

MILLER, Alexander. *Wittgenstein & the Possibility of Meaning: "To Follow a Rule Blindly."* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. xi + 168 pp. Cloth, \$90.00—Alexander Miller has been writing about rule-following for the better part of 30 years, and it shows in his new book, *Wittgenstein & the Possibility of Meaning* (*WPM*), which displays an easy mastery of the topic and its literature. *WPM* divides into two thematic halves. The first three chapters consist of an overview of the problem(s) of rule-following and the secondary literature that has amassed on the topic, while the final two chapters present Miller's own non-reductionist account of rule-following.

Chapter 2 is the longest in the book. It contains (i) an exposition of "Kripke's Wittgenstein's sceptical argument," which purports to show that no set of non-intentional facts about finite agents are sufficient to determine that an agent has accepted a rule with infinitary consequences for the correct application of that rule—call this the "Indeterminacy Problem"—and (ii) a comprehensive discussion of responses that try to show that the state of rule-acceptance can be reduced to some set of non-intentional facts about an agent after all (such as, for example, the agent's dispositions). Of course, as Miller points out, a *non*-reductionist view of rule-following remains viable for all this argument shows.

Chapter 3 discusses a further problem (anticipated by Wittgenstein and later developed by Wright and Boghossian) that applies even to non-reductionist views of rule-following: In order to follow a rule, R, an agent must apply R to a particular case. This requires her to take the particular case to be one to which R applies. Yet making this judgment requires the agent to follow some *additional* rule, S. We thus get a vicious regress in which applying R requires an application of S, which requires an application of yet another rule, *ad infinitum*. So, even if a finite agent could intend to follow a rule with infinitary consequences—as the non-reductionist maintains—the agent could still never actually apply the rule in a given situation. Call this the "Blindness Problem." (The subtitle of *WPM*—as well as inspiration for this problem—is drawn from *Philosophical Investigations* where Wittgenstein writes "When I follow the rule, I do not choose. I follow the rule *blindly*.")

Anyone new to the topic of rule-following—and anyone who is curious what all the fuss is about—would do well to pay attention to Chapters 1–3. They clock in at well under 100 pages and, although Miller claims the book wasn't written "in textbook mode," will serve to get a reader up to speed on the literature as quickly as anything else.

In Chapters 4–5, Miller presents his own "broadly Wittgensteinian" account of rule-following. He addresses the Blindness Problem first, in Chapter 4. For the purpose of solving it, he asks his reader to assume non-reductionism about rule-acceptance; he then elaborates on his "ability-based" version of non-reductionism in Chapter 5.

Miller takes the key to responding to the Blindness Problem to be found in Wittgenstein's claim that "there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*." On the reading

presented in *WPM*, this means *a way of following a rule that does not rely on the application of some further rule*.

Take the rule, “Answer emails immediately upon receipt!”, as an example. Granted an agent who (i) intends to follow R (an intention which has infinitary consequences for what she ought to do relative to her acceptance of R) and who (ii) believes some triggering condition of R to be met (that *this* is an email, just arrived), we ask: how does the agent move from this intention-belief pair to actually executing R, i.e., answering the email? We cannot say that she makes some *judgment* about the applicability of R, since that will run into the Blindness Problem.

The correct answer, for Miller, is that her intention-belief pair *causes* her to apply R: intending to follow R and believing that a triggering condition is met—alongside having been subjected to the right kind of training—will cause the agent to enter into an action-guiding state that disposes her to immediately answer the newly-arrived email.

Miller argues that this counts as genuine rule-following since the agent’s acceptance of R *explains* her action (if she didn’t accept R, she wouldn’t reply immediately); and, what’s more, it *rationalizes* her action, since we can suppose that her intention-belief pair (along with the relevant training) have, “in the right sort of way”, caused her to act as she does (note well that Miller accepts a Davidsonian view of rational causation). So, we have an account of how an agent can perform a rule-guided action (an action determined to be correct by R and also explained and rationalized by her acceptance of R) without applying any rule other than R itself—an account which thus solves the Blindness Problem.

What remains to be done in Chapter 5 is for Miller to spell out a non-reductionist account of rule-acceptance, one which comports with Chapter 4’s solution to the Blindness Problem. Miller formulates his non-reductionism in terms of *abilities*, writing “accepting a rule consists in having an intention to exercise one’s ability to suit one’s practice to its dictates” (p. 119)—in other words, to accept a rule is to intend to conform to it. In accordance with his non-reductionist scruples, Miller provides no analysis of what having an intention to follow rule R consists in; nor does he offer an account of what having the relevant ability consists in.

Bringing together Chapter 5’s formulation of non-reductionism with the solution to the Blindness Problem canvassed in Chapter 4, we can say that in cases of basic rule-following, an agent follows rule R when (i) she intends to follow R; (ii) she believes a triggering condition for R is met; (iii) her intention and belief, along with her training, cause her to enter into an action-guiding state in the right sort of way; and (iv) she applies, thereby exercising her ability to follow, R.

Of course, this reconstruction provides only the bare bones of Miller’s account. The discussion in *WPM* is rich in detail, and readers interested in new work on the problem(s) of rule-following will find Chapters 4 and 5 highly rewarding.—Elek Lane, *University of California, Berkeley*