

# Forms of Life as Forms of Culture

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## 1. Forms of Life

In the "Foreword" of the 1977 edition of CV, G. H. von Wright says that notes from "Culture and Value" "...can be properly understood and appreciated only against the background of Wittgenstein's philosophy" (CV: x). Here, we attempt to understand only one note from CV and just one part of the background, namely Wittgenstein's notion of culture from CV: 8-9 and forms of life mainly from PI (as forms of culture). Nevertheless, we will begin with some passages from Wittgenstein's later works and also with a short summary of ways of interpreting them, since there is only a small number of instances where the notion of form of life appears in his works. These are following paragraphs:

Form(s) of life: PI: 19, PI: 23, PI: 241, PI II: 174, RPP I: 49 (see RFM: 95), RPP I: 630, CE: 397, OC: 358

Weave of life: PI II: 174, PI II: 229, Z: 568 (see PI II: 174, 229)

Other expressions: NM, 2001:75, Z: 569, Z: 567, RFM: 335-6, RFM: 95 (Stream of life, pattern in the weave, the whole hurly-burly of human actions, way of living, forms of our culture.) We must note that we do not accept Anscombe's change from "form of life" to "life-form" in the 2001 50th Anniversary edition of PI since it emphasizes too much biology and eo ipso naturalism which is biological rather than anthropological which as such seems to be closer to Wittgenstein).

Primarily, there is a difference in the use of the singular and the plural, i.e. form/forms of life and what seems to be obvious is:

(a) Use of singular when he is writing on one form of life as background for many actions and also linguistic acts (PI: 23, 241, OC: 358, NM, 2001:75, Z: 567),

(b) Use of singular when he is writing on one form of life as a whole of practices of a certain community (PI: 19, PI II: 174, PI II: 174, Z: 569),

(c) Use of plural when he is writing on many forms of life as many practices of a certain community (CE: 397, RFM: 95),

(d) Use of plural when he is writing on many forms of life as different cultures, and also different backgrounds (PI II: 226, commented in Kripke 1982:96-98).

So, misunderstanding is possible regarding the difference between (a) – (b), and (c) – (d), but also regarding the distinction between (a) – (c), and (b) – (d), (on different readings see Garver 1994:244-7, especially regarding PI:19, 23). Now we can consider major interpretations of these passages. PI: 19 speaks in favor of language-games as presupposing forms of life as well as PI: 241 (noted by J. Klagge), but according to PI: 23, "speaking language" is a "part" of the "form of life" as "activity", so we can presuppose that there are some other parts as well and that there is no strict identity (or pure language-game account of forms of life, Garver 1994:246). CE: 397 proposes a different notion, i.e. "growing" (i.e. organic metaphor). PI II: 174 proposes that there is only "one" complex form of life which has certain modes, but PI II: 226 suggests that there are

many forms of life, and that they are given. These and related interpretations are sometimes confused as well as Wittgenstein's own lines, for example PI II: 226 where there is no way to decide whether he gives emphasis to social or natural (biological) understanding (Cavell 1989:42). Furthermore, there is no real difference between behavioral and biological interpretations (Hunter 1986). S. Cavell in his "The Claim of Reason" emphasized the distinction between "forms" of life, and forms of "life" (life forms) and also the second interpretation (biological), but he nevertheless changed his explication in support of the first interpretation (cultural), (Cavell 1979:83, 1989:40-41). Nonetheless, Cavell's suggestion is to merge natural (biological) and social accounts into one, furthermore, that "form of life" in fact "is" such a combination (Cavell 1989:44, referring to PI II: 174). To conclude this part we can say that we here have several, somewhat competing, interpretations of form(s) of life concept:

(a) Language-game account (von Wright, Schulte, Baker/Hacker) PI: 19, 23, RPP I: 630 Language games are interwoven with nonlinguistic activities. (Glock 1997)

(b) Social account, the way of life account, (Bloor, Cavell 1989) PI: 19 Identity between forms of life and ways of life. (Combined with biological, Cavell 1989:44)

(c) Cultural account, anthropological, conceptual relativism (Cavell 1989, Glock 1997) BB: 134, RFM: 95, culturally-natural account (Backer/Hacker 1995) Differentiation between forms of life and other cultural phenomena, ((b), and (c) is rather difficult to distinguish.

(d) Behavior-package account (Quine, Kripke 2002:96-98, Hunter) PI II: 226, RPP I: 630 Identity between forms of life and patterns of behavior. (Objection in Glock 1997:125-6)

(e) Organic, biological account (Cavell 1979, Hunter, combination of organic and cultural in Simpson 1998, for objections to Hunter see Garver 1994:241, objections 1-3) TLP 4.002, PI: 185, 206, 230 Identity between forms of life and biological conditions of human being (it must be noted that some authors identify only 4 or even 3 interpretations, so these mentioned interpretations can be reduced).

## 2. Forms of Life as Forms of Culture

Without further reference to other interpretations we will attempt to make understandable the cultural account, vis-à-vis the very phenomenon of culture. It seems that Wittgenstein used a whole family of resembling concepts such as actions, institutions, practices, routines, habits, forms of life, and even culture in an everyday sense (meaning arts, and also skill and technique). Of course, he also used the expression in a more strict philosophical sense, as for instance in CV.

(1) "Culture is like a great organization which assigns to each of its members his place, at which he can work in the spirit of the whole, and his strength can with a certain justice be measured with his success as understood within the whole." (CV: 8-9). However we must differ between Wittgenstein's notions of culture and civilization

since contemporary civilization, in Wittgenstein's opinion, lacks culture – noted by N. Garver.

Here, it seems that we have “culture” as a whole, as a “background”, as something given “which assigns place”, and on the other hand “culture” that is “constituted” by the success of its members. But, is there any kind of relevant confirmation of such an idea of culture in Wittgenstein's writings regarding form(s) of life? Now, regarding PI: 7, 19, i.e. equation of language-games with forms of life, we must mention that language is:

(2) in BB: 134 “equated with culture” (Glock 1998:125),

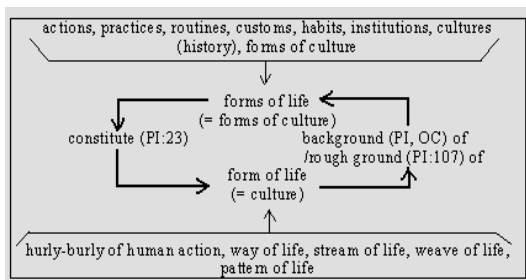
(3) in RFM: 95 with the “forms of culture” and in (RFM:335-6) with a “way of living”. So, if language-games are in the same relation to forms of life as well as to culture, forms of culture, and perhaps way of living, then forms of life are forms of culture.

That language activity is an important part of cultural activities seems to be an underlying idea which connects language-game account and cultural account. So, form of life has parts and is constituted by them. These parts are language-games, actions, practices, institutions, etc. Now, it seems promising to recognize many of his culture-concepts in a way that they form a bundle of resembling notions ordered to create a certain overview / perspicuous presentation i.e. from particular and more individual to universal and more social.

(4) These whatever “different forms” of life that, as Glock suggested (1997: 125),

(5) constitute “one form” of life that can be understood as culture in the sense mentioned previously (CV: 8-9, our suggestion). And this “constituted form” of life (or constructed) is explicated with the amount of related notions i.e. phenomena. Constituted “form” of life is at the same time a kind of background (culture) and a whole of many different given “forms” of life. Many different “forms of life” (actions, practices ...) can be understood only against one “form of life” as a background or a whole (way of life, stream of life ...), but this “form of life” is (as organization) constituted out of these “forms of life”.

For example, to describe a certain action (one among many “forms of life”) like ordering, or hoping, or a child's learning to brush his or her teeth, one needs a background from which the process of teaching and learning (in fact acquiring a form of life) is possible, and this background is one “form of life” as culture.



So, “form” of life is a culture, i.e. totality of communal activities in which, among other activities the language-game is embedded, or we can see it as a kind of background, which has to be accepted, the given (PI II 226).

(6) Linguistic and nonlinguistic actions are many “forms” of life and these constitute “form” of life as a culture,

(7) culture, which is at the same time a background on which these “forms” of life can be understood (i.e. learned, practiced, changed, and replaced), cannot be changed and if it can, then only without the possibility of far-reaching changes in worldview, language, and culture (form of this change may be suggested in OC: 95-99).

Regardless of the change, a certain form of life nevertheless can be steady or not (regular activity, CE: 397). So, routines for instance, as steady and regular actions are maybe also a form of life concept. Furthermore, this idea that the language-game or linguistic activity makes sense only within the background of a form of life, as the idea that forms of life are, as it were, foundations for language-games, has two interpretations, i.e. transcendental and naturalistic.

(8) According to the first, “forms of life as communal practices” are preconditions of language-games (see previously from (a) to (e), especially (a)), “My idea is that this mutual absorption of the natural and the social is a consequence of Wittgenstein's envisioning of what we may as well call the human form of life.” (...) “We might perhaps be ready to say that culture as a whole is the work of our life of language, it goes with language...” (Cavell 1989:44, 48),

(9) and, according to the second, “form of life as inflexible biological human nature” rigidly determines how we act and react. (Glock 1997:125-126, Simpson 1989, second interpretation supported by PI: 415, OC: 357-360 commented and criticized in Baker, Hacker 1995:241, see also previously (e))

Some argue that there is a third interpretation in which “natural” is important, although not as in naturalistic interpretations, but rather as in the cultural anthropological interpretation, like in Garver, and in Baker and Hacker (see (c)):

(10) The basic idea of cultural naturalism seems to be the following: “From the point of view of natural history, however, there is just one common form of life for all humans.” (natural history as general fact, Garver 1994:260, 267 and our proposition 7), (a) Natural is not uniformly biological. (b) Natural is not necessary. (c) Natural is anthropological. (d) If (a – c), and if Wittgenstein's conception of human nature is not biological, then natural is cultural, and his concept of form of life is not biological, but cultural. (Baker, Hacker 1995:239-241) or like in Glock: “However, Wittgenstein's naturalism is anthropological rather than biological. Ordering, questioning ... (PI: 25). These activities, as well as those already quoted [RPP I: 630], are cultural activities, forms of social interaction.” (Glock 1997: 126)

So, this interpretation (10) is in fact “form of life contextualism” and it seems in this context to be “culture”. This context of culture applies to linguistic and nonlinguistic activities, practices, routines, customs, and institutions (PI: 199, 337, Bloor, 1996).

(11) Culture as the background of action, and even more as the surroundings of actions, gives sense (meaning, background, rough ground) to these same actions as “ours”, meaning that they are part of our culture (this is what Cavell means by “everydayness as home”, see also PI 206, Z 567-9); as Baker and Hacker put it: “In short, the natural history of man is the history of a convention-forming, concept-forming, language-using animal – a cultural animal. (Baker, Hacker 1995:240-241)

So there is no paradox (of not knowing the criterion of “cultural” without knowing an “instance of culture”, and vice versa), rather, when a child learns a certain practice (certain form of life) it becomes familiar with it, or it bumps into the whole of culture (form of life). A completely different question and maybe more a interesting one is – in what way are these cultural phenomena in fact, form of life phenomena, such as these patterns, forms, and weaves of life? So, is it possible to interpret these phenomena and concepts as, surely not metaphysical, but nevertheless ontological? And what kind of ontology would it be? Would it be a kind of cultural ontology or ontology of culture?<sup>†</sup>

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