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Wittgenstein on Forms of Life,
Patterns of Life,
and Ways of Living

Abstract

This paper aims to distinguish Wittgenstein's concept of 'form of life' from other concepts or expressions that have been confused or conflated with it, such as 'language-game', 'certainty', 'patterns of life', 'ways of living' and 'facts of living'. Competing interpretations of Wittgenstein's 'form(s) of life' are reviewed (Baker & Hacker, Cavell, Conway, Garver), and it is concluded that Wittgenstein intended both a singular and a plural use of the concept; with, where the human is concerned, *a single human form of life* characterized by *innumerable forms of human life*.

Introduction

This paper aims to demarcate Wittgenstein's concept of 'form(s) of life' from other concepts or expressions that have been confused or conflated with it, such as, 'language-game', 'certainty', 'patterns of life', 'ways of living' and 'facts of living'. The tendency to merge these concepts may in part be due to their all being what we might call *framework concepts*: concepts featuring basicness or ungrounded-ness.

Wittgenstein's reputation as a therapeutic philosopher who refrains from interventionist or constructive philosophical activity

is unjustified.[1] Particularly when we think of him as pushing his way through a lot of muddied and muddled philosophical water to emerge with many a brilliant 'redeeming word' (*erlösende Wort*) or concept – such as 'form of life' or 'language game'. These concepts result from Wittgenstein's attempts to present the *familiar unseen* – what is always before our eyes but is unnoticed because of its familiarity[2] – in such a way that it becomes perspicuous. And this demands not only the dismantling of false pictures, but the tracing of boundaries, even if at times porous. It is important that we not let Wittgenstein's framework concepts collapse into each other if they are to perform their respective, valuable, demarcating functions.

In his search for bedrock, Wittgenstein comes across two main answers: 'form of life' and 'certainty'.[3] It is all the more important to clarify the difference between the two, as he himself seems, at one point, to conflate them. In doing this, it is essential that we are as clear as possible on what Wittgenstein means by each term. I have spent quite a lot of time figuring out what he means by 'certainty', and found his use of the term in *On Certainty* to reveal an act (attitude)-object ambiguity: he speaks of certainty both in terms of an *attitude* (e.g., a taking-hold or standing-fast) and in terms of the *object* of that attitude (e.g. "some things that one does not doubt" (OC 337); a *Weltbild*; a bedrock; norms of description). Certainty, then, is a basic, nonpropositional, nonepistemic (or

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[1] Wittgenstein: "The danger sets in when we notice that the old model is not sufficient but then we don't change it" (BT 318); "Yes, I have reached a real resting place. I know that my method is right. My father was a business man, and I am a business man; I want my philosophy to be business-like, to get something done, to get something settled." ("Conversations with Wittgenstein. M. O'C Drury", in Rhees (1981: 125-6). For a full-length discussion, see my "The Myth of the Quietist Wittgenstein" (Forthcoming).

[2] "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity" (PI 129); "We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand" (PI 89). References to PI will be to Hacker & Schulte's (2009) translation, with PPF referring to the formerly known PI Part II, except for a few cases where the Anscombe translation has been preferred (this is indicated either as "Anscombe translation" or as "PI, Part II").

[3] Does he also envisage the 'language-game' as bedrock when he writes: "Regard the language-game as the *primary thing*" (PI 656)? The context of this sentence shows that he means it to prevent us from thinking that our linguistic expressions are necessarily prefaced or prompted by states of mind, wishes, intentions, feelings, etc. (PI 653-655).

ungrounded) and yet indubitable, *attitude* towards *some things*.[4] One of the key features of this attitude is that it is a *nonpropositional* attitude; a kind of conviction that does not deploy itself in propositions, but in acting:

> ... the end is not certain 'propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting,* which lies at the bottom of the language-game. (OC 204)

Hinge certainty is an *enacted* certainty, exhibiting itself in the smoothness of our normal, **basic** operating in the world. Now what about 'form of life'?

1. Wittgenstein's 'Form(s) of Life'

> The form of life is not grounded on something more fundamental; *it is the fundament.*
>
> Gertrude Conway (1989: 24)

Wittgenstein uses the terms 'form' or 'forms of life', '*Lebensform*' or '*Lebensformen*' five times in the *Investigations*, a handful of times elsewhere in the published notes, once notably in *On Certainty*, and about 20 odd times in unpublished notes[5]. In PPF, he writes:

> It is no doubt true that one could not calculate with certain sorts of paper and ink, if, that is, they were subject to certain strange alterations – but still, that they changed could in turn be ascertained only through memory and comparison with other means of calculation. And how, in turn, are these tested?
>
> What has to be accepted, the given, is – one might say – *forms of life.* (PPF 344-45)

   In the few pages that precede and follow this passage, Wittgenstein is trying to locate the stopping-place of doubt and testing, the place of 'complete agreement' (PPF 347), without

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[4] Being some 'thing' does not preclude something from belonging to grammar (cf. PI 50). To be certain, in Wittgenstein's sense, means to *be unwaveringly and yet nonepistemically poised* on something that *enables* us to think, speak or act meaningfully. That something is *grammar*; and its manifestation in ordinary life is in our *certain* attitudes or ways of acting (OC 204). For a more elaborate discussion of Wittgensteinian certainty, see Moyal-Sharrock (2007).

[5] See Majetschak (2010: 76).

which human beings could learn no language.[6] He attempts to find it in the kind of facts that cannot be tested in their turn – 'Am I less certain that this man is in pain than that 2 x 2 = 4?' (PPF 332) – such facts which would then prove to be at the basis of our grammar or our concepts. Yet, rather than facts that are not open to testing, Wittgenstein finds – or so he writes in the PI passage – that what has to be accepted are *forms of life*.

There is, however, a variant of this sentence in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*; and here, it **is** 'facts' that Wittgenstein finds are 'what has to be accepted':

> ... the fact that we act in such-and-such ways, e.g., *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affairs thus and so, *give orders*, render accounts, describe colours, take an interest in others' feelings. What has to be accepted, the given – it might be said – are **facts of living** [*Tatsachen des Lebens*]. (RPP I, 630)

Such 'facts of living' are often mentioned by Wittgenstein: they are part of those "extremely general facts of nature: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality" (PI 142); or because they are always before our eyes (RFM 92). These facts are, as he says, "**that** in nature which is the basis of grammar" (PI, p. 230). In other words, these very general facts of living condition our grammar. So that to say, in nonfictional contexts, that human beings do not die or that the Mont Blanc didn't exist half an hour ago would be as ungrammatical or nonsensical as to say that 2+2=57.

It seems, then, that these very general 'facts of living' answer as much to the certainty Wittgenstein was looking for as the 'forms of life' in the PI passage. So are 'forms of life' simply 'facts of living', and are they all to be identified with the certainties of *On Certainty*? A passage in *On Certainty* would seem to point in that direction, at least as concerns 'form of life' and 'certainty':

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[6] In these pages, he is specifically concerned with the stability needed to learn the technique of calculating and the language-game of colours, but the point is easily extended.

[7] "If I say 'this mountain didn't exist half an hour ago', that is such a strange statement that it is not clear what I mean." (OC 237)

> Now I would like to regard this certainty, not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as a form of life [*Lebensform*]. (That is very badly expressed and probably badly thought as well). (OC 358)

> But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal. (OC 359)

Here again, we find the idea of something that has to be accepted as a given, or as beyond justification, but this time applied to certainty via form of life. One can see why Wittgenstein is tempted to think of certainty as a form of life: inasmuch as the certainty he is describing is a kind of animal attitude that deploys itself in our ways of acting (we act in the certainty that 'this is how we calculate' or that 'human beings have bodies, need water and food etc.'), it resembles a way of living – a form of *life* (as opposed to a form of thought). But Wittgenstein realizes that the animal nature of our basic certainty is not sufficient to make that certainty a form of life, and thus warns us that this was badly expressed and conceived. For just as individual certainties such as 'This⟨ is a hand' or 'I am standing here' are not forms of life, nor are certainties such as 'human beings need water to survive' or 'human beings punish certain actions' or 'human beings eat other animals'[8] or 'human beings have language' forms of life. The latter are expressions of indubitable 'facts of living' – certainties – that are *part* of a 'form of life'. Wittgenstein says as much when he writes: 'the *speaking* of language is **part of** an activity, or of a form of life'[9] (PI 23).

So that a 'form of life' is not a *single* way of acting, albeit characteristic of a group of organisms (such as speaking, calculating or eating animals), but must include innumerable other such shared ways of acting that cohesively form the necessary background or context or foundation of meaning. The givenness or indubitability or basicness of some facts of living are such only in the coherent context of a particular form of life.

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[8] *Contra* Pär Segerdahl, for example, who writes that eating animals is a form of human life (2014ms, 13). But like the speaking of language, eating animals is not a form of life (indeed that would mean we had the same form of life as nonhuman animals), but one of the facts of human life that give it its form.

[9] Wittgenstein obviously does not mean to imply here that all activities are forms of life: eating bread or calling for an ambulance are not forms of life, though they belong to some forms of life.

It seems to me, then, that Wittgenstein is working his way towards the idea that, although yes, extremely general facts of nature – which include 'regular ways of acting' (CE 397)) shared by all human beings – *are* certainties (or objects of certainty), they can only be such within a form of life. That human beings speak and eat other animals are extremely general facts of nature, or regular ways of living, and therefore certainties **in** the human form of life; whereas they might be empirical questions in an alien form of life, and cannot be questions at all in the canine form of life.

2. Competing interpretations of Wittgenstein's 'form(s) of life'

I found the most compelling understanding of 'form of life' many years ago in Gertrude Conway's *Wittgenstein on Foundations*, published in 1989; only in working on this paper did I come across a similar understanding in Stanley Cavell's "Declining Decline", an early version of which was published in 1988.[10] Both philosophers detect two senses of 'form of life' in Wittgenstein. In Cavell's terminology: a vertical (or biological) sense, whereby the human form of life is distinguished from other forms of life (higher and lower); and a horizontal (or ethnological) sense, which accounts for socio-cultural differences within a form of life. In Conway's terminology, the distinction is between a human form of life and different forms of human life: "One could say that all humans participate in the human form of life, but that there can be different forms of human life" (1989: 78). Note that Conway doesn't draw her distinction in biological and socio-cultural terms. I find this helpful as it allows for a clearer rendering of the irreducible presence of the social in the human form of life; something Cavell explicitly acknowledges but I find somewhat obfuscated by his terminology. Conway distinguishes the human form of life from the form of life of other beings, but takes the crucial dichotomy for Wittgenstein to be the *one human form of life* versus the *different forms of human life*.

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[10] "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture", *Inquiry* 1988: 31, 253-64. In this paper, I refer to the later version: Cavell (1996a).

Whereas all humans share in a fundamental form of life, there exist, within this shared biology, behaviour and environment – within these shared ways of living and (as we shall see) patterns of life – possibilities for diversity and variation; for, that is, various *forms of human life*. There is, as Conway puts it, "a multiplicity within a fundamental unity, a plurality within limits" (1989: 93). So that where the acquisition of language belongs to the *human* form of life, the acquisition of cartography, or of algebra, or of parliamentary elections attaches only to some of the various forms of human life.[11]

Extremely general facts of nature that belong to our human form of life are objects of certainty for all humans, whereas the facts that frame the various forms of human life are objects of certainty for only some humans depending on culture, society, education, interest etc. It will be a given for all human beings that people need to breathe air, eat, drink, sleep; that they can walk, feel pain, and use language; that they normally live in communities and do not systematically kill each other. But only for some will it be a given that there is a God, or that sacrifices should be performed, or that the future can be read in the entrails of a chicken.[12]

I share Conway and Cavell's bilateral reading of 'form of life', and would now like to measure it against divergent interpretations, starting with unilateral interpretations of 'form of life' as either *exclusively* vertical or horizontal,[13] and then briefly go on to inspect

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[11] An alternative classification might be *generic* versus *specific* notions of form of life: the *generic* being, e.g., the human, canine, leonine, vegetal, mineral as well as alien forms of life (e.g., OC 430); the *specific* referring to the various forms of life generated by a generic form of life. For example, some of the specific forms of human life generated by the human form of life would be the religious, the nomadic, the academic, etc.

[12] As Baker and Hacker rightly point out: "Of course, in advance of a particular question and a specific context it would be quite pointless to draw hard-and-fast distinctions between what counts as the same and what as a different form of life. Such distinctions depend upon the purpose and context of different kinds of investigation" (2009b: 222-23).

[13] This has also been tagged the singularity/plurality debate (see Marques and Venturinha, 2010: 16). In fact, the tag is misleading: commentators who, like Newton Garver, defend the interpretation of the human form of life as referring to a single biological human form of life, and not to a plurality of cultural forms of life, still use the plural with reference to various forms of biological life, such as the human, the bovine etc.

the interpretation of form of life as synonymous with 'patterns of life' and with 'language-game'.

2.1 Newton Garver: "a single form of life common to all humankind"

Newton Garver is in the vertical camp. He upholds the view that a form of life is uniquely something organic or biological,[14] and regards Wittgenstein's employment of the singular and plural as marking only the distinction between the human and non-human forms of life.[15] Garver is clear that what determines the human form of life is the capacity to use language (1994: 246). He also suggests that inasmuch as "form of life is given as part of natural history, ... the form of human life can be equated ... with the common behavior of mankind" (1994: 258).

I see at least two problems with Garver's reading: the equation between form of life and common behaviour of mankind leaves the world in which this common behaviour is deployed out of the picture. I find this exclusion problematic in view of Wittgenstein's multiple references to general facts of nature that are *not* part of the common behaviour of mankind but of the natural *world*, such as: mountains don't sprout up in half an hour; cats don't grow on trees; and the world has existed for a very long time (cf. OC 237; 282; 234). This suggests that the *human form of life* includes both the common behaviour of human beings and the natural conditions in which humans exist.[16] The second problem I find with Garver's

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[14] Though Garver concedes that Wittgenstein used 'form of life' to sometimes refer to culturally variant patterns of living rather than to biological forms and patterns, he does not find this conclusive (1994: 240).

[15] Six passages in PI lead Garver to believe that Wittgenstein thought of forms of life in connection with the facts of natural history, and that he meant to distinguish our form of life from the canine, bovine, piscine, reptilian, feline, leonine, etc. (1994: 258; 240).

[16] I do not, in any case, see how the former could be severed from the latter: how we could speak of the common behaviour of mankind without involving the world which conditions and embeds this behaviour. I therefore agree with Gertrude Conway's characterisation of the human form of life as "the shared ways in which humans exist and act and the natural conditions in which they live" (1989: 58); "There appears to be a certain constancy within the external world and the human way of being that allows for a characteristically human form of life, as distinct from the form of life of other beings' (1989: 58-9).

reading is that his recognizing language as determinant of the human form of life requires recognizing precisely that component to the idea of form of life which he denies: a cultural component.

For Garver, "[t]he identification of forms of life with life-style or cultures has no basis whatsoever in the text, and is particularly antithetical to Wittgenstein's thought" (1994: 266). For Baker and Hacker, however, the opposite is true:

> [Wittgenstein's] concept of a form of life is not primarily biological, but cultural.There is no uniquely human form of life, characteristic of the species – rather there are multiple human forms of life, characteristic of different cultures and epochs. (2009b: 221)

2.2 Baker & Hacker: "multiple human forms of life, characteristic of different cultures and epochs"

Where, for Garver, there is only the human form of life, and it is biological; for Baker and Hacker, there is only a plurality of forms of human life, and they are historico-cultural:

> A form of life is a way of living, a pattern of activities, actions, interactions and feelings which are inextricably interwoven with, and partly constituted by, uses of language. It rests upon very general pervasive facts of nature. It includes shared natural and linguistic responses, broad agreement in definitions and judgements, and corresponding behaviour. (2009a: 74)

Where Garver makes room for nonlinguistic forms of life, Baker and Hacker do not. For them, a form of life is uniquely a linguistic way of living. This then categorically excludes nonhuman forms of life from the concept's extension.

Although they note that the term is sometimes used by Wittgenstein to converge on a more biological notion (2009a: 74), Baker and Hacker set about minimizing the importance of the biological; and they do this by first pointing out – and rightly so – that "'facts of human natural history' are not prior to all conventions" (2009b: 220). In other words, not everything Wittgenstein calls natural is biological:

> Looking in the direction pointed at, crying out in pain, laughing when amused, etc. *are* **biologically** natural. Continuing the series of natural

numbers '1001, 1002, 1003, … 100,001, 100,002, 100,003, …' is "**culturally natural**" as it were. It is natural *for us* [after elementary training], but not for all people at all times and places (LFM 243). (2009b: 220)

Of course, they are right: what Wittgenstein calls 'natural' is indeed not uniformly biological; a lot of our 'natural' behavior is 'second nature' – what Baker and Hacker call 'culturally natural'. This is behaviour that is acquired and has become, through training, automatic or reflex-like.

What is perplexing about Baker and Hacker's view, however, is that the possibility that Wittgenstein's notion of form of life is not primarily biological should lead them to conclude that there is no unique *human* form of life. Baker and Hacker's point is well-taken: much of our *nature* is *second* nature; however, we must distinguish between the second nature *we all share* which is part and parcel of the single human form of life (e.g., the acquisition of language); and the second nature *we do not all share*, which belongs to the multiple forms of human life, characteristic of different cultures and epochs. Baker and Hacker's relativist/narrow account of 'form of life' is only part of the story. I will come back to this.

Also in the cultural camp, H.-J. Glock defines Wittgenstein's notion of 'form of life' as "a culture or social formation, the totality of communal activities into which language-games are embedded" (1996: 125). This, again, fails to take into account those primitive forms of life, alluded to by Wittgenstein, that have no language and do not therefore belong to what he calls our "complicated form of life", implying that there are simpler forms of life:

> We have an idea of which forms of life are primitive, and which could only have developed out of these. We believe that the simplest plough existed before the complicated one. (CE 397)

Here, Wittgenstein is suggesting that our 'complicated' form of life can only have developed from a more primitive, i.e. language-less, form of life – and this is also the point of his often-reiterated claim that "in the beginning is the deed": "Language… is a refinement"

(CE 395) 17 – the claim having ontogenetic, phylogenetic and logical application in Wittgenstein's corpus.

It should be pointed out here that it is unclear whether Wittgenstein would agree with making language the defining trait of the human.[18] When he speaks of natural reactions as precursors of language, he speaks of human beings as the subjects of these reactions. For instance:

> Being sure that someone is in pain, doubting whether he is, and so on, are so many natural, instinctive kinds of behaviour towards other human beings, and our language is *merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of,* this relation. Our language-game is an extension of primitive behaviour. (Z 545; my emphasis).

And the prelinguistic, primitive creature or animal that Wittgenstein refers to in the following passage is unquestionably human:

> I want to regard **man** here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination. (OC 475; my emphasis)

I think that what Baker and Hacker may be trying to preclude in their rejection of a human form of life is the idea of an exclusively biological form of life to which a cultural layer would then be added. Precisely the kind of error Merleau-Ponty warns us against (albeit in transcendental terms) in the *Phenomenology of Perception*:

> It is impossible to superimpose on man a lower layer of behaviour which one chooses to call 'natural', followed by a manufactured cultural or spiritual world. Everything is both manufactured and natural in man, as it were, in the sense that there is not a word, not a

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[17] "The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language – I want to say – is a refinement. 'In the beginning was the deed.'" (CE 395 – CV p. 31).

[18] Does language require or produce a culture? I first thought that the emergence of language required *social* and physiological conditions, with the presence of language being what enables the emergence of *culture* (as Cavell suggests, they go hand in hand); but as Wittgenstein suggests, and Canfield makes clear: 'language develops out of an earlier set of proto-*customs*' (2007: 73; my emphasis). And so it would seem that language requires at least a basic *culture*, and of course, generates more complicated ones. More on this in the next section.

> form of behaviour which does not owe something to purely biological being – and which at the same time does not elude the simplicity of animal life, and cause forms of vital behaviour to deviate from their pre-ordained direction, through a sort of *leakage* and through a genius for ambiguity which might serve to define man. (1962: 220)

This finely dovetails with what Cavell describes as "the mutual absorption of the natural and the social" (1996: 330); and I don't see that this mutual absorption is in any way excluded from the idea of *the* human form of life: the human form of life need not mean a biological-only form of life.

My objection to the Garver, and Baker and Hacker, camps is not so much in their description of the form of life they endorse, as in the exclusiveness claimed. Stanley Cavell rightly understands Wittgenstein as perceiving "the human as irreducibly social and natural" (Cavell 1996: 353) – as a "cultural animal" – but, unlike Baker and Hacker, puts equal emphasis on *both* terms of that expression. In favouring the cultural, Baker and Hacker fail to do justice to the idea of a *human* form of life; a form of life that is to be distinguished from nonhuman forms of life, and what it is about that form of life that calls for it to be so distinguished. It is at *that* level that relativism has no grip.

3 The cultural animal

We are all agreed: the distinguishing feature of the human form of life is that it is the form of life of a cultural animal. That is, says Cavell, a talking animal: "Wittgenstein gives a name for something to call the human form of life; he calls it, more or less, talking" (1996: 332). As mentioned earlier, Wittgenstein seems to acknowledge the existence of *pre*linguistic humans [19] phylogenetically as well as ontogenetically; however, for our purposes here, we can allow that what *grosso modo* distinguishes the human from other animals is language, and that culture is not

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[19] "Our language-game is an extension of primitive behaviour" (Z 545); "The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language – I want to say – is a refinement" (CE 395 – CV p. 31); "I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state." (OC 475).

something that emerges after language gets on the scene. Culture and language go hand in hand, and they are part and parcel of the human form of life: there is no pre-cultural human form of life; culture is internally related to the *human animal*. The human form of life is fundamentally socio-cultural.[20]

Pascal was right: "Custom is our nature" (*Pensées*). John Canfield speaks of "universal customs":[21]

> If language is a set of customs in which words play a role, and if language develops out of an earlier set of proto-customs, then it seems plausible to suppose that certain customs are to be found in every human society. The hypothesis is, in particular, that every extant or historically known human culture has language-games of greeting, requesting, responding to requests, refusing, responding to prohibitions, make-believe, intention-utterance, responding to intention-utterance, and possession-claiming. Across the vast differences between the various human cultures, one finds those customs, and others, as a common factor. (2007: 73)

And so 'the common behaviour of mankind' includes socio-cultural behaviour. There is a human form of life, and it is characterized by these 'universal customs'.

What *is*, however, a modification of culture in this basic sense are particular languages, which imply particular cultures. When Cavell writes: "To imagine *a* language means to imagine a modified form of talking life" (1996: 333; italics in the original), he is making a conceptual distinction between language being internally linked to form of life, and a particular language being internally linked to a particular form of life. So that we cannot imagine a language without imagining a form of life, but to imagine Italian means to imagine a modified form of talking life; that is, a *specific* form of human life.

There is then a basic as well as a more sophisticated – or modified – notion of culture, and the former characterises the

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[20] This is what distinguishes it from the nonhuman animal form of life, which can at most be social. Cavell: "Spengler's vision of Culture as a kind of Nature ... seems to me shared, if modified, in the *Investigations*" (1996a: 337).

[21] The term 'universal', here as elsewhere in this paper, pertains to our human form of life, and not to all possible worlds.

human form of life. Basic socio-cultural activities such as playing, helping, fighting, dancing; and socio-cultural relations, such as parenthood, community, leadership are shared by humans universally; but as we evolved from proto-linguistic into linguistic forms of communication, different languages embedded in specific cultural norms and values emerged.

That, *contra* Baker and Hacker, Wittgenstein did envisage a 'uniquely human form of life characteristic of the species' stands out most prominently in his reference to 'the common behaviour of mankind'. The basic, "regular ways of acting" (CE 397)) shared by all human beings are not behaviours that demarcate persons or communities from each other, but behaviours which, if absent, would alter what it means to be a human being. Wittgenstein repeatedly mentions such shared behaviours; for example:

> […] you say to someone 'This is red' (pointing); then you tell him 'Fetch me a red book' – and he will behave in a particular way. This is **an immensely important fact about us human beings. And it goes together will all sorts of other facts of equal importance**, like the fact that in all the languages we know, the meanings of words don't change with the days of the week.

> Another such fact is that pointing is used and understood in a particular way – that people react to it in a particular way. (LFM 182)

Or again, were we to meet a tribe of people brought up from early youth to give no expression of feeling *of any kind*, we could not see these people as human beings: "These men would have nothing human about them" (Z 390). The human form of life would by definition include behaviours such as these, as well as breathing, eating, walking, hoping, dying but also speaking, thinking, giving orders, asking questions, telling stories, having a chat. It is this common behaviour that constitutes the universal "system of reference" which conditions what might be called, though in obvious contrast to Chomsky, the "universal grammar" of mankind – that grammar by means of which any human being can

understand a foreign language.[22] This 'common behavior' includes what Wittgenstein called 'patterns of life'.

4. Forms of life are not 'patterns of life'

'Patterns of life' is an expression which has been deemed synonymous with 'forms of life'. In fact, Stefan Majetschak argues that it should replace 'forms of life' so as to discourage the ontological and cultural importance usually attributed to the term *Lebensform*.[23] I don't agree. Wittgenstein may have used the term 'pattern of life' in ways that overlap with his use of 'form of life' on a couple of occasions, but his predominant and salient use of 'pattern of life' cannot be confused with 'form of life'. It refers to the regularly recurring behavioural gestures or facial and verbal expressions that characterize our psychological expressions, such as of hope, pretence, grief or pain. Here are examples of Wittgenstein's use:

> 'Grief' describes a **pattern** which recurs, with different variations, in the weave of our life. If a man's bodily expression of sorrow and of joy alternated, say with the ticking of a clock, here we should not have the characteristic formation of the **pattern** of sorrow or of the pattern of joy. (PI, p. 174)

> For pretence is a (certain) **pattern** within the weave of life. It is repeated in an infinite number of variations.

> A dog can't pretend to be in pain, because his life is too simple for that. It doesn't have the joints necessary for such movements. (LW I, 862)

> Someone smiles and his further reactions fit neither a genuine nor a simulated joy. We might say 'I don't know my way around with him. It is neither the picture (**pattern**) of genuine nor of pretended joy.' (LW II, 61)

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[22] See Moyal-Sharrock "Universal Grammar: Wittgenstein versus Chomsky" (Forthcoming).

[23] Joachim Schulte also concludes, though not on the same basis, that in most cases Wittgenstein meant by form of life something closer to 'patterns of life' (*Lebensmuster*), or even 'stencil of life' (*Lebensschablone*): "A form of life, thus understood, would be a form, a shape, a pattern that life assumes under certain conditions" (2010: 138).

> Seeing life as a weave, this **pattern** (pretence, say) is not always complete and is varied in a multiplicity of ways. But we, in our conceptual world, keep on seeing the same, recurring with variations. That is how our concepts take it. For concepts are not for use on a single occasion. (Z 568)

> And one **pattern in the weave** is interwoven with many others. (Z 569)

'Patterns of life' clearly refer to recurring – mostly behavioral and facial, but also verbal – expressions characteristic of psychological concepts. There is not only one, or even a handful of 'occasions' that we might call 'grief', but innumerable ones that are interwoven with a thousand other patterns (cf. LW I, 966). And this is so for *all* our psychological concepts, because the "natural foundation" for the way they are formed "is the complex nature and the variety of human contingencies" (RPP II, 614). As a result the concepts themselves lack determinacy and have a kind of elasticity. But where most philosophers attempt to tame or reduce the indeterminacy, Wittgenstein wants to capture it: "I do not want to reduce unsharpness to sharpness; but to capture unsharpness conceptually" (MS 1367, 64). Yet this unsharpness does not mean that our concepts are so elastic as to lack a hard core, or what Michel ter Hark calls "a solid centre of meaning" (1990: 153). Indeed Wittgenstein's depiction of psychological indeterminacy is everywhere bounded not by rules, but by certain *regularities*: an order or pattern emerges from obstinate, though constantly varied, repetition; the evidence has telltale *characteristics*, our feelings and behaviours are informed by *typical physiognomies*. Also, it is "important for the concept" that "there are simple and more complicated cases" (LWI, 967), for it is the simple cases that give the concept its solid centre, its unambiguous core. Though the margin is elastic, though "[s]ufficient evidence passes over into insufficient without a borderline" (RPP II, 614), there is a core of sufficient evidence provided by the simple cases: "There is an *unmistakable* expression of joy and its opposite" (LW II, 32; emphasis in the original).

5. Language-games are not 'forms of life'

Before concluding, I will briefly address the view that forms of life are synonymous, or quasi-synonymous, with language or language-games. It is due, I believe, to a misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's remark that "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (PI 19). The view is discredited by most commentators,[24] but not all. Marie McGinn appears to hold it. Though she rightly speaks of language as "woven in with the countless activities that make up our 'form of life'" 25 (1997: 61), she also speaks of Wittgenstein's "idea of language as a form of life", and of "[g]iving orders, making reports, describing a scene, telling a story, and so on" as "particular forms of life" (1997: 54; 129). Wittgenstein is clear, however, that language is *not* a form of life but *part* of a form of life: "… the word 'language-*game*' is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is **part of an activity, or of a form of life**" (PI 23).

When Wittgenstein writes that "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life", he does not mean to equate both, but to suggest that language is logically connected to a form of life: there can be no language without a form of life from which it can spring, and which provides the necessary context for expressing meaning.[26] As Cavell puts it: "When a form of life can no longer be imagined, its language can no longer be understood" (1969: 172). And he goes on:

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[24] See esp. Garver "the correlation between *Sprachspiel* and *Lebensform* is many to one rather than one to one. Each language-game does constitute or determine a special form, namely, a form of activity or of behavior, not a form of life. Along with the activity or behavior the language-game presupposes a form of life of which it is (…) a proper part" (1994: 246).

[25] And just as rightly: "Coming to share the form of life of a group of individual human beings means mastering **the** intricate **language-games that, in part at least, constitute it**" (1997: 55).

[26] What Cavell writes regarding the language of tonality – that it is "**part of** a particular form of life, one containing the music we are familiar with; associated with, or consisting of, particular ways of being trained to perform it and to listen to it; involving particular ways of being corrected, particular ways of responding to mistakes" (1969: 84) – can be said of the language of style, of literature, of pain, of love. All of these languages or language-games are *parts* of forms of life – either specific forms of life or, for pain or love, the one human form of life, but they *are not* forms of life.

> ... 'speaking religiously' ... is to speak from a particular perspective, as it were to mean anything you say in a special way. To understand ... an utterance religiously you have to be able to share its perspective. ... The religious ... should be thought of as a Wittgensteinian form of life. (1969: 172)

The religious (being religious) is a form of life, but speaking religiously is not; speaking religiously is speaking from the perspective of a religious form of life. This is not to say that we must *belong* to a form of human life in order to understand it, but it does mean that we must be able to share its perspective.

If our language-games are conditioned by our form(s) of life, it cannot be that language-games *are* forms of life. The meaning of an utterance is embedded in its uses; uses are embedded in language-games; and language-games are in turn embedded in the human form of life and the different forms of human life. If I say: "Don't cry", the meaning of that sentence is conditioned by our *human* form of life – by one of those 'extremely general facts of nature', such as human beings sometimes cry; but it acquires a more pointed meaning from the particular language-game in which it is uttered (e.g., that of compassion or that of machismo), which is conditioned by the various forms of human life: in some cultures, it is the norm to comfort a grieving person by asking her not to cry; and in some cultures, it is not acceptable for men to cry. In the first case, the sentence has a consolatory use; in the latter, a prescriptive one.

"If a lion could talk, we wouldn't be able to understand it" (PPF 327) – this is because, as Roy Harris nicely puts it "language has no segregated existence; words are always embedded in a form of life" (1988: 113). When he writes that "[t]o imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" – Wittgenstein makes it *sine qua non* that form of life be the given from which languages can emerge. And so, the ultimate given that has to be accepted is a form of life. It is *that* given which conditions – not grounds or justifies, but *conditions* – our certainties and world pictures, as well as our language-games. Conflating form of life with language or language-games or certainties or patterns of life would have the disastrous effect of

losing the conceptual usefulness, originality and force of each of these terms.

6. The stopping-place of relativism

As we saw, language and culture are intrinsic characteristics of the human form of life. And the fact that human beings are necessarily historico-culturally situated makes them necessary participants in various forms of human life. Now it may be objected that since there can be no *de facto* separation of the human form of life from the innumerable cultural forms of life, why bother distinguishing it conceptually? Well, for one thing, the distinction serves to mark differences between the human form of life and nonhuman forms of life, [27] but more importantly, it marks the stopping-place of relativism.

Whereas there can be countless forms of human life, there can only be *one* human form of life, a form of life which collectively characterizes all of 'mankind'. Wittgenstein makes clear he has this understanding of form of life in mind when he writes that "[t]he common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (PI 206, Anscombe translation). By this, he means that it is this universally-shared human behaviour, to which patterns of life and language-games belong, that constitutes the bedrock from which *any* human being can begin to understand another human being, and from which any human being *must* begin to make sense. This precludes a thoroughgoing relativism. There is multiplicity, yes, but within a fundamental unity.

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[27] Oswald Hanfling concurs: Although Wittgenstein nowhere uses the phrase 'the human form of life', what should we make, he asks, "of the tantalizing remark at PI, p. 223, that 'if a lion could talk, we could not understand him'? Perhaps this is an expression of the *difference* between the human form of life and those of non-human animals. In that case 'human form of life' would have to be understood in a narrower sense than that just considered [by Hanfling in the chapter at hand]: the point would be to draw attention to the difference between our form of life and that of animals, as opposed to what they have in common. But there is no inconsistency here." (2002: 5)

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