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The Life of Concepts: Wittgenstein and the Morphology of Meaning

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Abstract Wittgenstein's later philosophy can be read as treating language less as a fixed logical structure than as a historically sustained practice of use. This paper offers a morphological reading of that shift. Meaning persists not through timeless form but through adaptive repetition within practice. Variation names drift within an existing grammar; mutation names the point at which such drift stabilises as a new rule of use. Through readings of the *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*, the paper argues that grammar is sustained by the interplay of natural reaction, training, and historical sedimentation. On this view, description tracks the continuity of concepts through alteration. Wittgenstein's later method thus presents language as dynamic without relativising it, historical without historicism, and rule-governed without reducing it to fixed abstraction.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, grammar, morphology, variation, mutation

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0. Introduction

Wittgenstein's later philosophy asks what it means for concepts to have a life. The question seems metaphorical, yet it recurs across his writings. Already in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* he observes that «everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it» (Wittgenstein 1921, transl. eng.: 4.002) – a remark that, though framed within a logical theory of representation, anticipates the later transformation of logic into life. In the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) this biological metaphor becomes methodological: we are invited to imagine a «natural history of human beings» (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §415), and understanding is described as a pattern of reactions, habits, and training rather than an inner act (*Ivi*: §§143-144). Taken together, these reflections suggest that Wittgenstein treats meaning not as an abstract relation between words and things but as a living arrangement of use – an activity whose stability depends on its capacity to change. What follows does not claim that Wittgenstein explicitly develops a Goethean morphology of language; it argues that his later descriptive method can be read fruitfully in those terms.

The life of a concept unfolds in the interplay between constancy and variation. When Wittgenstein turns from the logical architecture of the *Tractatus* to the later description of language-games, the problem of meaning becomes morphological rather than structural. Morphology, in the Goethean sense, studies form as transformation: each shape is intelligible only through its possible deviations (Goethe 1790, transl. eng.: 29).

Wittgenstein's descriptive practice can be illuminated by comparison with this Goethean method, in which form is recognised through variation rather than deduction[1]. *Variation* marks the gradual drift of meaning within an existing grammar, while *mutation* names the point at which such drift congeals into a new rule of use. To speak of a morphology of meaning is therefore to describe the persistence of sense through alteration – the continuity of a concept in the movement by which it adjusts to changing circumstances. Philosophy ceases to legislate from above and begins to observe from within.

This shift unsettles two familiar readings of Wittgenstein. The analytic view confines his investigations to rule-clarification, purging confusion without altering grammar (Diamond 1991: 19-22). The anthropological view, by contrast, turns *form of life* into cultural relativism. Both overlook the dynamic aspect of his descriptions. Grammar is not a static background but the pattern of repetition through which concepts remain alive; its authority derives from use, not decree. Meaning endures as the rhythm of correction and renewal within our practices.

The expression "natural history" gives this rhythm a philosophical name. In Wittgenstein's hands it designates not a science but a mode of attention. To invoke a natural history of human beings is to attend to what we ordinarily do when we understand, question, or follow a rule. These activities show the regularity of nature and the inventiveness of culture at once. Grammar thus becomes a living surface where natural reaction and learned technique intersect.

Such description demands a new philosophical posture. The philosopher is neither a logician seeking formal necessity nor a psychologist explaining linguistic behaviour, but a collector of examples – a curator of conceptual specimens whose comparisons disclose relations of kinship, the "family resemblances" of meaning (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §67). *Form of life* names this continuity between the biological and the historical, the instinctive and the conventional. Our "second nature", as McDowell writes, is simply the first expressing itself grammatically (McDowell 1994: 84).

Wittgenstein's late reflections thus anticipate a broader philosophical movement that takes variation, rather than foundation, as its principle. Canguilhem's account of the normativity of the living (Canguilhem 1943, transl. eng.: 66-68) and Foucault's archaeology of knowledge (Foucault 1969, transl. eng.: 17-18) echo this shift, though Wittgenstein achieves it without theorising change. His method remains descriptive, almost clinical: the vitality of language is not explained but shown in its ordinary operations. Philosophy becomes the observation of conceptual life itself – the tracing of forms in motion.

1. From Logic to Morphology

Wittgenstein's early and later philosophies are often divided by the supposed gulf between structure and use, yet the continuity between them becomes clear if the later shift is read not as a rejection of logic but as its morphological unfolding. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) the logical form of the proposition was the condition of sense: world and language shared one order of articulation. A sentence could picture a fact because both possessed an isomorphic structure. Logic, the skeleton of representation, appeared immune to contingency: «A proposition is a picture of reality»

1 Goethe introduces the *Urpflanze* in *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (Goethe 1790, transl. eng.: §§ 1-3), as an archetypal form discernible only through comparative observation – a generative schema visible across transformations. His later vertebral theory of morphology extends this principle of transformation within a persisting type. Wittgenstein's method of "family resemblance" mirrors this comparative logic: form is apprehended only through its differences.

(Wittgenstein 1921, transl. eng.: 4.01). To grasp logical form was to glimpse the very possibility of meaning.

Yet the same work gestures toward dimensions it does not fully thematise. «Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it» (*Ivi*: 4.002). In the later writings, such complexity is no longer treated chiefly as something to be abstracted from in order to isolate logical form, but as integral to the description of meaning itself. What comes to the fore is the temporal, practical, and communal character of language: the ways in which use persists through repetition, adjustment, and training.

The later writings recover what the *Tractatus* excluded – the temporal, bodily, and communal processes through which meaning persists. In the *Philosophical Investigations* clarity becomes a practice of description rather than deduction. Wittgenstein no longer seeks one constitutive model of language's essence but deploys language-games as partial, comparative instruments – models that illuminate by contrast (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §§130-131). The unity of language is comparative, not structural. Instead of a universal calculus he offers a collection of "language-games," each internally ordered yet open to others; what connects them is not essence but a network of resemblances (*Ivi*: §§65-67). The logic of sense becomes morphological.

To call this transformation morphological is not to import biology into philosophy but to recognise the grammar of description that Wittgenstein inherits – consciously or not – from Goethe's *Morphologie*. Goethe's science of form opposed mechanism with continuous variation: each organism manifests an archetypal relation that endures through metamorphosis (Goethe 1790, transl. eng.: 31). Wittgenstein's comparisons work likewise. They show how a concept remains the same by changing, how meaning retains coherence through difference. "Propositions" and "words" lack the simple form imagined by logicians (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §65). Simplicity yields to resemblance, essence to relation.

This new ideal of clarity transforms philosophy itself. In the *Tractatus*, philosophy sought a limit to expression – a syntax separating sense from nonsense. In the *Investigations*, the limit lies within variation. The philosopher must learn to move among uses without imposing uniformity. Description becomes orientation: tracing how expressions function in context (*Ivi*: §§122-126). Grammar replaces logic as the site of necessity, but this necessity is local, woven into practice. The relation between rule and instance mirrors the relation between type and token in organic form: the pattern is real only in its occurrences.

The consequences for meaning are radical. Logical form promised correspondence between sign and situation; grammatical form offers a field of internal adjustments. To understand a word is to know how to navigate that field – to recognise continuity within divergence. Wittgenstein calls this «knowing how to go on» (*Ivi*: §151): the capacity to project a practice forward without rulebook or theory. Understanding becomes temporal and collective. A concept lives insofar as it can be renewed in use; each application repeats and modifies – a new growth on the same stem.

Necessity, too, changes sense. Once a fixed framework of possibility, it becomes descriptive: the habits that make questioning possible. «What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life» (*Ivi*: II xi). What holds our practices together is not logical compulsion but shared comportment – the way things are done. Yet this bedrock is not immutable; its firmness is that of growth, not geometry.

Wittgenstein's use of examples, dialogues, and fragments is therefore methodological, not stylistic. The *Investigations* imitates the life it describes: each remark is a self-contained form whose meaning arises through resonance with others. The text behaves like an ecosystem where patterns emerge through proximity rather than deduction. Reading

becomes morphological – seeing relations among heterogeneous elements. Philosophy adopts the logic of taxonomy: comparison as method.

If the *Tractatus* purified language by excluding contingency, the *Investigations* restores contingency as the medium of sense. The rules of a game remain binding, but their force lies in agreement in action, not in an ideal syntax (*Ivi*: §199). Agreement is not consensus of opinion but convergence of life. Kripke's sceptical interpretation, which reduces rule-following to communal consensus, misses this organic dimension: for Wittgenstein, normativity arises from the continuity of use itself, not from a vote of approval (Kripke 1982: 89-90). A rule that cannot be broken is dead; a living rule defines itself by absorbing deviation.

The morphological turn thus reshapes philosophy's image. The early Wittgenstein sought the crystalline order of logic; the later cultivates the transparency of description. Meaning is secured not by abstraction from ordinary life but by returning to its forms. The task of philosophy is to render visible the connections that sustain understanding – to see how one practice leads into another, how a gesture echoes an earlier gesture. Clarity becomes orientation within a landscape, not mapping onto coordinates.

This transformation internalises rather than abolishes the early quest for order. Language's structure is no longer imposed from a schema but traced within practice. Each grammatical rule is a crystallised movement, a stabilised improvisation. Meaning has the consistency of habit, not of theorem. The philosopher's work is to exhibit this consistency as one exhibits a living form – attentive to its resilience and fragility alike. Logic's rigour survives, redirected toward the texture of life: necessity in abstraction gives way to recurrence in use. The life of concepts begins where philosophy abandons the dream of a metalanguage.

2. Grammar and the Life of the Concept

To describe grammar is to describe how meaning endures. The term no longer names a system of syntactic rules but the organisation of life within language – the pattern of gestures and responses that constitute understanding. Wittgenstein redefines it as the immanent order of use, a topology rather than a code. Grammar delineates what counts as sense by stabilising the very movements that threaten to unsettle it: the self-maintenance of meaning through repetition (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §133).

Understanding, accordingly, is not an inner event. To grasp a word is to master a pattern of possible continuations. «To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique» (*Ivi*: §199). Grammar operates as the medium of mastery – a set of embodied dispositions that orient us within meaning. Rules are not stored propositions but habits of projection; they live as tendencies to continue rightly.

The life of the concept mirrors that of the organism: both persist by adjusting to variation while conserving structure. Just as a species maintains identity through mutation, a concept maintains coherence through changing use. The sameness of a word is morphological rather than numerical; each instance recalls earlier ones without reproducing them. Grammar is this rhythm considered from within – the temporal normativity of recurrence (*Ivi*: §§143-150).

Unlike logical form, grammatical form has no foundation outside the practice it organises. The distinction is not between grounded and ungrounded necessity – the *Tractatus* already denies external foundations for logic (Wittgenstein 1921, transl. eng.: 6.1-6.11) – but between context-transcendent and practice-immanent form: logical form holds for any language regardless of use, whereas grammatical form is constituted through particular practices. Its authority is the sedimentation of use. A rule binds

because we have learned to recognise deviation (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §185). The "must" of grammar is internal regularity, not external compulsion. When Wittgenstein remarks that a name signifies an object (*Ivi*: §49), he does not describe a fact but sets a condition of description. Such propositions define what can be meant and remain stable precisely because they are no longer questioned.

This stability, however, is historical. What is unshakable in one epoch may lose its necessity in another. The bedrock of certainty is itself formed by earlier revisions. To trace grammar is to uncover these strata of use – the sediment of past adjustments that continue to orient the present. Each language-game carries the memory of earlier ones; its rules are fossilised interactions (*Ivi*: §§23-25). Continuity of meaning is secured not by invariance but by the translatability of habits.

Clarification must therefore attend to pathology as well as norm. Confusion arises when a word escapes its native grammar, when we project its use into a domain where it no longer fits. The philosopher's task is to restore the concept to the environment that sustains it – recognising the conditions of its vitality. Canguilhem's claim that the pathological is itself productive of norms rather than a mere deficiency of them (Canguilhem 1943, transl. eng.: 66-68) captures this logic: error is internal to grammar, one of its mechanisms of renewal (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §§138-141).

Grammar cannot be theorised from without because we belong to it. Explanation would require a vantage beyond language, which Wittgenstein denies. Description replaces theory because participation replaces observation (*Ivi:* §§127-133). Our examples and corrections occur within the same field we study. Grammar is reflexive: its analysis performs the movements it depicts.

That reflexivity carries ethical weight. Because understanding depends on shared practice, preserving meaning becomes a form of care. Agreement in judgment is not a contract but a condition of coexistence. To sustain a grammar is to inhabit a world with others. Its fragility – exposure to misunderstanding and drift – reveals the precarious vitality of language. The agreement Wittgenstein invokes is not assent but continuity of practice, the self-maintenance of sense within living use.

Grammar thus mediates between the necessity of rules and the freedom of invention. Each innovation tests the elasticity of the structure; if absorbed, grammar expands, and if not, meaning fragments. The boundary between sense and nonsense is maintained not by decree but by continual adjustment. Understanding consists in navigating this boundary without explicit maps. Recognition by others marks the reconfiguration of grammar in real time (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §201).

When Wittgenstein writes that «philosophy leaves everything as it is» (*Ivi*: §124), the remark is morphological, not conservative. Philosophy alters our vision of relations already there. To make grammar visible is to reveal the connective tissue that binds practices into coherence. This act of visibility is itself grammatical: it modifies our use of language by clarifying its pathways. The result is renewed orientation rather than doctrine.

Psychological concepts make the operation plain. Words such as *believe* or *understand* seem to denote inner states, yet their meaning lies in public contexts. «The human body is the best picture of the human soul» (*Ivi*: II iv): the grammar of inner life is inseparable from expression. The body is not evidence of the soul but its manifestation; the concept of belief lives in that expressive economy. Grammar links the physiological and the conceptual without reducing one to the other.

Our linguistic reflexes begin as bodily reactions – spontaneous, natural, pre-theoretical – yet the meanings they sustain are inherited through culturally transmitted forms of use: nature and convention meet in the same gesture. Learning a language is the naturalisation of convention – the incorporation of cultural forms into organic

response. Once acquired, these forms operate as second nature until disturbed, when their contingency is revealed. Grammar is precisely this invisibility in operation: a structure so pervasive it appears as necessity. To describe it is to suspend that transparency and let the ordinary appear as an artefact of history (McDowell 1994: 84-86).

Through this suspension Wittgenstein grants philosophy a new rigour. Clarity is not the elimination of vagueness but the recognition of how vagueness functions within understanding. Precision and imprecision are themselves grammatical; they mark differing degrees of stability in communal practice. The philosopher's role is to register these textures – the points where meaning thickens or thins, where the pulse of the concept can still be felt. Grammar, like an organism, breathes through such oscillations.

To think of grammar in this way is to reconceive philosophy as morphological observation. Every concept exhibits an internal economy of reproduction: it generates new instances while preserving recognisability. The form of the concept is its continuity across transformations – the pattern that makes variation possible. In describing this pattern, philosophy observes the life of meaning from within. The observation of grammar is the observation of ourselves as speaking beings.

3. Variation and Mutation: Toward a Natural History of Meaning

Wittgenstein's image of a «natural history of human beings» invites a peculiar form of philosophical description (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §415). Our conceptual life can be observed as one observes a living species – by tracing its patterns of emergence and decline – but the observer belongs to the life observed. A natural history of meaning must therefore look at language from within its own transformations (*Ivi*: §§23-25).

The phrase "natural history" already bore multiple resonances. It evoked eighteenth-century cataloguing but also the nineteenth-century *Naturgeschichte* of genesis without design. In philosophy of language it blurs the line between description and evolution. Wittgenstein's use of it marks not biological reduction but a shift in attitude: concepts are historical beings, sustained by continuity yet open to mutation (*Ivi*: §415).

On Certainty §§88,96 (1969) – where Wittgenstein writes that certain empirical propositions «lie apart from the route travelled by enquiry» and function as channels guiding other propositions – captures how grammar congeals from use[2]. Rules arise through sedimentation: once-fluid expressions harden into tracks along which speech runs. Yet every rigidity invites erosion. Practice wears new grooves, and grammar must yield or fracture. Meaning lives through this alternation of sedimentation and renewal.

Hence the rhythm of Wittgenstein's later writing. He builds no system but records small oscillations in sense. The philosopher becomes an observer of linguistic weather – watching how expressions drift, how some phrases lose force while others gain it. What changes is not propositional truth but the background that renders propositions intelligible (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §§142-144). The familiar examples – "Slab!", the builder, the beetle in the box – are fossils of conceptual life, preserving the outline of vanished practices (*Ivi*: §§2, 293).

To call this a natural history is to reject teleology. There is no progress from primitive to refined language, only differing degrees of fixation. Everyday speech is as complex as the organism it belongs to (Wittgenstein 1921, transl. eng.: 4.002). What he inherits from Goethe's morphological imagination is the idea that form is immanent to

[2] Philosophical Investigations §415 (1953) identifies the natural-historical stratum of practice – the level of primitive, pre-theoretical reactions from which grammatical regularities emerge – while On Certainty §§88, 96 (1969) describes the way that stratum hardens into normative channels.

variation: continuity lies in adaptability, in recognising the same word through different uses. "Family resemblance" is the trace of descent with modification (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §§65-67).

Philosophical necessity now appears as stability within flux. The "must" of grammar records how deeply a pattern is internalised. We act with certainty because alternatives have lost reality for us, yet that certainty is provisional. New conditions can reopen what seemed closed; grammar adapts by reconfiguring what counts as intelligible. The evolution of language is the evolution of what can be meant (Wittgenstein 1969, transl. eng.: §§204-211).

To follow such adaptation, Wittgenstein abandons generalisation for juxtaposition. His remarks do not argue but arrange. Each example reframes the others, forming a cabinet of conceptual specimens. Their order is morphological rather than deductive – an order of kinship and transition (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §§127-133). Reading him is less tracing a proof than comparing variations in a field notebook.

This comparative method yields a new sense of discovery. Novelty lies not in inventing concepts but in perceiving existing ones under a different aspect. The discussion of "aspect-seeing" makes this logic visible: what changes is not the figure but the seeing of it – the "duck-rabbit" as a re-organisation within the same field (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: II xi). Conceptual mutation occurs likewise, through a shift in relational neighbourhood. A natural history of meaning is thus a history of perspective, the slow drift of how we see connections (*Ivi:* §193).

Wittgenstein's refusal of theory preserves this vitality. Any theory of change would freeze the process it describes. By remaining within the movement, he affirms an ethical stance: to accompany rather than dominate language's transformations. The philosopher shares the vulnerability of the forms she studies; her writing becomes an experiment in coexistence (*Ivi:* §124).

Conceptual mutation without metaphysical cause redefines explanation. Canguilhem's insight that abnormality institutes new norms rather than merely violating established ones (Canguilhem 1943, transl. eng.: 66-68) clarifies Wittgenstein's grammar: deviation reveals flexibility. What we call error often exposes the possibility of new sense, and once deviation ceases to appear erroneous it stabilises as rule (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §§138-141, 201).

Philosophy thus becomes the ecology of its own medium. It studies not isolated propositions but the environment that allows them to survive. The background of gestures and expectations is its true object. When justification ends with "this is simply what I do," Wittgenstein names the ecological limit of description (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §217). The *form of life* is a living equilibrium, not a foundation (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §241).

Truth itself acquires this ecological shape. Correctness lies in the fit of actions within shared practice. Truth is not consensus but compatibility within evolving forms. A statement is true when it functions in a grammar that holds; as the grammar shifts, its sense – and thus its truth – changes with it (Wittgenstein 1969, transl. eng.: §§94-99). The philosopher's task is to track these modulations: to see how certainty expands or contracts with the forms that sustain it.

Wittgenstein's prose must therefore move slowly, allowing form to appear through repetition. The pauses between remarks are the time of morphology – the interval in which resemblance becomes perceptible (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §§133, 142-144). Through this rhythm, philosophy perceives that what we call a concept is itself a living continuity of use.

The natural history of meaning is finally a meditation on inheritance. Every act of understanding repeats a past that it also alters. We inherit not a lexicon but a capacity

for modification. Grammar is the memory of these modifications – the record of how sense has survived its own change. To philosophise is to listen to that memory and hear within it the pulse of the present: the life of concepts as the rhythm of holding fast while moving on.

4. Culture Without Relativism

If grammar gives life to concepts, form of life gives them a habitat. Wittgenstein's most cited expression is also his most misread. It is often taken to make meaning relative to culture, as if each community inhabited its own linguistic world. Yet *form of life* does not designate a plurality of peoples but the shared field in which understanding is possible at all. It marks not what differentiates cultures but what makes any culture intelligible (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §§19, 241).

The grammar of language is sustained by the regularities of behaviour – by gestures and reactions that underwrite expression. "To imagine a language," Wittgenstein writes, means to imagine a form of life not because culture explains language but because language already includes the texture of living (*Ivi*: §19). The remark asserts identity, not dependence: the boundaries of meaning coincide with the boundaries of life. Culture, in this sense, is the configuration of habits that give words their sense, an ontological rather than sociological category (Wittgenstein 1958: 145).

This reading dissolves the opposition between naturalism and conventionalism. The regularities grounding linguistic practice are at once biological and historical. We cry and point before we speak, yet these reactions are absorbed into inherited forms of use (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §25). The line between instinct and institution is porous; to speak a language is to inhabit that porosity, enacting continuity between the spontaneous and the learned. Form of life describes not a local tradition but the dynamic equilibrium in which nature and culture intertwine (*Ivi:* §242).

The persistent misreading arises from the wish to find in Wittgenstein either a defence of relativism or of universal reason. Both mistake description for doctrine. His aim is neither to multiply worlds nor to unify them but to show the condition under which worlds are speakable. The plurality of languages reveals not isolation but translatability. Translation – across tongues or epochs – demonstrates that what is most specific in a culture can still become intelligible elsewhere through modification of grammar (Cavell 1979: 52-55). Universality is not inherited but achieved in the labour of communication.

Meaning's universality – understood not as exceptionless necessity but as shared intelligibility across contexts – is therefore a task continually renewed through teaching and interpretation. Agreement in forms of life is the labour that sustains the human in language – the capacity to share sense without abolishing difference. Culture is the historical expression of grammatical plasticity: the record of how coherence endures through variation, unity by morphology rather than metaphysics (McDowell 1994: 84-86).

For philosophy, the consequence is double: meaning can be grounded neither in transcendental reason nor in context alone. Grammar transcends neither history nor dissolves within it; it persists as an immanent order whose stability depends on enactment. The philosopher describing it describes the world of overlapping practices (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §241). Even the recognition of incommensurability presupposes shared capacities of recognition. To say another culture has different concepts already employs concepts of similarity and difference that traverse those boundaries.

Wittgenstein's notion of "agreement in judgment" clarifies this. Agreement is not consensus of opinion but the convergence that makes dispute possible (*Ivi:* §242). We

can argue only where we already agree on what counts as argument or proof. This background agreement cannot itself be justified; it is what justification presupposes. Its scope is as wide as our ability to understand one another – finite yet expandable through invention of new grammars of address (Cavell 1979: 51; Wittgenstein 1969, transl. eng.: §§204-211).

The ethical resonance follows. To recognise another's form of life is not to relativise truth but to acknowledge that truth appears only within shared life. Responsibility for meaning lies in maintaining the conditions of intelligibility that allow disagreement to remain meaningful. When coercion or propaganda narrows expression, grammar loses vitality. Cultural destruction is conceptual destruction. To preserve culture is to preserve the openness of language to correction and renewal (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §217; Cavell 1979: 178).

Philosophy must thus be historical without becoming historicist. Every description of grammar is situated, yet what it describes is how temporality enters sense. Forms of life change, but their capacity for change is constant. The history of culture is the history of this constancy – our ability to integrate novelty into recognition. What persists is not any practice but the morphological relation among them, the pattern that lets one appear as a variation of another (McDowell 1994: 86-88).

Language's interdependence with culture also transforms philosophy's audience. The reader of the *Investigations* is not an observer but a participant invited to recognise his own habits. The dialogues and fragments are mirrors in which our linguistic life becomes visible as culture: not an ethnography of others but an anthropology of ourselves. Philosophy becomes self-examination at the level of form, its universality grounded in the shared medium of difference (Cavell 1979: 54-58).

To speak of culture without relativism is to treat it as a field of potential rather than possession. Each language embodies a way of being, yet these ways are not enclosed; they touch through translation, imitation, and resistance. A culture lives only insofar as its grammar can receive foreign expressions without losing coherence. The health of a culture is the elasticity of its syntax. The philosopher's task is to describe that elasticity – to show how the boundaries of sense remain porous enough for meaning to survive encounter (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §§19, 242).

In this light, philosophical inheritance itself appears morphological. The Western tradition Wittgenstein both inhabits and unsettles is a historical grammar – an archive of forms that continue to mutate. To write after him is not to break from tradition but to prolong its metamorphosis. Each interpretation is an act of renewal. The life of concepts extends through this relay of transformations, where understanding becomes the practice of continuing what one does not control (*Ivi:* §133; Cavell 1979: 185-188).

Here nature and culture quietly reconcile. Nature names repetition; culture, the variability of that repetition. Both describe one process at different speeds. Grammar is where they meet – the rhythm of constancy enabling change. Our words live because our forms of life do not stay still (Wittgenstein 1953, transl. eng.: §133).

5. Conclusion

The passage from logic to grammar, from proposition to life-form, marks the quiet metamorphosis of philosophy itself. Wittgenstein's later writing does not abandon clarity; it relocates it within change. What logic could no longer guarantee is sustained by morphological continuity – the patterned transformation through which meaning maintains itself. Description becomes rigorous not by theorising but by staying within the motion of sense (*Ivi*: §124).

In this motion grammar functions as both form and history. Each rule is a crystallised gesture, a condensation of practice, yet every application reopens it to variation. Language lives through this interplay of stability and change. «To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life» gathers the movement into one phrase: language endures only in the forms that enable its transformation (*Ivi*: §19). The remark describes a condition rather than prescribes a worldview.

Such renewal gives philosophy its temporality. Conceptual clarification is never complete because the conditions of intelligibility are never still. Each epoch inherits a grammar shaped by earlier rhythms, and every act of understanding adds a new inflection. The «natural history of human beings» is not progress but re-articulation: the past survives as habit, the present transforms habit into future possibility (*Ivi*: §415). Philosophy both observes and participates in this exchange.

A morphological reading of Wittgenstein restores unity between the analytic and the historical dimensions of language. Logic had detached the conditions of sense from their occurrences; relativism disperses them into incommensurable contexts. Grammar, conceived morphologically, keeps those conditions immanent to use while allowing them to vary historically. It preserves the order of language while recognising that this order alters with use. Necessity appears as habit, universality as the capacity for renewal. What cannot be otherwise is precisely that meaning must change to remain alive (*Ivi*: §133).

This perspective also transforms the image of the philosopher. The figure who once sought foundations becomes a custodian of intelligibility. She does not legislate but listens, tracing how sense emerges through repetition and innovation. Her instruments are the example, the dialogue, the fragment. Through them philosophy becomes the art of maintaining coherence amid transformation, recognising the living structure of meaning as it shifts (*Ivi*: §127).

The resulting image of language is ecological in a minimal sense: grammar is the medium in which words remain viable, and form of life names the conditions that sustain that viability. To understand a concept is therefore to understand the network of responses that lets it function and endure. When those conditions harden or decay, meaning becomes rigid or opaque. Philosophy does not rescue language by supplying foundations, but by renewing attention to the forms of use in which intelligibility is maintained.

This gives Wittgenstein's later writing an ethical force without turning it into a moral theory. To sustain the life of concepts is to sustain the shared conditions of understanding. Clarity becomes a practice of care directed against rigidity, dogma, and the deadening of sense. In that respect Wittgenstein's reflections anticipate later accounts of conceptual transformation, even as they remain resolutely descriptive rather than theoretical.

The life of concepts is therefore not a decorative metaphor but a way of naming the persistence of meaning through change. Words endure only by being repeated differently, and thought remains alive only within that changing grammar. A morphological reading of Wittgenstein makes this visible: reason depends not on escape from use, but on the disciplined renewal of the forms in which sense is carried forward.

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