies variants of this decisionist reading in a number of critics of Heidegger, notably Habermas, Levinas, Löwith, Ricoeur, and Tugendhat. The idea that anxiety reveals the necessity of groundless choice is hardly a straightforward caricature, however. Heidegger lends support to such a reading when he talks of anxiety revealing Dasein as '*Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself (BT 188/232) and of authentic Dasein '*choosing to make this choice*—deciding for a potentiality-for-Being, and making this decision from one's own Self (BT 268/313). Neutral-to-sympathetic readers such as Friedman (2000, p. 51–52) and Dreyfus and Rubin (1991, p. 316) also emphasize the element of groundless choice in Heidegger's account of authenticity. The trouble with this decisionism, as critics have pointed out, is that it makes Dasein seem not so much to be acting resolutely as to be acting at random. McManus (2015b, p. 166) calls this Heidegger's 'Motivation Problem': if Dasein has no good reasons for making the choices it makes, it's unclear what *does* motivate Dasein's choices, and how they can be meaningful at all.

This decisionist reading of Heidegger diverges from Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein as a Humean sceptic but finds a closer analogue in Dummett's conventionalist reading. Dummett reads Wittgenstein as saying that any expression of a rule admits of multiple interpretations, so each interpretation constitutes a decision to follow the rule in a particular way. At each step in a mathematical proof, then, 'we are free to choose to accept or reject the proof', and in accepting a proof, 'we are making a new decision, and not merely making explicit a decision we had already made implicitly' (Dummett 1959, p. 330). Dummett's reading shares many features with Kripke's – notably its emphasis on the groundlessness of our practices and the shift from truth conditions to assertion conditions – while also sharing with decisionist readings of Heidegger the thought that an unmotivated decision lies at the foundation of our practices. In other words, Dummett's Wittgenstein and the decisionist Heidegger reject the third feature of Kripke's Wittgenstein that I adduced

above – the idea that Wittgenstein rejects questions of justification by appealing to communal agreement – but accept the first two features.

I want to consider a third option: that we reject not just the third feature of Kripke's reading but also the construal of the problem that constitutes the first two features of that reading. Instead of taking the sceptical horn of a dilemma, Wittgenstein rejects the dilemma altogether. An analogous reading of Heidegger might also help us avoid the Motivation Problem adduced above. If Heidegger isn't committed to the conclusion that our projects are ultimately groundless, he's less vulnerable to the charge that his practical philosophy bottoms out in unmotivated choice. Conversely, finding these parallels with Heidegger can help us see how the theme of authenticity might be lurking in Wittgenstein's treatment of scepticism and rules. These two studies in comparison – looking at Heidegger in light of an anti-sceptical reading of Wittgenstein and looking at Wittgenstein in light of Heidegger's problematic of authenticity – are the subjects of the remainder of this paper.

## **5. An Anti-Sceptical Reading of Wittgenstein**

In the previous section, I adduced three principal features of a Kripkean reading of Wittgenstein on rules: (i) Wittgenstein presents us with a dilemma between Platonism and scepticism, (ii) Wittgenstein seizes the sceptical horn of the dilemma, and (iii) Wittgenstein offers a 'sceptical solution' to the dilemma in which our rule-following practices are licensed by communal agreement. Many readers who would not attribute (iii) to Wittgenstein are nevertheless prepared to accept (i) and (ii) – in the previous section, I presented Dummett as one example. Such a reading has Wittgenstein drawing a decisionist moral from his treatment of rules analogous to the decisionist reading some attribute to Heidegger: at the base of our practices is not some foundational ground or reason but a decision or action that is itself unmotivated. This reading can take as evidence in its favour Wittgenstein's remark at *PI* §186 that it would be 'more correct' to say that 'a new decision' is required at every point in following a rule as well as subsequent claims that, when all our reasons and explanations have been exhausted, when we 'have

reached bedrock' (*PI* §217), we 'act, without reasons' (*PI* §211) and are 'inclined to say: "This is simply what I do"' (*PI* §217).

The response I will consider identifies (i) as the root of the problem. The problem, on this alternative reading, is not the Platonist response to the sceptical dilemma but the sceptical dilemma itself. Kripke is right to think that Wittgenstein wants us to feel the force of this sceptical dilemma, but Wittgenstein thinks this force comes from the sceptic's misapprehension of the situation. What Wittgenstein calls for is not a way *through* the sceptical dilemma to a sceptical or decisionistic solution but rather a way of shifting our apprehension of the sceptical dilemma so that it loses its force.<sup>8</sup>

At its root, the question at issue is what Wittgenstein wants to do in confronting us with the parable of the wayward pupil. To both Kripke and Dummett, the purpose of the parable is to undermine a Platonist assumption about our mathematical practices, and our rule following practices more generally. But as Stone (2000, p. 105) points out, this construal gets Wittgenstein's dialectic backwards. Wittgenstein doesn't begin with a Platonist assumption that he disrupts with sceptical questioning. On the contrary, the Platonist voice enters the dialectic only in response to the prior sceptical challenge presented by the parable of the wayward pupil.

Instead of offering the parable of the wayward pupil as a sceptical challenge to Platonism, Wittgenstein uses the parable and the ensuing discussion to challenge precisely the assumptions that might incline us to draw a sceptical moral from the parable. The decisive assumption here is the idea that any particular instance of following a rule constitutes an interpretation of the rule. This idea arises from an underlying picture of what it means for something to be justified. That picture, and not Platonism about rules, is what Wittgenstein wants to undermine.

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<sup>8</sup> This approach finds varied expression in McDowell (1984), Goldfarb (1985), Diamond (1989), Cavell (1990), and Stone (2000), among others. A precursor to this line of argument is Part One of Cavell (1979), in which he associates scepticism not simply with the claim that we can't have knowledge in some domain but more broadly with any stance that takes the possibility of knowledge in that domain as a problem for philosophy.

The assumption about interpretation applied to the parable of the wayward pupil at *PI* §185 runs as follows: if I *could have* interpreted the rule ‘Add 2’ as instructing me to write 1004 after 1000, then I must be interpreting it as well when I write 1002 after 1000. If the expression of the rule on its own doesn’t determine how I go on, then what determines how I go on, according to this line of thinking, is the expression of the rule *and* an interpretation of the rule. But a method of interpreting a rule is itself a rule. Compare the rule ‘Add 2’ with the wayward pupil’s ascribed interpretation of the rule: ‘Add 2 up to 1000, 4 up to 2000, 6 up to 3000, and so on’. That interpretation is just another rule and is equally open to multiple interpretations. After all, it contains precisely the expression – ‘Add 2’ – that was previously seen to require further interpretation. But then we face an infinite regress of interpretations of interpretations of interpretations.

Wittgenstein raises this worry at *PI* §198 and at *PI* §201 rejects the idea that every instance of following a rule involves an interpretive act:

That there is a misunderstanding here is shown by the mere fact that in this chain of reasoning we place one interpretation behind another, as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another lying behind it. For what we thereby show is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call ‘following the rule’ and ‘going against it’.

That’s why there is an inclination to say: every action according to a rule is an interpretation. But one should speak of interpretation only when one expression of a rule is substituted for another. (*PI* §201)

Wittgenstein pushes back against the idea that interpretation is ubiquitous in rule-governed activities by inviting us to reflect on the circumstances in which we use the word ‘interpretation’. This is one manifestation of a broader strategy in *Philosophical Investigations* of situating expressions within the language-games in which they are used. We have a concept of interpretation because the word

'interpretation' has a use, and, as Wittgenstein famously remarks at *PI* §43, the way to explain the meaning of the word is to examine its use.

Consider one instance where we might rightly talk about interpreting a rule: a signpost points right at a junction where we have the option of both a soft right and a hard right. In that instance, it might be unclear which of the two routes the signpost indicates and we might reasonably speak of 'interpreting' the signpost as pointing to one or the other of those routes. But when a signpost points right at a junction with only a single rightward route, we don't *interpret* the signpost. If we attend to how we talk about interpretations of rules, we'll see that rules *sometimes* call for interpretation but certainly not *always*.

The idea that *all* instances of following a rule are acts of interpretation arises from an underlying picture of what it means to be justified in our way of going on. Both responses to the dilemma – Platonist and sceptical – suppose that we can ask in an absolute way whether or not a practice is justified. The Platonist affirms a basis upon which this practice is justified – in the case of mathematical realism, for instance, our mathematical practices are justified by their conformity to an objective mathematical reality – and the sceptic questions the very possibility of any such basis.

This picture feeds the seemingly decisionist moments in Wittgenstein's investigations. If we conceive the proper endpoint for the explanation or justification of a practice to be some sort of absolute endpoint – one that cannot be subject to further interpretation or explanation – then anything that falls short of that ideal seems not just incomplete but not properly an explanation or justification at all. If what seemed to us to be an adequate justification is revealed to be multiply interpretable, it seems on this picture that what we took to be a justification was in fact no justification at all, and only seemed so due to a lack of scrutiny. In that case, what seemed like a justified action is revealed as an unmotivated choice. And if it turns out, as the sceptic alleges, that *no* justification can satisfy the demands of this ideal of absolute justification, then none of our practices are justified and all of them ultimately come to rest on an unmotivated choice.



On the non-sceptical reading I am advocating, Wittgenstein presents the parable of the wayward pupil not to pose a sceptical challenge to mathematical Platonism but, quite the contrary, to dislodge the picture of justification that feeds the sceptical dilemma in the first place. The case of the wayward pupil highlights some of the normally taken for granted regularities and practices in connection with which our concept of justification has its use. If it frequently happened that pupils responded to instruction as the wayward pupil does, the concepts and practices associated with teaching, explaining, and justifying our mathematical procedures would be different. In contrast to the picture of ideal justification that feeds the sceptical dilemma, Wittgenstein wants us to see how sensitive our concepts and practices are to the contingencies of our lives.

Just before we encounter the first iteration of the wayward pupil scenario in *PI* §143, Wittgenstein makes this point explicitly:

It is only in normal cases that the use of a word is clearly laid out in advance for us; we know, are in no doubt, what we have to say in this or that case. The more abnormal the case, the more doubtful it becomes what we are to say. And if things were quite different from what they actually are . . . if rule became exception, and exception rule; or if both became phenomena of roughly equal frequency — our normal language-games would thereby lose their point. (*PI* §142)

He then presents another bizarre scenario: a world in which lumps of cheese spontaneously grow and shrink with no obvious cause: in such a world, '[t]he procedure of putting a lump of cheese on a balance and fixing the price by the turn of the scale would lose its point' (*PI* §142). We have a concept of weight because we have various practices of weighing things, but if those practices had no point, the concept of weight would have no use. Wittgenstein does not assert that we *could* no longer weigh things in these circumstances because that would imply that the concept of weight had some autonomous existence

independent of its use.<sup>9</sup> His point is rather that the concept of weight is tied to its use: we have a concept insofar as there is something we can *do* with that concept. Likewise, we have concepts of interpretation and justification because there is something that interpretation and justification can *do*.

Wittgenstein imagines bizarre scenarios like that of the wayward pupil or of the morphing cheese to help us see how our concepts are given to us along with the practices in which they find a use.<sup>10</sup> The sceptic is right to think that these scenarios destabilize any supposition that our concepts limn the world at joints whose existence has nothing to do with our own. But the moral is not that these concepts are then ungrounded or ultimately arbitrary. The moral is that these concepts have salience precisely because the practices in which we use them have salience.

The limited truth to a decisionist reading of Wittgenstein is that he thinks our practices go deeper than our reasons can reach. He cites approvingly the proclamation in Goethe's *Faust*: '*Im Anfang war die Tat* [In the beginning was the deed]' (*OC* §402). But he places deeds before reasons because giving and asking for reasons, providing justifications or interpretations, are themselves human practices. Wittgenstein only seems like a sceptic if we read his remarks about acting without reasons while also supposing that we can ask, absolutely and independently of any human practices, whether a given course of action is justified or reasonable. It makes no sense to expect we might *explain* the salience of our forms of life at a fundamental level, Wittgenstein wants us to see, because the very intelligibility of a practice like explanation presupposes that salience. We do not have at our disposal a concept of explanation – or of justification or of interpretation – that we can apply to our lives as a whole as it were from the outside – or 'from sideways on', as McDowell (1981, p. 150) puts it – such that the question the sceptic wants to ask makes sense. To pose

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<sup>9</sup> Wittgenstein contrasts the modal 'could' and 'would' at *Z* §351 and we see an echo of this thought at *PI* §497. Diamond (1989, p. 19–20) provides an illuminating discussion of the contrast between 'could' and 'would' in Wittgenstein's investigations.

<sup>10</sup> Cerbone (1994) provides an illuminating discussion of the varieties of Wittgenstein's imaginary scenarios. See also Egan (2011).

a question about the intelligibility of our forms of life involves using concepts whose very usability is given with the intelligibility of those forms of life. ‘What has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life*’ (PPF xi §345).

This response might feel unsatisfying. It provides assurance to those who already find themselves at home in their forms of life that they needn’t worry that they cannot provide any absolutely compelling justification for them. But it offers no comfort to those who find themselves dislodged from their ordinary practices and cannot find in them their usual salience. This experience of dislocation is at the heart of Heidegger’s treatment of anxiety. For Heidegger, anxiety is importantly disclosive: the experience of anxiety discloses ‘the world as world’ (BT 187/232) and can lead us to authentic self-understanding. This is one way in which I think reading Heidegger alongside Wittgenstein can deepen our reading of Wittgenstein. We miss an important aspect of Wittgenstein’s treatment of scepticism if we treat scepticism *simply* as a mistake. But we learn the wrong lesson from the sceptic’s worry if we take it at face value. Instead, I have argued, we should read the sceptical moment in Wittgenstein’s treatment of rule following as dislodging a certain picture of what it means for a practice to be justified.

## **6. An Anti-Sceptical Reading of Heidegger**

Let’s take stock of the dialectical space I have mapped out regarding the interpretation of Wittgenstein on rules. The parable of the wayward pupil presents a puzzle about how we might secure agreement about the correct way to follow a rule, but just what sort of a puzzle it presents is unclear. The moral that Kripke draws from the parable is that it presents a sceptical challenge to Platonism by confronting us with a dilemma and, by showing us that the Platonist horn is untenable, forcing us to take the sceptical horn of the dilemma. Kripke and Dummett offer different responses to this dilemma – Kripke opts for a ‘sceptical solution’ that emphasizes communal agreement whereas Dummett emphasizes unmotivated decision – but both agree that Wittgenstein frames his problematic in terms of a dilemma whose principal target is Platonism. This way of reading Wittgenstein, I argued, is motivated

by the supposition that we can ask about the justification for a given practice from a perspective that is detached from the life in which that practice has a point. And this supposition is precisely what the parable of the wayward pupil is meant to challenge. The parable reminds us of the sensitivity of our concepts to the lives in which they are used, such that different forms of life manifest different conceptual landscapes.

I can now return to Heidegger and consider how this sort of anti-sceptical response might help us address the Motivation Problem that, following McManus, I identified at the end of section 4. Although I rejected a fully ‘Kripkendergerian’ reading of the problematic of anxiety, according to which our projects have intelligibility insofar as they harmonize with those of others, I noted that one strand of Heidegger interpretation reads him as embracing a form of decisionism that bears important resemblances to Dummett’s reading of Wittgenstein. On this reading, Heidegger presents us with a dilemma about the ultimate grounding of our projects and embraces the sceptical view that no such ultimate grounding obtains, but that we must instead ground our projects in an unmotivated, identity-defining choice. One problem with this reading, I noted, is that it becomes difficult to see how existential choices can be distinguished from random and unmotivated impulses.

The response I offered in the previous section to Wittgenstein’s sceptical problematic offers a model for finding a non-decisionist response to anxiety in Heidegger. On the analogous reading of Heidegger, Heidegger wants us to be struck by the problem of anxiety, but he doesn’t want us to understand it in terms of a dilemma. That dilemma is founded on the supposition that a coherent question might be asked about the ultimate grounding of our projects, and the incoherence of such a question is precisely the positive lesson Heidegger thinks we can learn from anxiety.

Heidegger characterizes anxiety as a loss of significance: in anxiety, ‘the world has the character of completely lacking significance’ (*BT* 186/231). Significance is the ‘relational totality’ (*BT* 87/120) of the integrated and nested network of projects grounded in a for-the-sake-of-which. That is, the

significance of things in the world is the significance they have for us as parts of our ends-directed activities. From cars to trees to words to melodies, the entities I encounter in the world have significance to me because they are parts of a world in which I comport myself with understanding. Dasein's for-the-sake-of-which and the significance of the world are twinned, 'equiprimordial' manifestations of Dasein's understanding of Being (BT 143/182).

Because the significance of the world is so pervasive, we are liable to take it for granted. That we encounter cars *as* cars or trees *as* trees seems only natural – so much so that we might suppose that the carhood of cars or the treehood of trees are self-standing features of the world that would be there whether or not Dasein were there to apprehend them. The positive lesson of anxiety is that it exposes the emptiness of this supposition. Heidegger asserts that it is in the face of '*Being-in-the-world as such*' (BT 186/230) and '*the world as such*' (BT 187/231) that we feel anxiety, such that Dasein is confronted starkly with 'the world in its worldhood' (BT 187/231). What we discover in anxiety, when our projects lose their salience, is that the significance of the entities in the world was tied to the salience of the projects in which those entities have significance.

On a decisionist reading of Heidegger, the moral we should draw from the experience of anxiety is *that* the world fundamentally lacks significance. Just as a sceptical reading of Wittgenstein on rules takes at face value the claim that the rule cannot tell us how to go on, the analogous reading of Heidegger takes his claim about the world lacking significance at face value. That is, it reads Heidegger as saying that, fundamentally and as a matter of ontological fact, the world *does* lack significance, such that it is up to Dasein to impose that significance without any motivational basis for what significance it imposes.

But, as I understand Heidegger, this way of being struck by anxiety befalls us only if we expected that the world *could* be a source of significance that has nothing to do with Dasein's comportment in the world. And it is precisely this expectation that anxiety can disabuse us of. This expectation follows from the naturalistic conception of the world that I sketched at the beginning of §2, according to which I am just one more piece of furniture in

the world whose presence or absence has no essential bearing on the significance of anything else. From such a starting point, the draining away of significance in anxiety comes as a shock. But from a phenomenological standpoint, anxiety does not reveal *that* the world *lacks* significance, but reveals rather *how* the world *does* have significance, namely through our comportment in it. Anxiety does not reveal that entities simply lack significance *tout court*, according to Heidegger, but rather that ‘entities within-the-world are of so little importance *in themselves*’ (BT 187/231; emphasis mine). Anxiety undermines the supposition that the significance of entities is somehow internal to them, but this discovery is only paralyzing to those who hold that supposition.

In the previous section, I argued that the sceptical reading of Wittgenstein drew on a picture of our practices as either grounded in some sort of absolute justification or as ultimately unmotivated. A similar picture is at work in the reading of Heideggerian anxiety that I have been resisting. On that reading, anxiety undermines the notion that our projects can have absolutely compelling rational grounds, leaving us with nothing more substantial than a brute existential choice. With both authors, I have argued that their aim in the moments I have been comparing – Wittgenstein’s parable of the wayward pupil and Heidegger’s analysis of anxiety – is precisely to undermine this picture by reminding us that justification is a practice that has a purpose *within* the context of a life that already manifests a certain self-understanding, and that we cannot coherently extract the practice of justification from that life and apply it to that life as it were from the outside.

This comparison with Wittgenstein allows us to see an answer to the Motivation Problem I raised with Heidegger: if my reasons bottom out in a for-the-sake-of-which, what kind of reasons do I have available to motivate the for-the-sake-of-which itself? We give this problem the wrong shape if we hold on to the picture of reasons as ultimately having to bottom out in something rationally compelling in order to count as reasons. My basic comportment in the world cannot be rationally justified not because rational grounds are *lacking* but because rational justification is a practice that arises *from* that basic comportment and we cannot intelligibly apply that practice from outside the

life in which it has a use. If I want to explain why I decided to prioritize my family over my work, I don't do so by providing irresistibly compelling grounds – grounds such that anyone in my position who had done otherwise would be guilty of making a rational error – but by situating that choice in relation to other choices, other possibilities, other aspects of my life.

But what if these explanations are unsatisfying? Wittgenstein's parable of the wayward pupil confronts us with an interlocutor who is alien to us, to whom we cannot make basic sense. Heidegger's analysis of anxiety confronts us with the possibility that we may be alien to ourselves. Recoiling from these confrontations leads to Platonism in Wittgenstein's dialectic and to fleeing from anxiety in Heidegger's. These recoil responses seek assurance that our practices have a foundation more solid than human contingency. One hitch to abandoning the sceptical problematic that feeds both the sceptical worry and its recoil response is that we also have to abandon the assurance the recoil seeks to provide. Part of the difficulty of this anti-sceptical reading is that it seems to leave us without any firm answer to the sceptic at all.

Freeing ourselves from the picture of justification that feeds the sceptical problematic – according to which a justification must be absolutely compelling or else be no real justification at all – means recognizing that our ordinary practices of justification, explanation, interpretation, and the like don't resolve every possible confusion or misunderstanding. Rather, they respond to the particular confusions or misunderstandings that are salient in this instance. But these ordinary justifications, explanations, interpretations, and the like are by their nature not immune to further or unanticipated confusions and misunderstandings. 'Explanations come to an end somewhere' says Wittgenstein (*PI* §1), but there is no general answer as to where they come to an end – or, indeed, whether they find a felicitous end. Nothing guarantees that we or our world will make sense. As Cavell reads him, Wittgenstein does not refute scepticism but rather affirms 'the truth of scepticism' (Cavell 1979, p. 7), albeit in a way that 'shifts its weight' (Cavell 1979, p. 45). What Wittgenstein wants to wean us from, according to Cavell, is not just the sceptic's doubt that we can ever achieve perfect certainty, but the very demand

that we should aspire to such certainty in the first place and greet its failure as a crisis.

Similarly, Heidegger does not think we should hope to free ourselves entirely from anxiety. One of the ingredients of resoluteness – which, along with anticipation, is the key concept in Heidegger’s account of authenticity – is readiness for anxiety (*BT* 297/343). Authentic Dasein is not free from anxiety, not secured with any firm guarantee against the possibility of anxiety, but quite the contrary ready for anxiety precisely because it has relinquished the aspiration to firm guarantees. If we expect the world to furnish us with significance and suppose that our own projects have rationally compelling grounds, the experience of anxiety will be deeply unsettling. But if we recognize that the world has significance and our projects have salience only to the extent that we find ourselves in them, then we will be ready for anxiety when it strikes.

Being ready for anxiety does not mean being free from anxiety. The positive aspect of anxiety is that it brings to our attention the precariousness of our forms of life: nothing more sustains them than our own investment in them. Resoluteness for Heidegger involves this clear-eyed recognition that the significance of our world has a reciprocal relation with our investment in it, and that that investment can fail us unexpectedly. Likewise, Wittgenstein responds to scepticism not with refutation but by acknowledging the internal relation between the intelligibility of individual practices and the global intelligibility of our form of life as a whole. Anxiety and scepticism are not simply mistakes, then, which we are better off without. What is mistaken is the way of taking up the challenge of anxiety or scepticism such that it seems to present us with a demand that is in principle unsatisfiable. Authentic Dasein is not captivated by anxiety but it is also not captivated by a fantasy of invulnerability.

As with sceptical readings of Wittgenstein, decisionist readings of Heidegger latch on to an important insight – that the practices of asking for and giving reasons are themselves forms of comportment and so they cannot reach beneath our comportment to give that comportment rational justification – but extract from this insight the wrong moral – that, absent grounding reasons, our basic way of making sense of the world is radically ‘up



to us'. Heidegger does indeed want us to acknowledge our responsibility for the significance of our world but he deliberately chooses an expression for the way in which that significance takes shape – *sich verhalten*, the reflexive verb translated as 'comport' or 'relate' – that is neither active nor passive, thus emphasizing the reciprocal relation Dasein has with its world. That is, Dasein does not impose significance on the world through a sovereign act of volition but rather allows that significance to emerge in careful responsiveness to that world.

Decisionist readings latch on to Heidegger's language of choice in connection to resoluteness and infer that authenticity is characterized by a distinctive kind of existential or identity-defining choice. But what characterizes resoluteness is not primarily a particular *kind of* choice but rather an understanding of what it means to be the sort of entity that makes choices in the first place. Heidegger distinguishes authentic and inauthentic modes of existence not in terms of a change in circumstance but in terms of a different orientation toward those circumstances:

The 'world' which is ready-to-hand does not become another one 'in its content', nor does the circle of Others get exchanged for a new one; but both one's Being towards the ready-to-hand understandingly and concernfully, and one's solicitous Being with Others, are now given a definite character in terms of their ownmost potentiality-for-Being-their-Selves. (BT 297-98/344)

The difference between authentic and inauthentic modes of existence is not primarily a question of what we *do* but rather a question of how we understand what we do, how we understand what it means to be the kind of being that can *do* things.

In short, authentic Dasein has a clear-sighted apprehension of how far the contours of its world are responsive to its understanding of the meaning of its Being. In *Philosophical Investigations*, we find Wittgenstein working to induce a similar apprehension. The parable of the wayward pupil is one thread in a

broader strategy to tie the meaning of our concepts to their uses, and to see those uses as manifestations of what Heidegger calls an understanding of the meaning of our Being. One of the central aims of both *Being and Time* and *Philosophical Investigations* is to recover a self-understanding that their respective authors think we have lost sight of. Heidegger calls that self-understanding ‘authenticity’. And if the similarities I have traced between Wittgenstein and Heidegger extend as far as I have traced them so far, we have reason to think that *Philosophical Investigations* also contains an appeal to something resembling Heideggerian authenticity.<sup>11</sup>

Like Heidegger, Wittgenstein disavows any claim to a positive ethics,<sup>12</sup> but like Heidegger, he seems concerned with the general comportment within which our ethical commitments take shape. The particular decisions or actions we undertake bespeak a more general attitude, and ethical change, for Wittgenstein, comes at the level of changing that more general attitude. In one diary entry, he writes: ‘If life becomes hard to bear we think of improvements. But the most important & effective improvement, in our own attitude [*die des eigenen Verhaltens*], hardly occurs to us, & we can decide on this only with the utmost difficulty’ (CV, p. 60). The German word *Verhalten*, here translated as ‘attitude’, is the same word commonly translated as ‘comportment’ or ‘relation’ in *Being and Time* – that is, the middle-voiced way in which Dasein engages with entities – and while it would be unwise to make too much of a semi-accidental coincidence in vocabulary, the general outlook here seems importantly similar. Heidegger situates our particular moral commitments within a care structure

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<sup>11</sup> I develop this claim in greater detail in Egan (2019).

<sup>12</sup> Two examples should suffice to show Wittgenstein’s resistance to the idea of a philosophical theory of ethics. The first is from the end of Wittgenstein’s ‘Lecture on Ethics’: ‘Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable [*sic*], can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense’ (LE, p. 12). The second is from his discussions with the Vienna Circle: ‘If I were told anything that was a theory, I would say, No, no! That does not interest me. Even if the theory was true, it would not interest me – it would not be that I was looking for. What is ethical cannot be taught’ (Waismann 1979, p. 116–17).

that manifests itself primarily not in explicitly formulated principles but in our pre-reflective comportment with entities and other Dasein. Likewise, Wittgenstein sees ‘the most important & effective improvement’ to our lives to reside at the level of our *Verhalten* – our general orientation, attitude, or comportment.

Reading Wittgenstein alongside Heidegger allows us to see a clearer connection between Wittgenstein’s ethical orientation and his philosophical investigations. The story Heidegger tells about Dasein’s comportment in a significant world feeds directly into his treatment of anxiety – in which mood the significance of the world becomes questionable – which in turn contributes to his understanding of authenticity – in which Dasein recognizes and takes responsibility for the way its comportment and the significance of its world are intertwined. This paper argues for a number of important parallels between Heidegger’s treatment of anxiety and Wittgenstein’s treatment of rule following, such that we can see more clearly that Wittgenstein’s response to the problematic of rule following manifests a similar recognition of and responsibility for our practices.<sup>13</sup>

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