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There Is No Ground. Dynamism and Change in Forms of Life

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Abstract In Wittgenstein's later philosophy, the dynamics of change within a form of life is not a topic that scholars readily address. While commentators often highlight the themes of variability and pluralism in forms of life, the question of how forms of life differentiate remains challenging. However, Georg Henrik von Wright, one of Wittgenstein's earliest scholars, saw a strong theorization of the dynamic and transformative component of forms of life. Starting from von Wright's reflections, this paper will trace a path that focuses on and develops the idea of change in forms of life as found in the later Wittgenstein. Since forms of life rest on an unfounded background, they carve out a perimeter of existence that is sustained only by the—more or less—conscious consent of the participants in language-games. If the consent that leads to agreement on the practices of a form of life were to fail in daily routine, processes could be triggered that lead to change.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, von Wright, forms of life, groundlessness, consent

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1. Immanence and contingency in forms of life: von Wright on forms of life and language-games

In the articles dedicated to his friend Wittgenstein[1], Georg Henrik von Wright attributes to the Viennese philosopher a thought in perpetual transformation, which from time to time crystallizes in writings intended for publication. However, these writings were never published during Wittgenstein's lifetime, with the exception of a few texts, including the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (henceforth, T; von Wright 1982: 61).

Von Wright is a firm believer in the idea that Wittgenstein experienced a major theoretical crisis in the 1930s, which pushed him towards a new philosophy. After returning to Cambridge in 1929, Wittgenstein began developing new concepts that took shape in manuscripts, typescripts, and lecture notes transcribed by students. Between 1936 and 1937, Wittgenstein produced the first version of the *Philosophical Investigations* (PI; BNE: Ms-142, Ts-220). In the preface, written in 1938, Wittgenstein expressly distanced himself from *T*, which he believed contained serious errors. This awareness emerged through frequent conversations and discussions with Frank Ramsey and Piero Sraffa (BNE: Ts-225, III [3]; see von Wright 1982: 113-114).

[1] On the friendship between Wittgenstein and von Wright, see Kaipainen 2023.

Rereading Wittgenstein's writings starting from those years, and especially those not strictly tied to the philosophy of language[2], von Wright affirms

> In order to see how Wittgenstein could think thus, one must first note that it was his philosophical conviction that the life of the human individual and therefore also all individual manifestations of culture are deeply *entrenched* in basic structures of a *social* nature. The structures in question are what Wittgenstein called '*Lebensformen*', forms of life, and their embodiment in what he called '*Sprachspiele*', language-games. They are 'what has to be accepted, the given', the unquestioned basis of all our judging and thinking.[3] This basis, to be sure, is not eternal and immutable. It is a product of human history and changes with history. It is something man made, and *he* changes. But *how* this happens is, according to Wittgenstein, not to be accounted for by a theory, or foreseen. 'Wer kennt die Gesetze, nach denen die Gesellschaft sich ändert?',[4] he asks, and adds: 'Ich bin überzeugt, daß auch der Gescheiteste keine Ahnung hat'[5] (von Wright 1982: 206-207).

Von Wright's words are frank and powerful. In my opinion, they breathe life into a well-defined interpretative framework of the later Wittgenstein. According to von Wright's interpretation, the pages of the later Wittgenstein express the idea that individuals, their life, and their cultural manifestations are intrinsically linked to social structures, which represent the contextual basis for their existence. This basis is the social background (see OC: § 94, § 350), initially unquestioned, yet over time inevitably transformed. The subject enters into relation with this background, and acts within it together with others, so that, in the long run, the social background itself changes its form.

Von Wright tackles the problem of subjectivity in the later Wittgenstein with great ease and in a very direct manner, immediately giving it a relational connotation: individuals and their ways of expressing themselves are embodied and rooted in contingent and dynamic social structures, through relations that materialize in the form of language-games within a given form of life.

The connection that von Wright suggests highlights the subject's inescapable ties, through relations, to historical-social context. In other words, the subject is inseparable from what lies outside itself. Only within a social horizon does the subject move and, so to speak, find place and development: this movement alongside others alters the inherited social background. Conversely, it is impossible to conceive of the subject as an entity abstracted from social and historical context; it can be understood only within an immanent plane, a historically contextualized horizon represented by the social structures of which it is part.

Incidentally, this idea was not detached from the intellectual milieu Wittgenstein encountered in Cambridge from the 1930s onward. The claim that an individual cannot be isolated from his historical-social context in order to be made into an ideal subject is, in fact, an idea developed by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, published in 1932 (Marx-Engels 1932). This book was likely read and discussed by Sraffa and Wittgenstein's Marxist friends in Cambridge (see Rossi-Landi 1968, Engl. tr.: 204-207; Gakis 2015; De Iaco 2020: 128-144).

Within the interpretative framework outlined by von Wright, one could argue that, for Wittgenstein, language-games and forms of life, understood as social structures, are constituted by the relations—structured in and through language—that bind subjects

[2] Von Wright refers to Wittgenstein's writings contained in the volume *Culture and Value* (CV), which he himself edited.

[3] Cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, Part II, p. 226 (PI: Part II, xi, § 345, p. 238[e]); *On Certainty*, § 559 (OC: § 559).

[4] 'Who knows the laws according to which society develops?' (*Culture and Value*, p. 60) (CV: 60[e]).

[5] 'I am quite sure they are a closed book even to the cleverest of men' (*Ibidem*).

together to carry out activities (cf. PI: § 19; § 23, «*speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life»). Indeed, in *PI*, Wittgenstein establishes a strong connection between speech and participation in activities within the social spaces of language-games and forms of life. These activities create relations between the players. These relations materialize in the behaviors that the players exhibit in a form of life, constituted by and through the unfolding of language-games. These activities thus configure themselves as a system of practices in action among the players, reiterated over time. The players recognize this system of practices as meaningful, precisely because the activities they habitually carry out have a role and value in their lives (see Marconi 1987: 13-16).

According to *PI*, a form of life must exhibit a reiteration over time of the activities regulated in the language-games in order to be considered a social structure and not a random event (see Gargani 2008: 45; cf. RFM: Part VI, § 34). In other words, the identity of a form of life is temporarily fixed by the reiteration of activities in language-games—that is, activities that are habitually carried out according to rules (see PI: § 198 and § 199, see also § 7; cf. Z: § 567, OC: § 519). The form of life as a relational space that actualizes itself by habitually playing language-games is, therefore, a social structure based on systems of life customs («*customs* (usages, institutions)», PI: § 199), which are considered meaningful and that give shape to existence. Life takes form through the rules that organize it: for Wittgenstein, these rules are rules in action, rules that are practiced and momentarily crystallized into shared habits.

Thus, in von Wright's reading, forms of life are configured as a social, historical, and dynamic product. They, together with their realization in the activities of language-games, constitute the given from which experience begins; they are what the individual finds in the world, what is simply there: «What has to be accepted, the given, is — one might say — *forms of life*» (PI: Part II, xi, § 345, p. 238[e]; cf. OC: §§ 357-359).

According to von Wright, Wittgenstein believed that "the given" inevitably changes under the pressure of history and human action. Furthermore, the processes and dynamics leading to changes in forms of life are unpredictable: they cannot be foreseen by laws that determine their course. Thus, von Wright rejects the idea that forms of life progress through history according to a metaphysical plan that stands above contingent human relations, and can predict the future toward which they tend. For him, Wittgenstein presents forms of life as *open* social structures. These structures lack any metaphysical or teleological dimension guiding their course through laws beyond contingent human relations: it is the players in language-games and their relations that *shape* forms of life, not a metaphysical plan of Being unfolding through laws wholly independent of the players.

In conclusion, von Wright's interpretation suggests that a form of life is identified neither with something *exclusively* cultural nor with something exclusively natural (cf. von Wright 1982: 178-180). It cannot be reduced either to the cultural manifestations of individuals, or to their biological existence. Rather, form of life is understood as a *dynamic social space* that accommodates relationships between individuals, who, through their linguistic and cultural manifestations, produce an organization of practices—the language-games—that give *dynamic form to life* and the natural aspects thereof[6].

2. The pluralism of forms of life: Hacker on forms of life and Wittgenstein's anthropological turn

Von Wright interprets Wittgenstein as a philosopher of the unpredictable transformation of social structures—of forms of life that emerge in the activities of language-games. This interpretation aligns well with the anthropological turn that scholars often associate with

[6] A. G. Gargani (2008: 45 et seq.) also moves in this interpretative direction.

Wittgenstein's work in the 1930s. In his famous biography of Wittgenstein, Ray Monk notes that, in a conversation with Rush Rhees, the Viennese philosopher himself admitted that he had learned from Piero Sraffa to approach philosophical problems from an anthropological perspective (Monk 1990: 261). What Wittgenstein meant by that statement remains a matter of debate, and the stakes of this discussion concern the overall orientation one assigns to his philosophy starting from the 1930s onward—namely, whether the later Wittgenstein should be read as advancing a transcendental philosophy or not.

As Marilena Andronico has highlighted in her studies (1998: 17-95), those who attribute a transcendental philosophy to the later Wittgenstein pursue a kind of philosophical anthropology that seeks the conditions of possibility for humanity itself: in short, an investigation into the human form of life, and thus into human nature.

Those who, like von Wright (1995: 12), do not attribute a transcendental philosophy to the Wittgenstein's anthropological turn take a direct path toward an anthropological philosophy, that examines the relationship between language and its associated practices (cf. PI: § 7, § 21, § 51, «*Praxis der Sprache*»; § 202) in language-games and forms of life. For Wittgenstein, this investigation produces critical descriptions of language-games, whose aim is the care and health of the form of life, achieved by removing what are considered bad ways of thinking and acting (cf. PI: § 119, §133, § 255; BT: 90, § 422-426)[7].

It is not my intention here to take a position on Wittgenstein's anthropology. Rather, I wish to emphasize that those who followed the path of the later Wittgenstein's anthropological turn, in my view, often focus on concepts that remain confined within a static framework, and, for this reason, rarely engage with the dynamism and change of forms of life.

In his analysis of the notion of form of life, in interpreting the first two occurrences of *Lebensform* in the first part of *PI* (§ 19 and § 23), Peter Hacker (2015) highlights that, during the anthropological turn of the 1930s, Wittgenstein introduced new concepts that brought the complexity of language into focus. This complexity can, in my view, be articulated in two points: a) language cannot be reduced to something simple and essential; and b) language-games cannot be confined to a closed list, but may dissolve or differentiate into something new and unpredictable (*Ibidem*: 6-7; cf. Voltolini 1998: 39).

In paragraph 241, we find the last of the three occurrences of *Lebensform* in the first part of *PI*; according to Hacker (2015: 8-9), this occurrence plays a crucial role in defining Wittgenstein's anthropological turn. In his interpretation of the paragraph, Hacker argues that the standards of correctness (*Ibidem*: 8; cf. Frascolla 1994: 162, «paradigm of the correct performance», see chap. 3; see also Voltolini 1998: 86 et seq.)—the true and the false—that are agreed upon are social habits, and customs (PI: § 199, [*Gepflogenheiten*][8]) developed within a form of life. More generally, the standards of correctness operative in a form of life channel it into a regulated structure and provide a *common ground* on which the players of language-games can confront one another when they speak and act (cf. Gargani 2008: 116).

In concluding his discussion of the notion of form of life, Hacker acknowledges a plurality of forms of life, connected with the ways in which humans organize themselves both in relation to one another and to nature through the establishment of standards of correctness (2015: 11).

[7] For an overview of the interpretations of the notion of form of life, see Boncompagni 2015 and 2022; and Moyal-Sharrock 2015.

[8] On the social and normative aspect of the concept expressed by the word *Gepflogenheit*, see Mazzeo 2016: 31 and Morelli 2024.

Hacker and other scholars present a pluralistic image of the form of life (see for example Glock 1996: 125-126). However, the question of why and how forms of life can change is not easily addressed. Some commentators simply deny that there are indications in the later Wittgenstein pointing toward dynamism of forms of life: on this reading, Wittgenstein merely juxtaposes examples of language-games without considering the dynamic dimension that leads to their change and differentiation (see Rossi-Landi 1968, Engl. tr.: 207-210[9]; Ackermann 1988: 216-224). Others, by contrast, discern in the later Wittgenstein's philosophy a strong conceptualization of dynamism and change, which they then characterize as irreducibly pluralistic: changes and modifications of forms of life result from multiple factors that cannot be reduced to a single overarching idea (Eriksen 2020)[10].

In my view, neither formulation is entirely satisfactory, since I believe both that the later Wittgenstein's reflections contain a dynamic and evolutionary dimension and that an underlying idea unifies his references to the dynamism of meaning and forms of life. In my view, his remarks on change stem both from the idea—developed in many passages of *PI*—that, while acting in language-games, *there is always a space that is not rigidly regulated which and therefore allows for processes of experimentation* (see par. 3), and from his *rejection of the idea that meaning is an object external to language (i.e. to language-games) to which one can refer* (see par. 4).

3. The groundlessness of forms of life: the possibility of change

Is it really the case that there is no underlying idea in the later Wittgenstein concerning the dynamism and change of forms of life?

I would like to argue that such an idea can indeed be found, one that has been well developed and widely discussed within the reception of Wittgenstein within *Italian*

[9] On this point, Rossi-Landi's criticisms of the *PI* are particularly severe. He attributes to the *PI* a public rather than social conception of language. Wittgenstein, Rossi-Landi argues, certainly adopts a contextual and public view of meaning, yet he does not ask how the meaning of words is formed and develops—in short, he neglects the history of the meaning of words. According to this interpretation, Wittgenstein begins from the existence of a «*linguistic object*» (Rossi-Landi 1968, Engl. trans.: 208), and does not investigate how that linguistic object came into being. Wittgenstein, Rossi-Landi concludes, fails to address both the social production of meaning and the linguistic labor involved in producing it. In my view, Rossi-Landi fails to recognize that Wittgenstein rejects the idea that meaning is an object—whether real, linguistic, psychological, or conceptual—independent of the practices enacted within language-games. Instead, Wittgenstein believes that meaning is a *movement within the game*: *an action, a gesture performed in and through language-games* (cf. PI: § 43; see Gargani 2008: 1-27; cf. Gebauer 2009: 75-105). Precisely because it is a gesture within the game, meaning is a social habit which is part of a grammar of shared practices: it is embedded within an organization of life reiterated over time. This dynamic and non-substantialist conception makes meaning flexible and leaves it open to the possibility of being modified during the game. Ultimately, I would argue that Wittgenstein's concern is precisely the continuous formation and reformulation of meaning within the practices constitutive of forms of life. In the ritual practice of language-games, through their gestures and performances, participants continually actualize and re-actualize meanings. They may, of course, repeat blindly (cf. PI: § 219) the games that tradition has handed down to them. Yet they may also, in principle, transform them and redirect them toward *something not already known*. They can reshape their dynamics or even replace them altogether, taking advantage of the space for experimentation that opens up whenever one acts within language-games (see pars. 3 and 4). It is precisely this conception of change as something that cannot be foreseen *a priori* that, in my view, emerges most clearly from the *PI* and that von Wright has so perceptively brought into focus.

[10] For her part, through a meticulous analysis of Wittgenstein's work from the 1930s onward, Cecilie Eriksen brings into focus all the passages in which Wittgenstein refers to the dynamic processes and changes affecting language. Yet she does not identify an underlying idea capable of unifying all the various references she examines.

Theory[11]. In the folds of the later Wittgenstein's reflections, it is possible to discern a powerful underlying notion of how and why a form of life can change—an idea rooted in the concept of the groundlessness of language-games and forms of life[12]:

> You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable.
> I mean: it is not based on grounds [*Es ist nicht begründet*]. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable).
> It is there--like our life (OC: § 559, see also §§ 357-359; RFM: Part III, § 74; cf. PI: § 217, §§ 654-655).

And again: «If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false» (OC: § 205).
This idea can be summarized as follows: since language-games and forms of life are not based on ultimate grounds[13], and since the distinctions (true/false) that arise within them are matters of social construction rather than *predetermined and immutable* givens, forms of life carve out a perimeter of existence against a fundamentally unfounded background («the ground is not *true*, nor yet false»). In light of what has been said about rules and language-games, if the background of forms of life is unfounded, then it is *deregulated*, and thus *indistinct*, devoid of the regularities and distinctions (true/false, etc.) that are established only *within* forms of life[14]. From this, the idea emerges that the regularities of forms of life—usages and practices—constitute a dynamic system of customs carved out against this deregulated and indistinct background (cf. Virno 2003; De Carolis 2004: 134-166; Virno 2005; Cimatti 2007; Mazzeo 2016).
Moreover, with the introduction of these systems of social practices, the deregulated background does not fade away or exhaust itself in the newly established social order: it remains ever present in the shadow of the practices of the form of life, always ready to resurface, should the current form of life come into crisis. In other words, the perimeter of rules in practice (see PI: § 199) does not exhaust the *possibilities of existence* offered by the unorganized background; it merely limits and restricts them to the system of practices currently in use. Once these practices are questioned and eventually removed through

[11] On Wittgenstein's reception within *Italian Theory* (for an overview and introduction), see Mazzeo 2015: especially 181-187; Di Gesu 2018 and Gakis 2020.
[12] On the concept of groundlessness in relation to the *OC*, see Ramon Cámara-Vega Encabo 2022.
[13] From my point of view, *groundlessness* means that there is no stable ontology of atomic objects independent of—*and external to*—the linguistic practices embodied in language-games (see par. 4). In this sense, meaning is not an object to which language refers in order to receive correctness; rather, it is a *performance*, a *practical activity* that unfolds within language-games (cf. PI: § 43; see Gargani 2008: 1-55; 77-83, who further develops Wittgenstein's idea that meaning is a gesture). Since there is no ultimate and stable ontology external to language-games, *groundlessness* also entails the absence of any ultimate foundation. That is, there is no final and decisive reason (conceived as a conceptual object) that would necessarily require us to choose one linguistic use, one practice, one application of a rule, or one form of life rather than another. Choice therefore becomes arbitrary (on this topic, see Forster 2004), depending on factors that are not strictly connected with *reasons*, such as—I would suggest—the *mere and blind habit* of doing something (cf. RF: § 217), the *trust* placed in those from whom one has received one's education and learned to act in one way rather than another, one's *taste* for certain things and the *pleasure* one takes in doing them, or simply the *accidental and contingent fact* of having been born and raised in one cultural context rather than another (see Queloz-Cueni 2021: 758-762).
[14] "Deregulated" in the sense of *not yet* organized into the regularities (practices) of a form of life. The term "deregulated" is not Wittgensteinian. I introduce it to highlight the idea that Wittgenstein envisages a space in which the rules of language-games are *temporarily suspended*—that is, a space that is not regulated while language-games are being played. It is this space that allows for shifts in meaning and, consequently, for transformations of forms of life. Finally, the term "deregulated" is not intended to evoke the economic connotations with which it is often associated.

processes of discontent, dissent, disagreement, rejection, or denial, transformation and change can occur (cf. Laugier 2018: 211 et seq.).
A vivid illustration of this ever-present deregulated space, persisting despite the shared practices of forms of life, can be found in paragraph 83 of *PI*. Here Wittgenstein invites us to imagine

> people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball like this: starting various existing games, but playing several without finishing them, and in between throwing the ball aimlessly into the air, chasing one another with the ball, throwing it at one another for a joke, and so on. And now someone says: The whole time they are playing a ball-game and therefore are following definite rules at every throw.
> And is there not also the case where we play, and make up the rules as we go along? And even where we alter them – as we go along (PI: § 83).

The state of uncertainty just described, where the language-game is not constrained by rigidly applied rules, is one I wish to highlight. In the example mentioned, Wittgenstein depicts a situation in which there is a temporary suspension of all game rules between one game and another («and in between»), as well as the provisional construction of certain rules during play itself («as we go along»). This suspension of the rules of the language-game is always *potentially* present in the unfolding of practices within a form of life. Once this deregulated space is reached, processes of experimentation and the creative construction of new practices, and thus new forms of life, can emerge (cf. Mazzeo 2016: 35).
Another example of this deregulated space is the gap that opens between a rule and its application (see PI: §§ 185-202). According to Wittgenstein, *whenever* we set out to follow a rule, we must traverse a space of possibilities—an uncertain space—within which choices must be made (cf. PI: § 186). These choices usually converge on an already shared practice (cf. PI: § 198, § 202): the application of a shared rule.
Within this uncertain and deregulated space, interpretations of how to follow a rule succeed one another (see PI: § 201). These interpretations never reach a final point, because no praxis[15] has yet been established to anchor them in a shared custom (see PI: § 198). As in the previous example, this deregulated space involves a temporary suspension of the rules operative *at the level* of the form of life, resulting in a state of uncertainty (cf. PI: § 201). For Wittgenstein, we emerge from this space of uncertainty by acting largely in accordance with a practice that is already recognized and accepted within a form of life (cf. PI: § 202). However, this deregulated space can also *trigger* alternative possibilities and deviations from the shared praxis, giving rise to processes that contribute to the construction of new practices and new forms of life (cf. Virno 2005: 37-58).
Finally, one last example—among many that could be mentioned—of this uncertain space, where the deregulated has not yet crystallized into defined behaviors within consolidated practices, is found in the process by which primitive and natural pre-linguistic sensations are expressed through words within a form of life.
In paragraph 244 of *PI*, Wittgenstein argues that when a child learns to name natural sensations, he simultaneously acquires a new way of expressing them within the form of life. In learning to say "I am in pain", the child replaces the original pre-linguistic sensation with the words and behaviors developed within that form of life.
In the delicate transition—or «extension» (Z: § 545) or «refinement» (CE: 395)—from the pre-linguistic to the linguistic, primitive and natural sensations are gradually replaced by the linguistic practices learned within a form of life (cf. PI: § 293; cf. Moyal-Sharrock

[15] In the article, the terms "praxis" and "practice" are used as synonyms.

2010). Consider, for instance, how a child expresses pain, in contrast with how an individual embedded in a structured community processes and socially expresses pain according to shared practices. Yet, in this transformation of the original deregulated primitive sensation, the latter is never completely eliminated; it remains ever-present, *reworked and transformed* within the form of life through a constantly dynamic process that may eventually result in the formation of new practices (cf. Cimatti 2007: 156 et seq.)[16].

4. Dynamism and change in forms of life: *PI* § 241 and the absence of grounding as an agent of change in forms of life

Starting from an analysis of *PI* § 241, I aim to develop further arguments in support of the thesis that there is a unifying idea concerning how forms of life can change. Paragraph 241 reads:

> "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?" – What is true or false is what human beings say; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement [*Übereinstimmung*] not in opinions, but rather in form of life (PI: § 241).

Manuscript 160, dating from 1938, states:

> 'How is the application of a rule fixed?' – Do you mean, 'logically' fixed? Either through other rules, or nothing at all. – Or do you mean: how is it, that we all apply it in agreement in this way and not otherwise? By training, discipline, and the forms of our life [*die Formen unsres Lebens*]. It is not a consent [*Konsens*] of opinion, but of forms of life [*Lebensformen*] (BNE: Ms-160, 26r[1]-26r[2]et26v[1]; trans. in Boncompagni 2015: 159).

Shortly afterwards in the same manuscript, Wittgenstein writes something that he then cancels: ~~« Daher ist z.B. kein Grund »~~[17] (BNE: Ms-160, 26v[2] Diplomatic transcription). What do these fragments show us? From my perspective, they primarily suggest that true and false are not Platonic objects—or more generally, given objects to be discovered because their essence lies somehow hidden from view—; but rather matters of *consent*: the outcome of an agreement that leads to consent.

But what, then, does it mean to say that agreement takes place in form of life? In my view, Wittgenstein's philosophical strategy involves a displacement of truth. First, truth is embedded in language—or, in Wittgensteinian terms, in language-games. In this way, Wittgenstein detaches truth from the transcendental, the metaphysical or, more generally, the intellectualistic, and instead locates it within the fluid and ever-changing world of practices. This brings about a revolutionary philosophical shift from knowledge to practice. Truth is generated through the linguistic practices constitutive of forms of life, rather than through a theory of knowledge. Second, Wittgenstein's argument develops around the idea that linguistic practices constitute truth, which is itself rooted in a socially shared form of life. On the one hand, then, he moves beyond both an individualistic

[16] More generally, Wittgenstein argues that within forms of life, there is always a social and creative reworking of what he refers to as the «very general facts of nature» (PI: Part II, xii, §§ 365-367). For example, in *PI*: § 25 and § 415, Wittgenstein refers to the concept of natural history with ethnographic connotations: «– Giving orders, asking questions, telling stories, having a chat, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing»; natural history incorporates the practices developed by forms of life. Furthermore, Wittgenstein openly states that the grammar of concepts in use within a form of life is completely disconnected from any necessary relationship with the facts of nature (see BT: 56, § 234).

[17] "Therefore, for example, there is no ground" (my translation).

conception of language and transcendental and metaphysical conceptions of meaning. On the other hand, he maintains that meaning is shared within a social dimension represented by language-games and forms of life. In other words, Wittgenstein shifts the philosophical focus from a theory of knowledge to the social practices of language-games and forms of life.

With this conceptual shift, Wittgenstein first removes the essentialist foundation of meaning: there are no ultimate realities to which language refers. Secondly, he relocates meaning into the realm of social relations. Truth, falsehood, rules, and more generally meanings no longer refer to an object existing somewhere up there in the hyperuranion, out there in the world, or deep within the psyche or human mind (see Voltolini 1998: 15 et seq.). Nor do "true" and "false" refer to an object with a definition independent of language, that is, independent of speakers and the human practices in which they are engaged (cf. Gargani 2008: 85 et seq.). Rather, truth, falsehood, rules, and meanings are embedded in social practices. Only within these practices are they defined, thereby giving them existence, validity, and development. Within the relational bonds of the practices of forms of life, meanings and rules possess validity that is produced and reproduced socially *each time and from time to time*.

Thus, meanings become social constructions—inventions—that are mediated in and through language. This means that agreement on meanings occurs within language (Laugier 2018: 207), *understood as linguistic practices and uses*. These social practices momentarily bind a form of life to an order, that is always potentially *questioned* in the relationship[18]. Thus, agreement within a form of life is established and reestablished within the relationship each time.

Wittgenstein adds that this agreement is reached through socially shared training and exercise[19]—that is, through habitual practice. The strength and stability of the social practices that function as paradigms of correctness lie, therefore, in their being habitually enacted, not in their codification or certification by explicit rules (cf. CE: 395, «In the beginning was the deed»; and *ivi*: 397, «The basic form of the game must be one in which we act»; OC: § 204, «it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game»).

The shaping of life, or putting life into form, means that, from a deregulated background, one arrives at a system of practices through the construction of regularities of conduct. This system establishes what is true or false, what is correct or incorrect, right or wrong, and so on (cf. Mazzeo 2016: 77-82). The habits and practices of those who engage in language-games give shape to their lives by drawing distinctions, limits, and boundaries from an indistinct state.

This system of practices is always subject to the test of existence; in that, it derives its strength from being enacted anew each time. Yet with each enactment, the system is also implicitly called into question, with all the potential consequences that such questioning may entail. Within this ritual engagement in the system of habits that shapes existence, a process of change can be triggered if consensus around this system of current practices begins to weaken. In such cases, the habitual reiteration of the practices of a form of life may shift toward forms of dissent, sparking processes of rejection of the existing order and, potentially, systemic transformation.

But why should systems of practices arise specifically from a deregulated background? Why would a form of life, momentarily crystallized into a regime of customs, emerge

[18] Gargani (2008: 48-49) interprets the form of life as a «flux» of practices, i.e., «a cohesive, shared, and unitary flux of social practices, verbal praxis, behaviors, and relations with nature and the environment» (cf. Donatelli-Perissinotto 2010: 233). In doing this, he imbues the concept of form of life with the intrinsically dynamic connotation that I wish to convey in this article.

[19] For an analysis of the influence that Wittgenstein's experience as a primary school teacher in Austria had on his interpretation of the sphere of practice in the constitution of forms of life, see Basile 2024.

from a deregulated state? I would frame the discussion as follows: since Wittgenstein rejects any predetermined plan—whether a metaphysical order that establishes what is true and false, or an ontological background of stable objects to which truth and falsehood, and more generally meanings, refer—, meanings themselves become matters of invention, construction, elaboration, and social consensus.

If the meanings and rules of language-games—i.e. forms of life—are socially constructed, then the background from which each form of life emerges can only be a deregulated one, upon which human action imposes distinctions between true from false, thereby tracing the boundaries within which language-games are played.

In other words, if what is considered true and false is a matter of consent and social construction, rather than a predetermined and immutable given, then forms of life operate by drawing distinctions against a background that is itself without order and thus open to the possibility of assuming, always provisionally, a form: *a system of practices*. Furthermore, since a form of life reproduces itself in its actualization, it is each time potentially called into question and thereby open to modification and change.

In other words, once again, since the organization of a form of life rests on habitual behaviors, it is an ongoing and dynamic process; it must continually be sustained by the players who reproduce its existence through ritual practice. Should this organization lose consensus, it would slip back into the original deregulated state from which it arose—a state that remains ever-present in the established practices of a form of life and never gets exhausted. Once the acquired organization is lost due to a lack of consensus, and form of life enters a crisis and begins to fade away, it will be necessary to make corrections and changes.

Again, if there is nothing metaphysically predetermined and immutable, and if once a regularity of conduct is reached from a deregulated state, and its maintenance is based on nothing other than habit, then the only criterion that makes a rule stronger or weaker is its degree of social consensus. In other words, the strength of a rule depends on how widely it is practiced (see OC: § 153, a proposition «only gets sense from the rest of our procedure of asserting»)[20].

Thus, although necessary, agreement within a form of life is fragile, since it requires ongoing consent to endure (cf. Laugier 2018: 216-217). Consent and trust in the paradigms of correctness of a form of life must be continually reinforced by the choices that converge upon them; otherwise, a form of life risks entering into crisis and setting out on one or more paths toward change.

A form of life thus appears as a social organization in action, shifting each time between trust and decision: trust—sometimes blind (cf. PI: § 217 and § 219)—in the prevailing paradigms of correctness, and decision whether to continue following them or not (see PI: § 186, «a new decision was needed at every point»). And all of this occurs in daily practice.

5. Concluding remarks

In summary, the paradigms of correctness in language-games are practices learned, exhibited, and perfected within a form of life; they give shape to life: a shape that is always possible and dynamic.

[20] In light of the foregoing discussion of the importance of the dimension of praxis in the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein, it follows that the *consensus* in question—concerning linguistic uses and the paradigmatic applications of rules—can only be a *consensus embodied in practice and within a form of life*. Only through the ritual enactment of linguistic uses within language-games do those uses and the games themselves acquire normative force and communal assent.

If there is no rigidly predetermined semantic background (cf. OC: § 94), but only one that is continually structured and restructured, produced and reproduced, then the stability and robustness of a form of life rest on social consensus and the trust placed in its paradigms of correctness. Such trust and consent can be implicit and unconscious, as in the case of a child learning to navigate the world by following the guidance of those he fully trusts (cf. OC: §§ 159-160).
However, if this trust were to falter, and a forceful rejection were to take hold, processes could be set in motion that lead to the abandonment of existing customs, and, in time, the introduction of new ones (see OC: §§ 94-97 and § 99).
The dynamism of forms of life—the possibility that they may evolve and differentiate—develops through an oscillation between, on the one hand, the knowledge, acceptance, and practice of habitual, socially shared actions within language-games, and, on the other hand, varying degrees of rejection of the existing order (consider the recalcitrant pupil in the paragraphs on "following a rule", PI: § 185). Within this oscillation, processes of change can arise that may lead to the introduction of a new system of social habits, crystallizing as a new form of life.
All of this is possible because the lack of ultimate grounding in language-games and forms of life renders them vulnerable to a slide back into the deregulated whenever the practices that shape life lose consensus: once this deregulated state is reached, the space of possible and of experimentation opens, with all its *potential for change*.

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