

INTRODUCTION

And all the earth was one language, one set of words. And it happened as they journeyed from the east that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to each other, ‘Come, let us bake bricks and burn them hard’. And the brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar. And they said, ‘Come, let us build us a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, that we may make us a name, lest we be scattered over all the earth’. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the human creatures had built. And the LORD said, ‘As one people with one language for all, if this is what they have begun to do, nothing they plot will elude them. Come, let us go down and baffle their language there so that they will not understand each other’s language’. And the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth and they left off building the city. Therefore it is called Babel, for there the LORD made the language of all the earth babble. And from there the LORD scattered them over all the earth. (Genesis 11:1–9)¹

The last collective undertaking of all humankind, according to the Book of Genesis, is to build a city and a tower in the land of Shinar, which subsequently comes to be known as Babel. The settlers of Shinar build the tower, we are told, to ‘make . . . a name’ for themselves. In an earlier story, we learn that

¹ I am using the translation by Robert Alter (1996).

God has already bestowed on the first human the authority to name ‘each beast of the field and each fowl of the heavens’ (Genesis 2:19). In seeking to make a name for themselves, then, they seek to claim over themselves the sovereignty they already hold over all the animals (cf. Genesis 1:28).²

This is no minor adjustment to God’s bequest. They are attempting to arrogate to themselves the powers of naming and creation that are proper to their own creator. God’s response, then, is a response to the threat of usurpation.³ He quashes their challenge by bringing about the very thing that the tower is designed to prevent. The goal of creating the tower is to avoid being ‘scattered over all the earth’. We have no evidence to suggest that the humans’ situation is otherwise precarious, that they have good reason to fear being scattered. Rather, they usher in precisely what they seek to avoid in the act of trying to avoid it.

This story of power and usurpation is prominently concerned with language. It opens with the reminder that, at that time, ‘all the earth was one language’, and that shared language not only unites the humans in their ambition but is also a condition for their being able to make ‘a name’ for themselves. God’s response to their ambition, in addition to scattering the humans, is to ‘baffle their language’.

² We find a further hint of this ambition for self-sovereignty or self-creation in their baking of bricks, which echoes God’s creation of the first human by breathing the breath of life into soil that he fashioned (Genesis 2:7).

³ Nor is it the first such response. A further echo in the Babel story of the Eden story is God’s alarm at the usurping ambition of his human creation. He exiles the first humans from Eden after they eat from the tree of knowledge, saying: ‘Now that the human has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he may reach out and take as well from the tree of life and live forever’ (Genesis 3:22).

What is this baffling? It is clear that humans are no longer able to understand one another as they once could, but why not? The story leaves unresolved which ‘one language’ those primeval humans speak. One possibility, the most intuitive, is that this primeval language is simply destroyed and replaced by the ‘babble’ of the multitude of languages of the peoples that now inhabit the earth. But no act of creation is described in the Babel story: we are not told that God *created* a multitude of *new* languages, just that he ‘baffled’ the one we already had. Another possibility, suggested by the many parallels between the story of Babel and the story of Eden, is that, like Eden—which is not destroyed when the first humans are driven out from it, but is rather guarded to prevent our return—this primeval language still exists but is somehow inaccessible to us.⁴ We cannot retrieve it or return to it, perhaps because we are unable to recognize it for what it is. A third possibility, not incompatible with the second, is that we all still speak this primeval language. Although God promises to baffle our language, we are told in the sequel that what he in fact does is scatter us, with no further mention of baffling. Perhaps it is not our language that is baffled but we ourselves who are baffled, still speaking the same tongue but unable to understand one another.⁵ Fittingly, the site of this bafflement is named onomatopoeically: the last place where all the earth spoke one language is commemorated with a name that all the earth should still be able to understand.

⁴ One further intriguing connection between these stories is that the cherubim are ‘set up **east** of the garden of Eden’ (Genesis 3:24) and the Babel story opens with the unified human family ‘journey[ing] **from the east**’ (Genesis 11:2)—perhaps hoping to return to the paradise from which they have been expelled.

⁵ This third possibility is broached by Daniel Heller-Roazen (2005, 219–31), who offers a rich and suggestive reading of the Babel story.

Both Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's portraits of the human predicament have drawn comparisons with the Biblical story of Eden,⁶ but I find in their work even stronger resonances with the story of Babel. Both philosophers see us as subject to the same pattern of baffling in an attempt to 'make a name' for ourselves. In their work, the Babel narrative has salience not as a moment in our mythic past, but as something ongoing: it evokes an enduring characteristic of the kind of beings that we are.

In Wittgenstein, the ambition to make a name for ourselves is manifest in our desire to free our words from their seemingly contingent contexts of use and to grasp them in their essence. When philosophers 'try to grasp the *essence*' of the thing denoted by a word, Wittgenstein cautions, 'one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language in which it is at home [*in der es seine Heimat hat*]?' (*PI* §116). Words have a home, as Wittgenstein figures it, and this home is a language in which these words have a use—and, as he notes immediately afterward, this use is the 'everyday' and not the 'metaphysical' use of words (*PI* §116). The metaphysical impulse, in this picture, is an impulse to self-exile, an impulse to remove words—and by extension the people who use them—from the language in which they are at home in the pursuit of perfect perspicuity.

The self-exile of metaphysics is born of the same self-fulfilling fear as the self-exile of the builders of Babel. We become dissatisfied with the language that

⁶ Most notably in Mulhall (2005a). Stanley Cavell (2005, 196) also finds 'a counter-myth to that of Eden' in Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

people actually use and the standing uncertainty it brings with it whether others will understand us. As an antidote to this dissatisfaction, we become enchanted by the idea of a language that, in its perfection, speaks from nowhere and to everyone neutrally. This fantasy of extricating ourselves from our own skins so that our wording of the world may shed its merely human contingency is a fantasy of taking on a perspective that is in some sense absolute—it is the philosopher’s version of a fantasy of apotheosis. As in the case of the settlers of Shinar, the fear that we *might not* make sense to one another brings about conditions in which we actually *do not* make sense to one another.

Wittgenstein exhorts us to give up this fantasy. His story of ‘[bringing] words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’ (*PI* §116) is, however, more complicated than a straightforward story of exile and return. Such a story would posit two countries, the country of everyday use and the country of metaphysical use, with Wittgenstein trying to bring us from our exile in the metaphysical country back to our home country. Wittgenstein, in contrast, is at pains to show us that this metaphysical country does not exist. It is a utopia in both senses of the word: it is the imagined place where the ills of the everyday world are decisively mended, and it is ‘no place’. In fact, Wittgenstein’s denial of the country of metaphysical use is even stronger: it is not just nonexistent, but there is not even an ‘it’ that does not exist. Wittgenstein’s ‘metaphysical use’ is not a different use of *language* but a kind of non-use, a babbling that we do not realize is babbling. In our aspiration to build a stronghold in which our uses of

words are secure against the possibility of misadventure, we bring about the baffling of our language.

If the supposed place of exile is illusory, then the supposed exile is illusory too. The first step in returning us from a non-existent exile, for Wittgenstein, is to make us aware of our bafflement. Before we can find ourselves in our language, we have to acknowledge the manner in which we have become lost.

Heidegger likewise presents a portrait of human beings as lost to themselves in the midst of their lives. We have a constitutional tendency to turn ourselves away from the question of the meaning of being, Heidegger tells us, and to forget that there is even a question from which we have turned ourselves away. This turning away has a similar Babelic structure to Wittgenstein's account of the realization of our fears precisely in the attempt to escape them. According to Heidegger, we are beings whose nature is fundamentally unsettled and open-ended. The apprehension of our unsettledness induces anxiety, which in turn prompts a race to find comfort in a stable sense of the meaning of our existence. But, in affirming a stability we do not have, we fundamentally misapprehend ourselves, and so thwart the very project of finding meaning in our existence. As a result, we live for the most part in a state of existential babbling.

Heidegger gives our predicament of self-bafflement a name: inauthenticity. *Being and Time* is essentially a project of unbaffling, of revealing the contours of an authentic existence that is the opposite of the apotheosis that the builders at Babel aspire to. Rather than build ourselves up into something we are

not, authenticity requires no more—and no less—than that we see clearly what we are and live in that ‘clearing’ (*BT* 133).

The achievement of authenticity is thus not to come into the truth but to recognize that we were already in the truth to begin with. In this respect, an authentic existence does not transcend or escape from the everyday existence that we inhabit inauthentically. On the contrary, authenticity is the mode in which we inhabit the everyday without denying or rejecting it.

This story of an un baffling that results in an authentic inhabitation of the everyday finds expression in the work of a figure who exercised a strong influence on both Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Saint Augustine’s narrative of his conversion provides a model for the turn to inhabiting the everyday.⁷ By the beginning of the crucial eighth book of *Confessions*, Augustine is already free of all doubt about the truth of Christianity (*Confessions* 8.1.1) but this confidence is not alone sufficient for conversion. Augustine figures his moment of conversion not

⁷ Coyne (2016) offers a thorough examination of Augustine’s influence on Heidegger. Both Kisiel (1993, especially chap. 4) and van Buren (1994, especially chap. 8) also attest to the influence of Augustine on Heidegger’s development. Wittgenstein opens *Philosophical Investigations* by scrutinizing critically the ‘picture of the essence of human language’ (*PI* §1) he claims to find in Book I of Augustine’s *Confessions*, but he was nevertheless deeply impressed by that text. Drury (1984, 90) reports Wittgenstein as saying that Augustine’s *Confessions* is possibly ‘the most serious book ever written’. Malcolm ([1958] 2001, 59) reports that Wittgenstein revered Augustine and von Wright ([1958] 2001, 19) lists Augustine as a major influence on Wittgenstein, observing that ‘[t]he philosophical sections of St Augustine’s *Confessions* show a striking resemblance to Wittgenstein’s own way of doing philosophy’. Burnyeat (1987) also argues that Augustine’s views on learning language coincide strikingly with Wittgenstein’s own—and that Wittgenstein was likely aware of this fact. So whatever Wittgenstein’s reasons for choosing to open *Philosophical Investigations* with a quotation from *Confessions*, he did not do so purely in a spirit of criticism. According to Malcolm, Wittgenstein felt the conception of language he subjects to scrutiny ‘*must* be important if so great a mind held it’ (Malcolm [1958] 2001, 60).

as a cognitive, or even a spiritual, achievement—he does not come to believe, know, or otherwise apprehend something new that he had been blind to previously—but as relinquishing something. In particular, he writes of his professional ambition and his sexual desire as driving him to seek a fulfillment that leaves him constantly unsatisfied and anxious. In a moment of anguish, he hears a voice that prompts him to read a passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans, and writes that, in a flash, ‘it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into [his] heart’ (*Confessions* 8.12.29). At his moment of conversion, he is not bestowed with a new truth, but is rather disencumbered of the burdens that kept him from accepting that he was already living in the light of God’s truth.

For both Wittgenstein and Heidegger, the intended outcome of their philosophical work is likewise one of disencumbrance. Wittgenstein presents the challenge not in terms of achieving something new but of seeing clearly where we already are: ‘The difficult thing here is not, to dig down to the ground; no, it is to recognize the ground that lies before us as the ground’ (*RFM* VI §31). Likewise for Heidegger, *Dasein*—his term for the distinctive mode of being of human beings—‘is “*in the truth*”’ (*BT* 221).

In a pivotal passage,⁸ Wittgenstein emphasizes that this ground that lies before us, if we are to move across it, requires friction: ‘We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction, and so, in a certain sense, the conditions are ideal; but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk:

⁸ Quite literally pivotal: this passage comes directly before Wittgenstein invokes ‘the pivot of our real need’ around which ‘the inquiry must be turned’ (*PI* §108). Wittgenstein figures the change he wants to induce in his readers as a conversion.

so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!’ (PI §107). This contrast between slippery ice and rough ground comes at the culmination of a series of reflections in which Wittgenstein characterizes the ‘urge to understand the foundations, or essence, of everything empirical’ (PI §89) as the search for something sublime. Wittgenstein repeatedly invokes images of purity and an ideal: he describes the a priori order of the world, which ‘must be *utterly simple*’ as being ‘of the **purest** crystal’ (PI §97), and describes the language of logic as ‘something **pure** and clear-cut’ (PI §105) and of ‘crystalline **purity**’ (PI §106), while repeatedly invoking the notion of an ideal (PI §§98, 100, 101, 103, 105, 107).

Taken at face value, Wittgenstein’s parable figures the slippery ice as the metaphysical confusion we bring upon ourselves when we are captivated by a certain image of the ideal and the rough ground as the firm footing we find in the ordinary use of our words. But such figuring recapitulates the story of exile that I questioned earlier: here the slippery ice of metaphysical use, there the rough ground of ordinary use. Such figuring gives us two different places and thereby bestows an autonomous reality on the idea of a ‘metaphysical use’ of our words. If the notion of a ‘metaphysical use’ is problematic, we find a resemblance between Wittgenstein’s parable and the story of Babel in that the precise nature of the failure is difficult to discern.

One internal reason for mistrusting the face value reading is that it does not take fully seriously Wittgenstein’s claim that we find ourselves on an ‘ideal’ slippery surface where there is ‘**no** friction’. There is a way to get off any *actual* icy surface—slowly and cautiously—because there *is* friction on an icy surface, just

not very much. On a truly frictionless surface, there is no way of getting ‘back’ to rougher ground because any translational motion at all is impossible. Furthermore, if we cannot move across it, it is unclear how we might have ‘got on to’ this frictionless surface in the first place.

These internal tensions point to an alternative reading of Wittgenstein’s parable, in line with my alternative reading of the story of Babel: we never left the rough ground because there is no other ground to leave to.⁹ What keeps us from walking is not the *fact* that we stand on a frictionless surface—something that does not, after all, exist anywhere in nature, but only in the idealizations of physicists—but the *illusion* that we stand on a frictionless surface. The way back to the rough ground is not to move to a different location but ‘to recognize the ground that lies before us as the ground’. The only thing that keeps us from moving is the self-bafflement that wishes to make of the ground we stand on something other than what it is.

Like Heidegger’s authentic mode of being, Wittgenstein’s rough ground is the opposite of apotheosis. This is not the place where we free ourselves definitively from our difficulties but rather the place where we apprehend our difficulties as inalienably our own. We need not achieve this apprehension in a spirit of resignation. We are not giving up on anything substantial by abandoning the fantasy of the ideal, but are only dismantling structures of air that had no

⁹ James Conant suggested to me this alternative approach to reading the parable of the ice-walkers as well as the intriguing contrast with Kant’s parable of the dove, which supposes that it could make even better progress in the absence of the friction of air resistance (Kant [1781/87] 1997, A5/B8–9).

substance to begin with (*PI* §118).¹⁰ Nor are we even giving up on the aspiration that fed the fantasy of slippery ice in the first place: '[W]e too', says Wittgenstein, 'are trying to understand the essence of language' (*PI* §92).¹¹ When Wittgenstein says he wants to turn the inquiry around 'on the pivot of our real need' (*PI* §108), then, he retains the 'urge to understand the foundations, or essence, of everything empirical' (*PI* §89) but realigns our sense of what might fulfill that urge. Mulhall (2001, 92) characterizes this pivot as turning us from the vertical axis of penetrating the surface of our ordinary uses of words to the horizontal axis of surveying them. We need to apprehend the world we find ourselves in, not transcend it.

Wittgenstein's method is often characterized in terms of dissolving problems, and we gain a clearer view of his pivot if we take this metaphor of dissolution seriously. One of the few places where Wittgenstein himself invokes the metaphor is *BTS* 310: 'The problems are solved in the literal sense of the word—dissolved like a lump of sugar in water'. When we dissolve a lump of sugar in water, that does not make the sugar go away. All of the sugar remains—it is simply distributed evenly throughout the water where before it was concentrated in a single hard lump. And this is the sense in which Wittgenstein sees himself dissolving philosophical problems. Rather than bore inward to what

¹⁰ My 'structures of air' is a literal rendering of Wittgenstein's *Luftgebäude*, which in both Anscombe's original translation and Hacker's and Schulte's revision is rendered as 'houses of cards'. Their translation carries the unfortunate connotation that *something* substantial is being destroyed, however flimsy and unstable.

¹¹ I use Anscombe's translation here, which I think remains closer to Wittgenstein's original meaning, although Hacker and Schulte are right to emphasize that the question of whether to translate *Wesen* as 'essence' or 'nature' is a complex and fraught one.

we think is the heart of a concept, we should broaden our view, and consider how the uses of that concept are distributed through our lives as a whole. In treating our lives, and the words through which we articulate our understanding of those lives, as a continuous whole, we will not fall victim to the bafflement that results from our overweening ambition to overcome our finite selves.

One consequence that Wittgenstein and Heidegger both perceive in overcoming our fierce determination to reject or deny our everyday existence is that we come to see this existence as our own. Our world, when we apprehend it clearly, is not simply something we find ourselves in, but something whose shape conforms to our own. By taking responsibility for our everyday existence, we find that it is responsive to us.

Wittgenstein in particular figures this responsiveness in terms of play: we articulate our understanding of our lives by playing language-games, and the rules and aims of these games take shape in the way that we engage with one another. This engagement in turn manifests a shared understanding that precedes any deliberate agreement—an attunement between players that enables them to play. As I will argue in the pages that follow, Wittgenstein's rough ground is a play ground.

* * *

Although they worked in different philosophical traditions, and seemed mostly ignorant of one another's work,¹² Wittgenstein and Heidegger have far more in common than just the year of their births. The aim of this book is to trace these philosophers' parallel engagements with the everyday and with authenticity, and their pursuit of an authentic inhabitation of the everyday. In particular, Heidegger's explicit articulation of his conception of authenticity helps me to uncover an implicit conception of authenticity in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. And by tracing the parallels between those two philosophers that far, I am able to articulate the two principal ways in which I find Wittgenstein diverging from his unlikely doppelgänger: in the centrality of play in his conception of authenticity and in the methodological innovations by which he resists the will-o'-the-wisp of metaphysical confusion.

Part One treats Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's respective engagements with the everyday, emphasizing three principal parallels. Chapter One outlines Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's rejection of the idea that philosophy is a cognitive discipline. Their descriptions of familiar aspects of everyday human existence present an alternative to a philosophical method that seeks to uncover hitherto

¹² I am aware of five instances in which Wittgenstein or Heidegger refers to the other. The best known is Wittgenstein's remark 'On Heidegger' (*LWVC* 68–69), which presumably is a response to 'What Is Metaphysics?' (and not to *Being and Time*, as the editor's footnote suggests), which had also recently exercised Carnap ([1931] 1958), who was a regular interlocutor of Wittgenstein's at the time. We find more extended reflections on the same theme in *Voices of Wittgenstein* (*VW* 69–77), and a brief, disparaging remark in a recently published collection of conversation notes by Rush Rhees (*CRR* 48). The other two are brief remarks by Heidegger, one in which Heidegger makes passing reference to Wittgenstein to illustrate a point about extricating oneself from the hermeneutic circle (*HS* 17), and the other in which he misquotes the *Tractatus* (*SLT* 35). I am grateful to Gabriel Citron for drawing my attention to the second and third of the Wittgenstein references, and, in the case of the Rhees notes, for making them public in the first place.

unknown truths. Wittgenstein sharply distinguishes between grammatical and empirical investigations, and Heidegger distinguishes between ontological and ontic levels of investigation. Both use these distinctions to argue that the philosophical enterprise is radically different in kind from the sciences—and that this distinction is frequently overlooked to the serious detriment of philosophy. Chapter Two examines the way in which Wittgenstein and Heidegger situate our utterances and activities within a holistic network of human practices. Wittgenstein maintains that ‘to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life’ (*PI* §19) and Heidegger examines what he calls the ‘worldliness’ of the human world, in which objects show up as ready-to-hand equipment whose significance is indexed to its role in human life. And Chapter Three shows how both bring out the shared nature of these practices: Wittgenstein emphasizes our attunement—what he calls our ‘agreement . . . in form of life’ (*PI* §241)—and Heidegger claims that human being-in-the-world is essentially a matter of being-with-one-another.

Part Two situates Heidegger’s conception of authenticity within his analysis of the everyday and argues that we can find a homologous dynamic of authenticity and inauthenticity in Wittgenstein. Chapter Four argues that we find in Wittgenstein’s treatment of explanation and rule following parallels to Heidegger’s articulation of falling (our tendency toward inauthenticity), anxiety (in which we confront the fundamental uncanniness of our existence), and resoluteness (in which we are ready for anxiety). Unfolding these parallels requires distinguishing various interpretive responses to Wittgenstein’s treatment

of rule following. In particular, the comparison with Heidegger helps us to see that one influential reading—most famously associated with Kripke (1982)—leaves no space for an authentic understanding of our existence. On the other hand, the comparison with Wittgenstein helps us to see that Heidegger's conception of authenticity is a mode of inhabiting the everyday, and not a way of transcending it. These two interpretive claims—that an 'authentic' Wittgenstein does not embrace Kripke's sceptical problematic and that Heideggerian authenticity is a mode of everydayness—are the central concerns of Chapter Five. Chapter Six delves more deeply into Wittgenstein's conception of authenticity by exploring the theme of play in his later philosophy. This theme comes to prominence most explicitly in his use of language-games, which, I argue, are based in an appreciation of our capacity for unregulated play. Wittgenstein's deployment of language-games reveals both the active dynamic by which we keep practices 'in play', and the potential fragility of these practices when play breaks down. What emerges is a distinct conception of human agency: people are not so much *agents* as *players*, where our capacity for thought and action rests on our responsiveness to the constantly changing dynamic of our circumstances.

Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's understanding of authenticity cannot be detached from their understanding of what it means to philosophize authentically. Part Three brings to the forefront questions of method that have been a constant background theme in the first two parts. Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's methodological commitment to the everyday means rejecting the

idea that philosophy can inform us of anything we did not already know—which raises the pressing question of how it can nevertheless be illuminating. Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger face the challenge of providing words whose efficacy does not rest on being informative, and it is on this question of method that they most diverge. Focusing on Heidegger in Chapter Seven and Wittgenstein in Chapter Eight, I consider a number of techniques these two authors deploy—coinages, scare quotes, and formal indication in Heidegger, and objects of comparison and the dialogue form in Wittgenstein—and examine the difference in these authors’ chosen terms of criticism. Most notably, where Heidegger uses language of discovering or uncovering (*entdecken*) to talk about a deeper level of ontological disclosure, Wittgenstein uses the same language to talk about exposing nothing more substantial than nonsense. Ultimately, I argue, a greater sense of strain is apparent in Heidegger’s work, as if he wants both to tell us something and to tell us that there is no *something* to be told—a struggle more reminiscent of the *Tractatus* than of Wittgenstein’s later work. Wittgenstein avoids this strain by using contrasts to jog our preconceptions about the case before us without trying to convey any deeper truths about it. This methodological difference, I argue, manifests the more pronounced performative aspect of Wittgenstein’s investigations. Where Heidegger describes the experience of anxiety, for instance, Wittgenstein enacts it in his language-games—and encourages his readers to join him in this enactment.

This comparative project illuminates facets of both philosophers' work that are less evident when we consider them in isolation. Indeed, one aim of this project is to illuminate just *how many* fruitful points of comparison obtain between Wittgenstein and Heidegger. But the most significant achievements of the book, I think, are the ones that are also the least evident: that embedded in Wittgenstein's later philosophy is a strikingly Heideggerian dialectic of authenticity, and that considering the philosophers in tandem allows us to see the depth of the methodological challenge they face—and the range of possible responses to it.

These results are not merely of historical interest. By bringing the theme of authenticity in the work of Wittgenstein and Heidegger into contact with the question of method, this book articulates an understanding of what it means to do philosophy—and why it is so difficult—that remains pertinent in the twenty-first century. Wittgenstein and Heidegger help us to see something that seemed obvious to the ancients but that has faded from view in the modern world: that we cannot *not* be philosophers, and that the manner *in which* we are philosophers is manifest in our manner of living. For Wittgenstein and for Heidegger, the pursuit of an authentic philosophy cannot be detached from the pursuit of an authentic existence.