



LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN'S CONCEPT OF THE FORM OF LIFE

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Abstract. This article examines the concept of “forms of life” in the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, focusing on its theoretical significance within his later works, particularly *Philosophical Investigations*. The study analyzes the role of forms of life as the foundational background that makes language, meaning, and understanding possible. It argues that Wittgenstein’s notion of forms of life reflects a shift from abstract and formal accounts of meaning toward a socially embedded and practice-oriented perspective.

The research explores how forms of life function as a framework for language-games, shaping the rules, norms, and contexts in which linguistic expressions acquire meaning. Special attention is given to the interdependence between language and human activities, demonstrating that meaning is inseparable from the shared practices and cultural patterns of a community. The article also highlights the anti-essentialist and anti-metaphysical character of this concept, emphasizing its role in overcoming traditional dualisms such as subject–object and individual–society.

Keywords: Forms of life, language-games, meaning, social practices, rule-following, Wittgenstein, philosophy of language, normativity, communication, cultural context.

Introduction. The concept of “forms of life” occupies a central place in the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and represents one of the most significant shifts in twentieth-century philosophy of language. This notion reflects a move away from abstract, formal, and purely logical interpretations of meaning toward an understanding grounded in lived human practices, social interactions, and cultural contexts. In this perspective, language is no longer treated as an isolated system of signs, but as an integral part of human activity, inseparable from the ways individuals live, act, and relate to one another.

The relevance of studying Wittgenstein’s concept of forms of life lies in its capacity to address fundamental philosophical questions concerning the nature of meaning, understanding, and communication. In contemporary philosophical discourse, particularly within social philosophy and philosophical anthropology, there is a growing recognition that meaning cannot be fully explained without reference to shared human practices. Wittgenstein’s approach provides a non-metaphysical framework for analyzing these issues, emphasizing the practical and communal foundations of language.

Despite the extensive scholarship devoted to Wittgenstein’s philosophy, the concept of forms of life remains open to multiple interpretations and continues to generate debate. Some scholars interpret it as a cultural-historical background of linguistic practices, while others emphasize its normative or even anthropological dimensions. This diversity of interpretations



indicates the theoretical richness of the concept, but also points to the need for a more systematic and comprehensive analysis.

The aim of this article is to examine the essence and philosophical significance of the concept of forms of life in Wittgenstein's later thought. The study seeks to clarify its relationship with key notions such as language-games, rule-following, and meaning, as well as to determine its role in shaping a socially grounded theory of language. To achieve this aim, the research employs hermeneutic and conceptual analysis, allowing for a detailed interpretation of Wittgenstein's texts and their broader implications.

The concept of "forms of life" in the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein has attracted sustained attention in twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophical scholarship, particularly within the fields of philosophy of language, social theory, and philosophical anthropology. Despite this attention, the notion remains conceptually open and subject to diverse interpretations. In many studies, it is not treated as an isolated category but rather examined in connection with key elements of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, such as language-games, rule-following, and the critique of private language.

Early interpretations by scholars such as G. E. M. Anscombe and Norman Malcolm emphasized the anti-metaphysical orientation of Wittgenstein's thought, focusing on the everyday use of language and the rejection of essentialist theories of meaning. Within this framework, the concept of forms of life was understood as the implicit background of linguistic activity, though not always explicitly theorized. These contributions established the groundwork for viewing meaning as a function of shared human practices rather than as a purely mental or abstract phenomenon.

Subsequent developments in Wittgensteinian studies introduced more differentiated approaches. The works of Peter Winch highlighted the social and cultural dimensions of understanding, interpreting forms of life as the basis for meaningful action within a community. At the same time, Saul Kripke's analysis of rule-following brought attention to the normative and potentially skeptical aspects of meaning, indirectly reinforcing the importance of communal agreement embedded in forms of life. These perspectives contributed to a broader recognition of the concept as central to the social grounding of language.

In addition, comparative analyses involving Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger provide a wider philosophical context. While Husserl's phenomenology approaches intersubjectivity through transcendental structures and Heidegger emphasizes being-in-the-world as a shared existential condition, Wittgenstein's concept of forms of life offers a non-transcendental and practice-oriented alternative. This distinction underscores the originality of Wittgenstein's approach and its relevance for contemporary debates.

At the same time, modern interpretations increasingly view forms of life as encompassing not only linguistic practices but also broader socio-cultural, historical, and normative frameworks. However, the absence of a unified definition and the plurality of methodological perspectives indicate the need for a systematic analysis that integrates these dimensions into a coherent conceptual structure.

From a methodological standpoint, this study is based on a combination of hermeneutic, conceptual, and comparative approaches. The hermeneutic method is employed to interpret Wittgenstein's primary texts, particularly *Philosophical Investigations*, with the aim of uncovering the implicit meanings and philosophical implications of the concept of forms of life. Conceptual analysis is used to clarify the relationships between forms of life and related



notions such as language-games, rule-following, and meaning, ensuring terminological precision and analytical rigor.

The comparative method allows for situating Wittgenstein's ideas within the broader history of philosophy by examining similarities and differences with other major philosophical traditions. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the originality and significance of the concept under study.

The analysis of the concept of "forms of life" in the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein demonstrates that it functions as a foundational category underlying his understanding of language, meaning, and human interaction. Although Wittgenstein does not provide a strict definition of this concept, the textual examination of *Philosophical Investigations* reveals that "forms of life" serve as the precondition for the possibility of language-games and, consequently, for meaningful communication.

The study shows that language-games are not autonomous systems governed solely by internal logical rules; rather, they are embedded within broader patterns of human activity. These patterns, referred to as forms of life, include habitual practices, social norms, cultural traditions, and shared ways of acting. As a result, meaning is not determined by abstract structures but emerges within the context of these lived practices. This finding confirms that Wittgenstein's philosophy represents a shift from formalism to a pragmatic and socially grounded account of language.

A key result of the analysis is the identification of the intrinsic connection between forms of life and the normative dimension of language. The concept of rule-following illustrates that understanding a rule presupposes participation in a shared practice where criteria of correctness are publicly accessible. In this sense, forms of life provide the background that stabilizes linguistic norms and enables individuals to coordinate their actions and interpretations. Without such a shared background, the distinction between correct and incorrect use of language would collapse.

Furthermore, the research indicates that forms of life possess a dual character: they are both enabling and limiting. On the one hand, they make communication and understanding possible by establishing a common framework for interaction. On the other hand, they define the boundaries within which meaning can be constituted, thereby restricting the range of possible interpretations. This duality highlights the contextual and historically conditioned nature of meaning, while also explaining its relative stability within a given community.

The analysis also reveals that Wittgenstein's concept of forms of life challenges traditional philosophical dichotomies. By situating meaning within shared practices, it overcomes the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism, as well as between individual and society. In this framework, meaning is neither a private mental entity nor an independent external reality; rather, it is a product of collective human activity. This perspective aligns with contemporary approaches in social theory and philosophical anthropology, which emphasize the socially constructed character of knowledge and understanding.

Additionally, the study demonstrates that forms of life are not static or homogeneous. They evolve over time and vary across different cultural and historical contexts. This dynamic aspect suggests that meaning is also subject to transformation, reflecting changes in social practices and modes of interaction. Nevertheless, despite this variability, forms of life maintain a sufficient degree of coherence to sustain communication and mutual understanding within a community.



Conclusions. The study demonstrates that the concept of “forms of life” occupies a central and foundational role in the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. It functions as the implicit background against which language, meaning, and communication acquire significance. Unlike traditional approaches that treat meaning as a mental or abstract entity, Wittgenstein situates it within shared human practices, highlighting the social, normative, and contextual dimensions of understanding.

The analysis shows that forms of life provide the necessary framework for language-games, enabling coordinated action, rule-following, and mutual comprehension. They integrate the normative and practical aspects of linguistic activity, establishing the conditions under which meaning can emerge and be sustained. At the same time, forms of life reflect the cultural and historical embeddedness of language, demonstrating that understanding is both dynamic and situated within specific communal practices.

Furthermore, Wittgenstein’s concept challenges traditional dichotomies between subject and object, individual and society, and objective and subjective interpretations of meaning. By grounding language and understanding in socially shared practices, he presents a model of meaning as a collectively constituted phenomenon rather than a private or purely formal one.

In conclusion, the research establishes that forms of life are essential for comprehending the interdependent nature of language, human activity, and social norms. This concept not only deepens the understanding of Wittgenstein’s philosophical contribution but also provides a methodological and conceptual basis for contemporary studies in philosophy of language, social theory, and philosophical anthropology.

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