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Is an Artificial Form of Life Possible?

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Abstract This article reassesses the question of whether an artificial form of life is possible. It does so by engaging critically with Sebastian Sunday Grève's Wittgensteinian defense of AI against the biological objection. While largely endorsing Sunday Grève's conclusion that biological life is not a prerequisite for participation in the human form of life, I argue that his account rests on an insufficiently elaborated understanding of the latter concept. Drawing on Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following, the notion of form of life is reinterpreted not as a mere pattern of activity, but as the background of blind, noninterpretative rule-following that makes language-games possible. On this basis, "mindedness" is reframed as an attitude to be acknowledged, rather than a property to be acquired; specifically, as what Wittgenstein calls an "attitude towards a soul". This framework allows a more nuanced assessment of animals, humanoid robots, and contemporary large language models. I argue that only agents capable of blind rule-following can participate in the human form of life. There is no a priori reason that nonhuman animals or artificial systems must be excluded from this participation. At present, however, there is no evidence that they engage in the human form of life.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, form of life, artificial intelligence, rule-following, large language models

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0. Introduction

This essay is intended as a reply to Sebastian Sunday Grève's article *Artificial Forms of Life* (2023). Sunday Grève utilizes Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of "form of life" to dismiss the biological objection against AI, according to which intelligence requires being alive in a biological sense[1]. Then he argues that artificial systems can participate in the human form of life and thus *acquire* human mindedness. I largely agree with these claims. However, I think they should be backed differently within the Wittgensteinian framework. In particular, I shall argue that we need a deeper elaboration of "form of life" that goes beyond Sunday Grève's characterization of it as a mere pattern of activity. Moreover, I reframe the notion of "mindedness" in terms of what Wittgenstein calls «an attitude towards a soul» (Wittgenstein 1953: part II, §22). Mindedness or having a soul is *not* some property one can acquire. Rather, it is an attitude that can be adopted or acknowledged.

[1] Sunday Grève addresses the biological objection also in this article «The Biological Objection against Strong AI» (2025).

Let us begin by looking at how Wittgenstein himself uses the term "form of life". It only occurs at a very few points in his writings, in contrast to the abundance of secondary sources on the topic (I will comment on this contrast in due course). Wittgenstein writes in §19 of his *Philosophical Investigations* that «to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life». A few paragraphs later, we read: «The term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life» (*Ivi*: §23). At the beginning of Part II, we find: «The phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life» (*Ivi*: 174). Besides these three examples, there is one other occurrence of the expression "form of life" in the *Investigations*, which I shall discuss later.

Why does Wittgenstein speak about the *form* of life instead of life itself?[2] The primary purpose of this concept is to provide the foundation for our linguistic activities, which Wittgenstein describes in terms of "language-games". I believe that it is because of this connection to language that he refers to the *formal* aspect of life: the form of life in which language is grounded.

What is meant by "life" here is primarily social and cultural life, rather than biological life. Wittgenstein is not interested in the life of plants, though socialized animals like dogs represent important border cases. However, because the biological basis is not decisive in this case, humanoid robots can also be considered borderline cases. As I shall argue, we can imagine both dogs and robots participating in human social practices to at least some degree.

1. Mindedness/«attitude towards a soul»

Sunday Grève's discussion is framed in terms of "mindedness". As he is not entirely explicit about this concept, I take the liberty of rephrasing it as "having a mind" or "having a soul". Sunday Grève treats "mindedness" as something that can be acquired. I want to argue that, based on Wittgenstein's writings, it is rather something that can be acknowledged. What primarily matters here is someone's *attitude* toward an object or a phenomenon; we can understand this as meaning their social behavior and social interactions. Wittgenstein captures this idea in the following remarks:

> Suppose I say of a friend: "He isn't an automaton"–What information is conveyed by this, and to whom would it be information? To a *human being* who meets him in ordinary circumstances? What information *could* it give him? (At the very most that this man always behaves like a human being, and not occasionally like a machine.) "I believe that he is not an automaton", just like that, so far makes no sense. My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul (Wittgenstein 1953: part II, §20).

These remarks touch very closely on our topic. I, an outside observer, can decide to approach an object with «an attitude towards a soul» (*Ibidem*) as opposed to an attitude toward an automaton. Thus, having a soul or a mind (being minded) is not an internal or external property. Rather, it is a matter of one's attitude.[3] I can adopt this attitude even if there is no observable behavior to support it. I can treat a physical object, such as a doll or a necklace, as if it had a soul. But again, this would be a borderline case. Conversely, I

[2] Sunday Grève does mention that Wittgenstein «deliberately chooses to say "form"» (Sunday Grève 2023: 7). Although he refers to several secondary sources, it is unclear to me what implications he thinks this choice has.

[3] For Aristotle, soul is the form of a living body. For Descartes, it is a substance that exists alongside but separately from a living body. Both approaches take soul to be a property, whether formal or metaphysical.

can suspend this attitude despite observing social behavior. This amounts to treating a human being as an inanimate thing. Sadly, such cases of cruelty or indifference are not uncommon.[4]

Does possessing the form of life *imply* mindedness, as Sunday Grève appears to suggests?[5] I think the answer must be negative because mindedness is not something that can be inferred. The notion of a form of life captures social behavior that can serve as the basis for adopting an «attitude towards a soul» (Wittgenstein 1953: part II, §22). As argued above, this attitude can be suspended. Hence, there is no logical or causal link between the form of life and mindedness other than a person's decision or acknowledgment. However, as we shall see, the form of life, just like mindedness, is not something that human or nonhuman creatures can simply possess. Rather, it is something that can be acknowledged within human society. In order to develop this idea in its full complexity, it is necessary to say more about the concept of form of life and how it has been interpreted in the Wittgensteinian literature.

2. Form of life

The term "form of life" captures *some* formal aspects of our human society. The term "human form of life" (which Wittgenstein does not use) is almost pleonastic, analogous to the term "human society". There is no nonhuman society in the strict sense. How could a phenomenon completely detached from human society merit being called "society" at all? What would distinguish it from a mere physical system displaying regularities? If we use the term "society" to describe phenomena in the animal domain, then we are modeling our understanding of those phenomena on human society. Sunday Grève is attentive to this argument: «Psychological terms should not be uncritically extended from the human case to non-humans» (Sunday Grève 2023: 5). However, upon critical reflection, we must acknowledge that since there are no nonhuman societies, it seems there can be no nonhuman forms of life either. I will argue this in the following discussion.

There is still some uncertainty about which formal aspects are captured by "form of life". We can say that any form, including the form of life, is an abstraction facilitated by language. In order to imagine language, we must imagine formal aspects of social life marked by language. As for the notion of a nonhuman form of life: Can we imagine a nonhuman language?

Here we can reuse the same argument as above. What we call "language" is modeled on our human language. As Davidson (1984) argued, any phenomenon that we call "language" must be, at least partially, translatable into our human language (e.g., English). As we cannot imagine a completely nonhuman/nontranslatable language, we cannot imagine a completely nonhuman form of life either.

[4] Sunday Grève is aware of this phenomenon and quite rightly frames it as a problem of attitude (although this is the only place where he speaks about attitudes). He hesitates about whether the phenomenon of children's cruelty as an immoral attitude toward others or an attitude toward nonlikeminded people (Sunday Grève 2023: 10). I would like to insist that an «attitude towards a soul» (Wittgenstein 1953: part II, §22) is always morally charged. On Cavell's reading of these remarks, failing to adopt this attitude is not a cognitive shortfall but a specific moral failure he calls «soul-blindness», i.e., a failure, that is, not of evidence but of acknowledgment (Cavell 1979: 378).

[5] Sunday Grève writes: «Our natural languages are forms of life that entail not only the existence of other minds but indeed what I shall call their "likemindedness", that is, the qualitative identity between the mental states of another and my own, in a large number of cases» (Sunday Grève 2023: 10). Further: «Wittgenstein use[s] the notion of a form of life to describe human mindedness» (*Ivi*: 5). In my view, Sunday Grève portrays the connection between the form of life and mindedness in overly rigid terms.

On a very superficial level, we can say that the form of life comprises regularities in people's social activities, that is, in their observable behavior. However, these must be regularities that are expressible in language.
At this point, let us bring in the third remark from the *Investigations* in which Wittgenstein employs the concept of form of life:

> "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?" – It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life (Wittgenstein 1953: §241).

This remark is pivotal to my interpretation of the concept of form of life. It suggests that we must focus on regularities that can be expressed in language, but not as opinions (about, say, someone's behavior). What are they then? I believe the key to understanding this issue lies in recognizing that Wittgenstein employs the concept of a form of life in his discussion of rule-following.
This interpretation is well attested in the secondary literature. For instance, Baker and Hacker write: «The important remark that human beings agree in the language they use, not in opinions but in form of life (Wittgenstein 1953: §241), may be taken to allude to our common "natural reactions"» (Baker, Hacker 1985: 239). They further argue that this consensus is constitutive of Wittgenstein's account of unmediated rule-following: «There is no such thing as shared rules independently of agreement over what accords with the rules, for understanding a rule is knowing what accords with it» (*Ivi*: 244). They come close to saying that these natural reactions constitute the agreement between a rule and its application.
I shall expand on this reading of Baker and Hacker later. But before doing so, let us examine another prominent interpretation, namely that of Meredith Williams. She focuses on Wittgenstein's metaphor of blind obedience, that is, following a rule without justification. She writes:

> Blind obedience to a rule expresses seeing how matters must be. It is this lived mustness that constitutes the form of life against which error and mistake, truth and falsity can be discerned. These communal regularities thus have the status and rigidity of what is necessary (Williams 1991: 116).

At least some rules are followed without interpretation or justification. Of course, I can justify why I follow this or that rule, and I can justify this justification. However, this chain of justifications must come to an end somewhere. Specifically, with trained, learned, or biologically determined practices that are rigid and necessary in the moment of rule-following. Wittgenstein was preoccupied with this strange kind of rigidity and necessity in his final philosophical reflections, collected in *On Certainty*.
Before I set out my own preferred way of understanding the concept of form of life, let me introduce a third secondary source. Saul Kripke writes in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*: «The set of responses in which we agree, and the way they interweave with our activities, is our *form of life*» (Kripke 1982: 96). From Kripke's discussion, it is clear that he means responses to rules, for example, "If one is asked to compute '68 + 57'" (*Ivi*). He explicitly treats the form of life as a stable pattern of such responses, without any further interpretation.
These three characterizations of the concept of form of life can be combined, like pieces of a puzzle, into the following unified statement: The form of life consists in regularities in applying/following rules blindly, that is, without any other mediating rule.

I believe this is an exegetically correct interpretation of the concept of form of life. However, exegesis is not my primary goal here, and I shall not defend this interpretation against its rivals. The mere fact that it comes close to the three arguably most important views from the secondary sources should be sufficient for the present purpose. Note that this interpretation leaves open the question of where the agreement in blind rule-following originates: It could be socially or biologically determined, or both factors could be at play.

Thus understood, the human form of life consists in regularities in human behavior. At this point, I would like to raise the question of whether such regularities can be instantiated by nonhuman agents. However, the form of life does not consist in just *any* regularities (as Sunday Grève appears to maintain[6]), but rather regularities of a special kind, namely regularities in applying/following rules blindly. These regularities represent *the* formal aspect of life.

This more nuanced interpretation allows us to address two questions: (1) Can there be a plurality of forms of life? Or, in other words: Can we envision a form of life that differs from the one we currently share? (2) Can our form of life be instantiated by nonhuman agents (animals, aliens, machines)?

Regarding the first question, we can draw on Kripke's arguments. Within our present form of life, when asked "What is 68 + 57?" we answer "125". However, following Kripke, we can imagine a bizarre form of life where "+" means "quus" and the answer one would give is "5". Kripke argues that there is no a priori argument ruling out such a form of life. However, it would be incomprehensible for us to adopt it. Hence, another form of life is conceivable only as an abstract possibility, not as something we can actively engage in.

Davidson's argument against the plurality of conceptual schemes leads to a structurally identical conclusion. However, in contrast to Davidson's treatment of the idea of the conceptual scheme, in Wittgenstein's framework the concept of form of life is not abandoned but retains its foundational role.[7]

In this context, Kripke is right to invoke Wittgenstein's dictum: «If a lion could talk, we could not understand him» (Kripke 1982: 96; citing Wittgenstein 1953: §223). If an agent could follow rules blindly, though differently from the way we do, we could not understand her. And I would like to employ a variant of the argument from above: In such a case, we would not have any reason to suppose that the agent is following any rule whatsoever. We would not be inclined to treat such an agent as a rational being, and ultimately there would be no reason to speak of an "agent" at all. Even if there were a lions' form of life, we would not be able to recognize it as such. Hence, from a practical point of view, there is only one form of life: our shared human form of life.

This argument for the singular character of the form of life rests crucially on conceiving of the form of life as comprising regularities in blind rule-following. If the form of life consisted in just any social pattern/regularities, other regularities that differ from those inherent in human society would be easily conceivable and recognizable. The situation is

[6] He writes: «On Wittgenstein's conception of a form of life, a given ability, disposition, or capacity is to be understood in terms of a pattern of activity» (Sunday Grève 2023: 11-12).

[7] Meredith Williams argues, in her detailed study, that a play of interpretations without any foundation leads to the paradox of interpretation: «The importance of agreement in specifying meaning reveals that the situation of radical interpretation is a myth, and an unhelpful myth as well. Agreement in what we say and the circumstances under which agreement is achieved show that much must be shared if we are to share a language. *Charity, construed in this way, is Wittgensteinian form of life.* This agreement cannot itself be a matter of interpretation. Only in this way is the paradox of interpretation to be avoided» (Williams 2010: 166, my emphasis). Form of life, interpreted as agreement in blind rule-following, is the foundation that avoids the paradox of interpretation.

different if we focus on blind rule-following. There is no way of distinguishing an alternative form of blind rule-following from mere regular patterns displayed by animals or physical systems.

The second issue is no less complex than the first. Can our shared form of life be instantiated by nonhuman agents, such as animals or machines (let us put aside the possibility of aliens)? Already, such framing sidesteps the very notion of (biological) life, as animals fall under the category of living beings but machines do not. Following my specific interpretation of the concept of form of life, this question reads: Can nonhuman agents follow rules blindly, as we do? Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that our form of life is actually shared among humans in the biological sense. That only means that there are no hidden robots or aliens among us (that would be classified as a weird conspiracy theory), and there are no animals that are as intelligent as humans in all respects. If that is the case, then merely entertaining the idea that there are humanoid robots with a different biological constitution[8] among us raises the possibility that they can participate in our human form of life. What is crucial here is that such creatures are fully integrated into our society. I believe this reasoning sufficiently addresses the biological objection Sunday Grève is concerned about.

3. *Blade Runner*: imagining nonhumans with humanity

Imagining nonhuman creatures that are fully socially integrated is not difficult with the aid of popular fiction. Consider the film *Blade Runner* (1982), for example, which features artificial (possibly bioengineered) beings called replicants. Replicants are integrated into society to the point that human beings struggle to distinguish them from their fellow humans. The film brings up many complex metaphysical, epistemological, and moral issues around their role in human society. As I see it, one of the key points of the film is that replicants are so integrated into human society that humans often adopt an «attitude towards a soul» (Wittgenstein 1953: part II, §22) with respect to them. Deckard, the main character, develops a romantic relationship with Rachael despite being aware that she is a replicant. The film thus helps us to imagine how artificial beings could participate in our human form of life.

The plot of *Blade Runner* is even more relevant to our topic. The film presents us with a procedure known as the *Voight-Kampff test*. On the surface, the test is presented as a quasi-scientific instrument for distinguishing humans from replicants by measuring involuntary physiological responses to emotionally charged scenarios. The test focuses on rapid affective responses, especially to imagined suffering. Empathy here is a last line of defense for maintaining the fundamental distinction between humans and replicants. Intelligence, language, and practical rationality have already been conceded. Empathy is invoked because it seems deeper, more authentic, less teachable. But the film steadily undermines this assumption. Humans (including the titular "blade runners", who hunt and kill replicants) repeatedly act without empathy, while replicants display care, grief, loyalty, and terror. The conclusion is that empathy itself is a poor candidate for the defining essence of humanity. Seen this way, the test inevitably fails.

The main point I wish to emphasize is that the Voight-Kampff test is officially aimed at detecting mindedness or humanity, but what it in fact tests is the tested agent's ability to participate in the human form of life, understood as our shared mode of blind rule-following. The test can be understood as targeting the ability to follow rules blindly, without interpretation. The questions are designed to elicit direct emotional reactions. They are asked in rapid succession, making any reinterpretation via another mediating

[8] Or a completely nonbiological one; the difference between biological and nonbiological is immaterial here.

rule difficult. (Difficult for humans, anyway. But would it be difficult for artificial beings with superior computational power?) Participation in the form of life can, to that extent, be tested. The test fails, nonetheless, at its declared goal, because mindedness or humanity cannot be tested at all, only acknowledged.

Of course, *Blade Runner* is a piece of science fiction. We do not know whether creatures like replicants could actually be engineered. As far as we know, such technology is not yet possible. But there is no a priori reason why humanoid robots could not be fully integrated into our society and participate in our human form of life.

4. Forms of life, adjectivally modified

Our initial question, "Is an artificial form of life possible?" presupposes that we can add an adjectival modifier to this concept. This might suggest that there are different kinds of forms of life, e.g., artificial and human. This is at odds with the argument I gave above for the conclusion that there is only one shared form of life. Does that mean the initial question is conceptually flawed from the outset? In fact, there have been many proposals in the secondary literature for adjectival modifiers that can be added to "form of life", including "religious", "scientific", "mathematical", "aesthetic", "political", "ethical", "animal", "digital", and, most recently, "artificial". Would there be any point in introducing such modifiers in light of our argument for the singularity of the concept of form of life? Most of these proposals do not suggest any genuine plurality, but there are some exceptions. Norman Malcolm, for instance, explicitly writes: «Religion is a form of life… Science is another» (Malcolm 1977: 212).[9]

These modifiers to "form of life" almost never denote a genuinely distinct form of life. Instead, they usually denote domains, modes, or transformations within the shared form of life, unless the author is explicitly testing the limits of the concept of form of life, e.g., in cases involving animals or artificial beings. "Religious form of life" can refer to the domain of our human form of life involving religious practices and language, "scientific form of life" and "aesthetic form of life" to the domains involving, respectively, scientific and artistic practices and language, and so on.

While modifying the concept of form of life in these ways may appear legitimate, I would argue that doing so is redundant and ultimately confusing. There is a better way to account for the distinctive character of certain linguistic practices within the Wittgensteinian framework: It would be more in the spirit of Wittgenstein's philosophy to say that there are religious, scientific, or aesthetic *language-games*.

Language-games are enumerable, describable, revisable, and often explicitly rule-governed. The form of life, in contrast, is not enumerable and not codified. It is the background that makes language-games possible in the first place. There can be a plurality of religious language-games, each endorsing different sets of explicit or implicit rules and practices. A religious language-game can be in conflict with the scientific language-game, and their difference can be made explicit at the level of rules. However, when it comes to following a rule blindly, they do not differ (as if one game endorsed "plus" and the other "quus").

There is a certain obsession in Wittgensteinian scholarship with the concept of form of life at the expense of that of language-game, which has been neglected. Some scholars, including Sunday Grève, do not sufficiently distinguish between the two concepts, in my opinion. For example, he writes that Wittgenstein's «term "language-game" can generally be interpreted to mean *linguistic form of life*» (Sunday Grève 2023: 8). Here, I must strongly disagree. The form of life is what makes language-games possible by allowing one to

[9] Cf. Weiberg (2025) for a detailed discussion of this claim in the Wittgensteinian literature.

follow a rule blindly, that is, without reference to any further rules. In this sense, the form of life is already *linguistic*, and so to explicitly add the modifier "linguistic" is redundant and does no real work.[10] Danièle Moyal-Sharrock (2015) observes, in a passage aptly entitled *Language-games are not "forms of life"* that the contrary view «is discredited by most commentators» (Moyal-Sharrock 2015: 37). Her argument is a variant of what I wrote above: «If our language-games are conditioned by our form(s) of life, it cannot be that language-games *are* forms of life» (*Ivi*: 38). She concludes: «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» (*Ivi*: 38-39).

Moyal-Sharrock is, without doubt, correct here. However, she is less critical of attaching adjectival modifiers to the concept of form of life when she approvingly refers to Cavell's remark that «the religious … should be thought of as a Wittgensteinian form of life» (Cavell 1969: 172). She elaborates: «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» (Moyal-Sharrock 2015: 38). To which I wish to reply: No, speaking religiously is speaking within the language-game of religion. This language-game is grounded in our form of life. The form of life cannot be framed as a "perspective". That is just another way of attaching an illicit adjectival modifier, thereby adding content to something that should remain formal. This causes a dual harm: The concept is stripped of both its purely formal character and its foundational role.

This is not to deny that there are some rule-governed human practices in which blind rule-following is more common than in others. Dancing is one example, performing music is another. The Voight-Kampff invites us to imagine a practice in which blind rule-following is central. Some practices and language-games are thus closer to the form of life than others.

5. Animal form of life

Let us now shift our focus to modifiers intended to extend the concept of form of life, that is, ones that aim to include other creatures in its domain.

Although the expression "animal form of life" does not occur in Wittgenstein's writings, it has sporadically appeared in Wittgensteinian scholarship.[11] Moyal-Sharrock maintains, with reference to Cavell, that our shared human form of life is fundamentally sociocultural, which «distinguishes it from the nonhuman animal form of life, which can at most be social» (*Ivi*: 33). The crucial question, then, is whether the human form of life can be extended to creatures[12] that are social but noncultural. Given the discussion above, we must ask: Can animals participate in our human form of life? However, this question leads to a contradiction: Can noncultural creatures participate in the cultural form of life? Of course, we can entertain the possibility that animals can possess culture. Again, fiction,

[10] Sunday Grève maintains, wrongly in my view, that there are nonlinguistic forms of life: «Not all forms of life in Wittgenstein's sense of the term are linguistic in nature, although arguably any human form of life in his sense, whether big or small, is essentially a or the form of life of a speaking being» (Sunday Grève 2023: 9). I would insist that, in Wittgenstein's sense, the notion of form of life is essentially linguistic.

[11] David DeGrazia considers «the thesis that an animal's *form of life* is crucial to what mental states can be attributed to it» (DeGrazia 1994: 133). Antonio Defez, meanwhile, focuses «on the natural form of life, because this is what interests us most in relation to animals. As we have said before, animals would also have a form of life, that is, a set of natural actions and reactions constitutive of a horizon of meanings. Moreover, between the animal form of life and the human form of life there would be transitions and transactions» (Defez 2018: 11).

[12] I shall here continue discussing the "animal form of life". However, it would be more apt to consider a form of life specific to a certain animal species, e.g., the canine form of life.

such as the novels and films of the *Planet of the Apes* (Boulle 1963) series, can help us imagine cultural animals. However, this is pure fiction; there is no evidence that animals are capable of actually developing culture.[13]

To strengthen this argument, we can bring in our specific interpretation of the form of life as the shared mode of blind rule-following. Can we acknowledge that animals follow rules directly as we do? Animals are capable of following (at least some) rules. However, as they are nonlinguistic creatures, they do not interpret rules. This means that if animals follow rules, they always do so blindly. Wittgenstein is inclined to acknowledge that animals possess «instinct but not ratiocination» (Wittgenstein 1969, transl. eng.: §475). Regularities displayed in animals' behavior can be explained by the notion of instinct. Animals may be able to follow this or that rule instinctively. Consider a sheepdog trained to a fixed repertoire of whistled commands: one pattern sends her out wide to gather the flock, another drops her to the ground, a third calls her off the field. She reliably discriminates between the whistles and produces the matching response, and a shepherd relies on this regularity much as we rely on others' grasp of "plus" when we ask them. But nothing here amounts to interpretation. The dog cannot hear a whistle outside her trained repertoire and work out what it must mean by analogy with the ones she knows, the way a human apprentice could guess an unfamiliar command from its resemblance to familiar ones; her competence stops exactly where interpretation would have to begin, and this is what "instinct but not ratiocination" looks like in practice.

However, if there is no difference between blind and interpretational rule-following, the whole concept of rule-following collapses. Blind rule-following would then, strictly speaking, not be rule-following at all, because it would be indistinguishable from mere regularity, as already argued above. Hence, we can imagine an "animal form of life" as an extension of our human form of life, but the term does not currently refer to any actual animals. As far as we know, no animals are currently able to participate in our form of life. No animal can follow rules that go beyond instinct. However, there is no a priori reason to suppose they will not be able to do so in the future – e.g., due to evolution or a sudden mutation (as we may imagine having occurred in *Planet of the Apes*).

6. Artificial form of life

From the preceding discussion, it should be clear that the expression "artificial form of life" can only refer to the human form of life instantiated by artificial nonhuman agents – and not to any unique nonhuman mode of blind rule-following. The modifier "artificial" serves the same function here as in "artificial intelligence", where it means a human-like intelligence instantiated by nonhuman agents.

We can imagine such agents through works of fiction like *Blade Runner*. Replicants are indeed able to follow rules blindly in the same way as we do (by which I mean following all or nearly all the rules that humans are capable of following). Based on the replicants' ability to engage in the human form of life, some characters in the film adopt an «attitude

[13] My argument that there is a single cultural form of life may raise concerns that it implies the existence of only one culture, specifically our current culture, which could be perceived as a form of cultural supremacy. However, the concepts of culture and form of life are not the same. Wittgenstein clearly states that education is a part of culture. This education can initially focus on blind rule-following (as in early stages of learning), but it is primarily about complex rules built upon other rules (as in formal education). In other words, what we learn are various language-games. Wittgenstein's examples of cultural differences support this idea: variations in methods of counting (Wittgenstein 1956: §27), differing responses to music (Wittgenstein 1967: §164), and variations in recognizing facial expressions (Wittgenstein 1992: part V, Ms 164, p. 89). All these cultural differences can be understood as variations in taught language-games, while still maintaining the singular form of life.

towards a soul» (Wittgenstein 1953: part II, §22) with respect to replicants; that is, they acknowledge the replicants' mindedness.

However, *Blade Runner* is a work of fiction. Today's artificial systems are completely different from the fictional replicants. Consider large language models (LLMs). Can they participate in the human form of life? That is to say: Can LLMs blindly follow all the rules we follow? Without doubt, LLMs have the capacity to follow many rules, including the rule for "plus" (without confusing it with that for "quus"). However, I claim that LLMs do not follow rules blindly. That is to say, there is always an interpretation involved. This is clear even in the case of a rule as simple as "plus", though not for the reason it might first seem. It is not that the arithmetic is too complex: a human asked to compute "68 + 57" must also reason her way to "125" rather than simply seeing it, carrying digits by means of a learned procedure that is itself a mediating rule. What differs is not the difficulty of the sum but the availability of a blind alternative. Asked "what is 2 + 2", a human does not compute an answer; she simply gives it, the way she gives her own name, with no further rule standing between the question and the response. An LLM has no such fallback. It has no hardwired arithmetic to retreat to even for "2 + 2": every output, trivial or not, is produced by the same operation of predicting a likely continuation given a context. This is an operation that is interpretative by its very nature, since it proceeds by reference to a further rule (a distribution over probable completions) rather than by direct application of "plus" itself. The LLM, in other words, is not merely worse than us at hard sums; it has no blind mode at all.

That is one case. Another would be rules related to direct perception, like identifying the color of a perceived object. However, LLMs lack the capacity for direct perception. Let us assume they are given a picture of an object as a prompt. Again, there is a complex computation involved in identifying the color in the picture. It is not something direct or immediate. This argument can thus be summed up by saying that LLMs, as purely symbolic machines, are capable of interpreting symbolic rules solely by reference to other symbolic rules. Moreover, there is, of course, clear evidence that LLMs are not socialized in any relevant respect. This evidence is sufficient for us to say that they do not participate in the human form of life. However, my argument is different: LLMs are not capable of following rules blindly and, therefore, they are not capable of adopting the human form of life.

Because LLMs cannot participate in our human form of life, we have no real reason to adopt an «attitude towards a soul» (Wittgenstein 1953: part II, §22) with respect to them. This does not rule out the possibility of adopting this attitude for some alternative reason. It is common today for representatives of big tech companies to suggest that their language models are (nearly) sentient, minded, conscious, etc.; most likely, they do so to increase the market value of their products.

I have argued that neither animals nor LLMs are capable of blind rule-following in the way we humans are. However, this is for a directly opposing reason in each case. In animals, everything is about instinct, lacking any interpretation, whereas with LLMs, everything is about interpretation, lacking any direct instinctive rule application. In both cases, the distinction between blind rule-following and interpretation collapses. Ultimately, both animals and LLMs display mere regularities, which is not sufficient to consider them as participating in our human form of life.

7. Conclusion

I said above that I largely agree with Sunday Grève's conclusions, so they deserve to be quoted in full. He argues that «the human form of life turns out to be so very specific that no known nonhuman animal may share any part of it» and that «it is possible nonetheless

for a machine to share the human form of life and thus to acquire human mindedness» (Sunday Grève 2023: 16). I think both claims require qualification. Human mindedness cannot be *acquired*; it can only be *acknowledged*. Nor does participation in the human form of life by itself warrant such acknowledgement.

The central issue, however, is how the notion of a form of life is understood. If it is conceived as «an abstract pattern of activity» (*Ivi*: fn. 30), it loses its foundational role. There may be many patterns, but a pattern can be entirely mechanical, since it need not presuppose an underlying agent. By itself, a pattern is not evidence of activity, let alone of life. One is then forced to appeal to supposedly more fundamental notions such as "mindedness". I have instead proposed an interpretation rooted in Wittgenstein's account of rule-following: a form of life is our shared mode of blind rule-following. On this view, there is a single human form of life, while the observable diversity of linguistic practices and cultural phenomena is explained by the concept of the language-game. More importantly, this interpretation distinguishes genuine participation in the human form of life from the mere regularities exhibited by organic or physical systems. That distinction is, I maintain, the most pressing philosophical challenge posed by contemporary artificial systems.

The original question was whether an artificial form of life is possible. On my account, the question should instead be whether artificial systems can participate in the human form of life. The same question may be asked of animals. There is no inherent reason to rule out such participation. For a machine or an animal to cross this threshold, it must cease operating on mere instinct or mere algorithmic computation, and instead share our specific mode of blind, non-interpretative rule-following. At present, however, there is no evidence that either artificial systems or nonhuman animals participate in the human form of life.

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