



## Form of Life: A Foundational Concept for Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy

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### Abstract

“Form of life” is considered one of the most significant concepts in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. This term is one of his most ambiguous philosophical concepts. This paper tries to explain the specific and fundamental role of “form of life” as a cornerstone for the whole of Wittgenstein's later philosophy; a role that has not attracted much attention in Wittgenstein scholarship. From the author's perspective, describing the form of life as a condition for the possibility of language can put an end to some of the challenges in Wittgenstein's later philosophy such as Behavioralism, being trapped in general linguistic relativity and the reduction of all reality to linguistic principles. This study attempts to prove the fundamental role of this concept by studying Wittgenstein's later position toward philosophical explanation in general and pictorial theory of language in particular, and by analyzing in detail the concept of form of life in his later works. Finally, the authors will provide a possible fifth path entitled “Phenomenological Interpretation” through a critical analysis of the four existing interpretations on the concept of form of life.



### Keywords

Form of life, Language, Foundationalism, Later Wittgenstein.

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## Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) is undoubtedly one of the most influential and at the same time one of the most controversial philosophers of our modern world, whose earlier and later philosophy has had a deep influence on Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition. On the other hand, the great minds of the continental tradition have been attracted to his existential concerns. Hence, emerges the question of the possibility of the confluence that the analytical and continental traditions based on Wittgenstein's later philosophy can have. This essay tries to find a way to answer this question while posing two others: is it possible to recognize later Wittgenstein as a Foundationalist philosopher? If so, what is that foundation?

## Summary

In the present essay, we strive to analyze the concept of “Forms of Life” in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. The authors of this essay try to arouse attention to this concept that has an infrastructural position in his philosophy. Although the concept of “Forms of life” has been discussed frequently by the contemporary philosophers; such as J. F. Hunter who gives a quadruple interpretation of this concept (Hunter, J. F. M, 1968). The authors believe that most of the researches regarding Forms of Life (in Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations), attend to the functional role of this concept and demonstrate its use in several domains like religion, culture and other language games, but none of them has talked about the infrastructural role of this concept as the cornerstone of the Wittgenstein' later philosophy. On account of the background of our discussion, we can point out these researches:

Humphries, Carl (2017): Wittgenstein, Culture and Forms of Life; Sherry, Patrick (1972): Is Religion a Form of Life; Sahviro, Steven (Winter-Spring, 1986): From Language to Forms of Life, Theory and Practice in Wittgenstein; Reece, Gregory L. (June 2006): Language Games, Form of Life and Conceptual Schemes

The present research includes two independent parts. We try, by demonstrating the special rank that later Wittgenstein gives to the ordinary and common language in opposition to any technical and artificial philosophical- logical language, to open the way to analyze the critical position of the concept of Forms of Life in his later philosophy. It seems that his special emphasis on the common language rank has roots in his position against what he calls “philosophical explanation.” We will see that this kind of discussion regarding common language, leads to his position against his

earlier philosophy and especially to criticizing the "picture theory of language" as an example of philosophical explanation. Wittgenstein's opposition against philosophical explanation has a binary aspect; because according to him, first of all, the functions of language are not reducible to a single theory and can always lead to several roads, and secondly, the explanations must reach to an end anyway. One of Wittgenstein's basic theories, in order to replace the "philosophical description" with the philosophical explanation, is by believing that "everything is obvious and visible." According to this belief, there cannot be any sort of explanation and conclusion in philosophy, as if this later is a declaration of all that is already obvious. As we will see in the second part of this essay, this basis is rooted directly in Wittgenstein's perception of the concept of "Form of Life." On the other hand, his positioning against the picture theory of language is presented by the emphasis on the common language. This theory intended to demonstrate that there should be a state of the "real" relating to each part of speech (proposition, phrase, noun, and word), where each part is its picture. According to Wittgenstein, this theory reduces all aspects of our lingual activity to a single unit, while the meaning of lingual propositions is in their multiple functions in common language which is derived directly from the form of life.

In the second part, we will do a detailed analysis of the concept of "Form of Life" and its basic position in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. This concept is to replace, according to the later Wittgenstein, more basic and deeper explanations of other philosophers (metaphysical or material and reductive) facing the phenomenon. He believes that every question concerning language leads to form of life and there is no need for further explanation and basically, the possibility of these explanations is denied. Therefore, the concept of form of life is the most "foundational" condition for the realization of language. According to Wittgenstein's quintet references that he gives to the concept of form of life in his later philosophy, this concept has three key properties: the first is that the form of life concept is more common than that of language itself or its language-games. The second, that every tautology or contradiction, every divergence in beliefs, skepticism and other primary forms of language-games are themselves subordinates of a primitive agreement on the triviality of form of life. And finally, that this concept is the basis of each and every explanation and is itself beyond the "explainable" and the "unexplainable."

At the end of the following essay, the authors criticize Hunter's quadruple interpretation of form of life by suggesting a fifth interpretation, titled "phenomenological perception of form of life." According to this interpretation, form of life is a domain of primitive triviality from which all of humankind's

life-forms and their achievements including the language takes roots. Form of life, on which depend all relative concepts e.g. multiple language-games, is itself absolute and a priori. In other words, it is the only concept that determines “the meaning of every speech concerning the world.”

### Main References

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