III. On the Very Idea of a Form of Life

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Drawing on writers as diverse as Saul Kripke, Stanley Cavell, G. E. M. Anscombe, Jonathan Lear, and Bernard Williams, I offer an interpretation of Wittgenstein's key notion of a form of life that explains why Wittgenstein was so enigmatic about it. Then, I show how Hilary Putnam's criticism of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics and Richard Rorty's support of (what he takes to be) Wittgenstein's legacy in the philosophy of mind both require mistaken assumptions about Wittgenstein's idea of a form of life. Finally, I consider the extent to which the idea of a form of life is subject to Donald Davidson's critique of the idea of a conceptual scheme.

The idea of a form of life, which occupies a crucial position in Wittgenstein's later thought,[1] was passed over almost in silence by Wittgenstein himself. I want to show why Wittgenstein was so spare in his elaboration of the idea of a form of life – explicitly mentioning forms of life only five times in the whole *Philosophical Investigations* – and how later philosophers, even of the stature of Putnam and Rorty, have missed the significance of Wittgenstein's reticence.

After discussing the most persuasive interpretation of Wittgenstein's idea of a form of life, I shall draw on recent work by Kripke and Lear in order to expose some of the difficulties of elucidation of the idea of form of life. Then, I shall try to show how Putnam's criticism of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics and Rorty's support of what he takes to be Wittgenstein's legacy in the philosophy of mind both require mistaken assumptions about Wittgenstein's idea of a form of life. Finally, I shall consider the extent to which Davidson's critique of the idea of a conceptual scheme is applicable to the idea of a form of life.

1. Features of Forms of Life

Patterns of activity and response – following rules in the ways that we do, coping with the past, hoping for the future, caring for and educating the young, taking into account the interests and feelings of others – patterns so obvious as to escape notice, are constitutive of human life. Pervasive as they are, however, the practices that shape human life form no system. Wittgenstein, to the chagrin of many philosophers, would have deep reasons to reject a request for identity conditions for forms of life. It is no more promising to attempt to describe what would count as a form of life *per se* than to attempt to describe what would constitute a background *per se*. That Wittgenstein would take systemization to distort is suggested by Anscombe, who recalls, in a different context, one of Wittgenstein's similes:[2]

> There is something all jagged and irregular, and some people have a desire to encase it in a smooth ball: looking within you see the jagged edges and spikes, but a smooth surface has been constructed. He preferred it left jagged.

She adds: 'I don't know how to distribute this between philosophical observation on the one hand and personal reaction on the other.' In any case, the sentiment – echoing Dostoevsky's that life may be a messy affair, but at least it is still life and not a series of extractions of square roots – is characteristic of the later Wittgenstein.[3]

In addition to the non-systematic character of forms of life, two further features of forms of life require notice. First, forms of life are communal property; there is no private practice. Second, they are in a certain sense conventional. Both of these latter features of forms of life are functions of the ways that forms of life rest on *agreement*.

The public nature of language, if not of forms of life generally, has been discussed at length elsewhere.[4] Here, I want only to draw attention to the fact that forms of life rest finally on no more than the fact that we agree, find ourselves agreeing, in the ways that we size up and respond to what we encounter: 'My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul.'[5]

Stanley Cavell, who takes our agreeing to be something like our being in harmony or being mutually attuned, points out that 'nothing is deeper than the fact, or the extent, of agreement itself'.[6] In particular, the fact that we can communicate, that we can use language and continue to use language, rests on nothing other than the ways we find it natural to proceed. Noting that there is no guarantee that we will make the same projections of words in unfamiliar contexts, Cavell says:

> That on the whole we do [make the same projections of words in unfamiliar contexts] is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke is, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation – all of the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'. Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this.[7]

It is hardly surprising that forms of life, resting as they do on the community's generally agreeing in their responses, should be thought of as conventional.

To call forms of life conventional is, in part, to distinguish them from empirical regularities. In the first place, empirical regularities are discoverable by induction, hypothesis, and experiment; forms of life are not so discoverable. Since these scientific procedures presuppose the forms of life that render them intelligible, they are not available for the investigation of forms of life. One result is that Wittgenstein does not use, cannot use, 'forms of life' as a theoretical or explanatory concept.

In the second place, although empirical regularities are easily imagined to be different from what they are, there is no getting outside our forms of life to imagine other ways we 'might have been'. All attempted comparisons are made from within our forms of life. (This point, if correct, suggests that the inclination of some developmental psychologists to speak of a child's conceptual world as radically different from an adult's should be resisted.)[8] Wittgenstein would say that comparison of what we take to be natural (e.g. how we compute sums in arithmetic or how we apply the concept of pain) with some putative alternative is nothing like comparison of rival hypotheses. Such, I take it, is part of Wittgenstein's point in insisting that

he is *not* saying: 'if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis)' (*PI*, II, 230).

Moreover, we are not bound by forms of life as we are by natural laws:

> someone *may* be bored by an earthquake or by the death of his child or the declaration of martial law, or *may* be angry at a pin or a cloud or a fish, just as someone may quietly (but comfortably?) sit on a chair of nails. That human beings on the whole do not respond in these ways is, therefore, seriously referred to as *conventional.*[9]

But when we think of forms of life as conventional, as Cavell continues,

> we are thinking of convention not as the arrangements a particular culture has found convenient, in terms of its history and geography, for effecting the necessities of human existence, but as those forms of life which are normal to any group of creatures we call human, any group about which we will say, for example, that they *have* a past to which they respond, or a geographical environment which they manipulate or exploit in certain ways for certain humanly comprehensible motives. Here the array of 'conventions' are not patterns of life which differentiate human beings from one another, but those exigencies of conduct and feeling which all humans share.

This passage makes it clear that – the amorphousness of the idea of life notwithstanding – most fundamentally, the human species is the locus of forms of life. For specific purposes, 'form of life' is sometimes applied to practices that are not universal, as when writers take religion (or a particular religion) to be a form of life,[10] or when writers speak of different societies as exhibiting different forms of life.[11] Although I think that these narrower uses of 'form of life' illustrate the elasticity of the idea, and suggest that forms of life, though not clearly demarcated, are thoroughly inter-woven and even 'nested', they do not tell against the point that Wittgenstein's first concern is with human practices, not with local options.

Another part of the force of calling forms of life conventional is to emphasize that they go no deeper than the contingent fact that human beings find it natural to proceed in the ways that we do. (Hanna Pitkin suggests calling them 'natural conventions'.)[12] Had our biology and history been different, we might have found it natural to proceed in other ways – the clear conceptions of which are not available to us, given the kind of beings that we in fact are. Although there is no logical contradiction in supposing our practices to be different from what they are, the alternatives are not really options for us. We cannot clearly conceive in detail measuring, say, with elastic rods, or adding by two in this fashion: '2, 4, 6, ..., 998, 1000, 1004, 1008 ...' 'When we try to trace out the implications of behaving [in these different ways] consistently and quite generally', Stroud has noted, 'our understanding of the alleged possibilities diminishes.'[13] Not everything that is logically possible in the sense of being describable without contradiction is possible for us.

Thus, forms of life, in the first instance, are the common property of humankind; they have neither the arbitrariness of unconstrained choice nor the force of laws of nature. We might sum up this discussion of forms of life by saying that there are two constraints on practices possible for us humans. First is a 'formal' constraint induced by the public nature of forms of life: all human practices depend upon agreement in the sense that anyone claiming to participate in a practice can be checked by others in the community.[14] Second is a 'material' constraint induced by the conventional nature of forms of life: the practices available to us depend not only on the fact of agreement, but also on the content of agreement, on the actual responses that are so natural, so appropriate that their obviousness makes them difficult to

discern. Much of Wittgenstein's philosophizing consists of 'assembling reminders' that bring particular agreements to the fore.

2. Why Wittgenstein did not Say More about the Idea of Forms of Life

The notion of forms of life is pivotal for Wittgenstein's views on meaning. How can there be meaningful language? On Kripke's account, Wittgenstein argues that there is no fact about an individual that could constitute his meaning one thing rather than another; there is no fact about an individual 'in virtue of which he accords with his intentions or not'.[15] Since, considered in isolation, an individual cannot mean or intend anything at all, Wittgenstein turns to the community as the condition of meaning.

In general, an expression is meaningful if it has a place in a language-game that has utility in our lives. Thus, an account of a linguistic expression has two parts: a specification of the language-game in which it functions, i.e. of the conditions in which it may be used, and an account of the utility of the practice of using the expression in those conditions.[16] It is not by virtue of grasping rules or universals that one knows a language; rather it is the other way round: only because we act in certain ways are we said to be applying a concept.[17]

Kripke shows how our forms of life, our practices, underwrite for Wittgenstein the meaningfulness of 'John means addition by "+"'. But what practice underwrites the meaningfulness of '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' (*PI*, I, 241), or the meaningfulness of 'What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – *forms of life*?' (*PI*, II, 226).

It is not entirely clear how these passages can be meaningful on Wittgenstein's view. Perhaps Wittgenstein was implicitly acknowledging this difficulty in his parenthetical phrase in the latter passage, 'so one could say'. What language-game do we have that supports the use of 'language-game'? What form of life underwrites the use of 'form of life'? Would such a language-game have utility in our lives? Full answers to these questions should show why language-games of, say, traditional metaphysics do not have the same claim to utility.

In 'Leaving the World Alone', Lear, who takes Wittgenstein (as I have been taking him here) to be an anti-conventionalist, has used the idea of a form of life to defend Wittgenstein's claim to be non-revisionary. Speaking of a form of life as 'a community that shares perceptions of salience, routes of interest, feelings of naturalness',[18] Lear cites both our use of the law of the excluded middle and our belief that the world exists independently of us as 'mutually constitutive of a stance we take to the world',[19] part of our forms of life. As such, they are immune to both justification and repudiation. It is useful to ask whether or not Wittgenstein can accommodate Lear's comments as meaningful.

Consider the claim that the belief that the world exists independently of us is part of our forms of life. If that claim is correct, then, according to Lear, no one can doubt that the world exists independently of us. But by a well-known Wittgensteinian argument, what cannot be doubted cannot be believed either: 'One says "I know" where one can also say "I believe" or "I suspect": where one can find out' (*PI*, II, 221).[20]

Now Lear's Wittgenstein is in the unenviable position of saying, on the one hand,

that the statement that the world exists independently of us is not something that can be believed, known, doubted, suspected, etc., and on the other hand, that belief that the world exists independently of us is constitutive of our forms of life. Similar considerations could be advanced against any claim regarding a belief that it is part of our forms of life.

One may well protest that Lear was mistaken in supposing that we have a *belief* in the external world at all: Just because it would not occur to adults innocent of philosophy to *doubt* the existence of the external world, our attitude is not correctly characterized as one of belief. There is some justice to this protest. In a way, my attitude toward the external world is no more belief than is my attitude toward him an opinion that he has a soul. 'Belief' and 'opinion' fail to suggest the intimacy, the unavoidability, of our forms of life. As Wittgenstein clearly saw, it is this intimacy that makes our forms of life not only difficult to discern but even more difficult to describe. (Description, along with any other application of concepts, is another language-game, whose possibility and point derive from our forms of life.)

Suppose, then, that in some way the idea of the external world figures in our form of life, but that our attitude regarding that idea is not properly called 'belief'. If the application of concepts depends on our forms of life, what gives us so much as the idea that the world exists independently of us? (cf. 'What gives us *so much as the idea* that living beings, things can feel?' [*PI*, I, 238; original emphasis]). That we do have such an idea is attested to by the queries of children.[21] It is further attested to by the fact that Wittgensteinians and Cartesians can argue over whether or not it is possible to doubt that the world exists independently of us; to speak of the possibility of doubting that such and such requires that the speaker have the concept of such and such. Activities such as these provide the contexts in which the concept of the world as existing independently of us is applied. Therefore, on Wittgenstein's view of meaning, we do have an idea of the world as existing independently of us, and it is possible to identify this idea only from within the forms of life that it partly constitutes.

There are two ways in which this result may seem paradoxical. First, there is the 'circularity' of deploying our practices (here, uses of language) to ascertain the conditions of practice. Second, there is the suggestion that it is part of our practice that things are regarded as independent of practice. Let us consider each of these in turn.

The first apparently paradoxical feature is one that attaches to any transcendental argument of the sort that Wittgenstein offers.[22] Any aspect of our forms of life that we isolate is so only from the point of view of some other aspect of our forms of life. Since forms of life are the source and limit of meaning, there is no stepping 'outside' forms of life to survey them.

Whatever is said about forms of life – whatever is said about *anything* – can be said only within the context of forms of life. Lear suggests an attendant difficulty:[23]

> Any attempt to *say* what our form of life is like will itself be part of the form of life; it can have no more than the meaning it gets within the context of its use. As we try to stretch ourselves to say something philosophical, we end up saying things that are, strictly speaking, false.

Although there is a complication lurking, Lear does not seem exactly to have located it. Given our concept of *falsity*, it is unlikely that, as we stretch ourselves to say something philosophical, we end up saying anything straightforwardly false; it would

seem much more likely that we should end up trying to say, nonsensically, what can only be shown. Then again, on occasion, we may succeed in saying something true. Since the bounds of sense have not been drawn once and for all, there is no saying in advance where nonsense begins.

The second apparently paradoxical feature is not unrelated to the first. The meaningfulness of any statement is determined by practice; so how can it meaningfully be said that something is prior to practice? Wittgenstein is entitled to answer that although the use of concepts of independently existing objects depends on practice, it does not follow that the things to which the concepts apply likewise depend on practice. The fact that 'the existence of human concepts can be somewhat generally equated with the existence of a great variety of human linguistic practices', Anscombe remarks, 'by no means implies any dependence on human thought and language, on the part of the things that fall under concepts'.

Although rules, rights, and promises are products of human linguistic practice, '[h]orses and giraffes, colours and shapes – the existence of these is not such a product, either in fact or in Wittgenstein'.[24] There is no reason to suppose that the existence of horses waited upon the human concept 'horse'. And to say as much is itself sanctioned by our practices. It is part of our form of life that we suppose that horses and giraffes, colors and shapes exist independently of our form of life. But if our practices support the idea that the world exists independently of us (and *a fortiori* independently of our practices), then the dependence of that idea on our practices shows itself in what we count as sense, and is not to be stated in remarks about our practices.[25]

Several philosophers (such as Bernard Williams and Jonathan Lear) see post-Wittgensteinian philosophy as an exploration of our forms of life. On this view, philosophy would be the activity of 'moving around reflectively inside our view of things and sensing when one began to be near the edge by the increasing incomprehensibility of things regarded from whatever way-out point of view one had moved into'.[26] Such an enterprise, teetering on the brink of self-referential paradox, is best undertaken with the caution that Wittgenstein brings to it.

In sum, the role that the idea of a form of life plays in Wittgenstein's understanding of meaning severely circumscribes what can meaningfully be said about forms of life. The sharp line between what can be said and what can only be shown drawn in the *Tractatus* was moved, but by no means erased, in the *Investigations*. Thus, it is doubtful that forms of life *per se*, as it were, can be the subject of meaningful discussion; as in the *Tractatus*, not everything that can be shown can be said. What is of interest, and what engages Wittgenstein, is the devising of particular examples to illuminate various of our practices and thus to bring us to awareness of our forms of life. Such a goal seems not too distant from that of Socratic self-understanding.

3. Philosophy of Mathematics: Putnam's Criticism

The implications of the idea of a form of life, as developed here, have not been fully appreciated. Hilary Putnam, for example, charges Wittgenstein with 'claiming that mathematical truth and necessity *arise in us*, that it is human nature and forms of life that *explain* mathematical truth and necessity'.[27] I shall only discuss Putnam's Consistency Objection, which, for present purposes, does not require detailed consideration of Wittgenstein's views on mathematics.

The Consistency Objection: Axioms are 'not logically arbitrary'; they are 'required to be consistent'. Consistency is 'an objective mathematical fact ... which is *not* explained by our nature or "forms of life" in any intelligible sense'. And: 'Our nature, our forms of life, etc. may explain why we *accept* the Peano axioms *as opposed to some other consistent set*; but our nature cannot possibly make an *inconsistent* set of axioms *true*.'[28]

There are three charges against Wittgenstein here: (1) that forms of life are not up to the task of 'explaining consistency', as Putnam takes Wittgenstein to suppose that they must be; (2) that Wittgenstein would deny that our choice of axioms is constrained by the requirement that they be consistent; (3) that Wittgenstein would deny that 'our nature cannot possibly make an inconsistent set of axioms true', i.e. that Wittgenstein is committed to holding that our nature can possibly make an inconsistent set of axioms true.

It seems to me that none of these charges hits its mark:

1. The first charge is that forms of life cannot explain consistency, and that if Wittgenstein were correct, they should. However, the idea of 'form of life' is not intended by Wittgenstein to explain anything; so it is no criticism that it fails to 'explain consistency'. Moreover, I do not know what it would mean for *anything* to explain consistency; what needs explanation? I think that Putnam wants to emphasize that consistency is an objective property of sets of statements, not a product of our forms of life. Wittgenstein need not deny this; although the content of our concepts is determined by our practice, by how we go on, it is part of the content of the concept of consistency that consistency is an objective property of statements. That is how we use the concept; there is no more difficulty with the objectivity of consistency for Wittgenstein than with the independence of the external world.

2. The second charge is that Wittgenstein must deny that our choice of axioms is constrained by the requirement that they be consistent. However, there is no reason to suppose that Wittgenstein would deny any such thing. We have already seen that there are both 'formal' and 'material' constraints on our practices. Of course, Wittgenstein would insist that the application of the concept of consistency, like the application of any other concept, can occur only within a form of life.

However, Putnam may want to insist that the *source* of the requirement of consistency lies not in us, but in the nature of mathematics. But without a much more elaborate view of the nature of mathematics than Putnam gives, it is unclear what such insistence would come to. Putnam begs the questions by assuming what Wittgenstein would not grant – viz., that there is a clear and unproblematic contrast between 'in our nature' and 'in the nature of mathematics'. Moreover, the question-begging assumption rests on the Platonistic view that Putnam himself repudiates. (Putnam's discussion of Wittgenstein was first published in 1979, about four years after his turn from metaphysical realism.) So Putnam thus seems guilty of an outright inconsistency himself.

3. The third charge – that Wittgenstein supposes that our nature could make an inconsistent set of axioms true – assumes that Wittgenstein would take the proposition,

> If our natures were different, then an inconsistent set of axioms would be true,

to express a genuine possibility, an hypothesis. I have already noted that Wittgenstein denied that he was urging any empirical counterfactual (cf. *PI*, II, 230). Moreover,

the concepts used to express the above-mentioned proposition are of necessity *our* concepts, whose applicability is constrained by *our* forms of life as they actually are. Since our forms of life are the limits of intelligibility for us, we can make no sense of supposing them to be radically different. As Lear has argued, 'There is no getting a glimpse of what it might be like to be other-minded, for as we move toward the outer bounds of our mindedness we verge on incoherence and nonsense'.[29]

Putnam concludes his criticism of Wittgenstein with the observation, 'I do not create the properties of individual proofs in Peano arithmetic any more than I create the berries on the Mountain Ash'.[30] The extent to which Wittgenstein would say that facts are created by our language raises complicated questions. But even for those aspects of our world that *are* created by language,[31] Wittgenstein would never suppose that they were created by an *individual's* use of language. The very content of what an individual says – as Putnam seems to acknowledge earlier[32] – is determined by the practice of the community.

Putnam sums up:[33]

> Clearly, philosophy of mathematics is *hard*. But the Wittgensteinian views that (1) mathematical statements do not express objective facts; and (2) their truth and necessity (or appearance of necessity) arise from and are explained by *our* nature, cannot be right.

Again, I do not believe that these remarks touch Wittgenstein. First, mathematical statements, on Wittgenstein's view, do express objective facts in the only sense of 'objective' that both Wittgenstein and Putnam think makes sense. Mathematics is a paradigm of objectivity. The only sense in which mathematics would fail to be objective is in a sense of 'objectivity' which Putnam, as well as Wittgenstein, finds incoherent – a sense that entails metaphysical realism. Moreover, the truth and necessity (not just the appearance of necessity) of mathematical statements are not explained by anything. Wittgenstein insists that they are not the sorts of things that stand in need of explanation. It is ironic that Putnam, as if he is countering Wittgenstein, says:[34]

> My own guess is that [certain] truths of logic . . . are *so* basic that the notion of *explanation* collapses when we try to 'explain' why they are true . . . [T]here is simply no room for an explanation of what is presupposed by every explanatory activity, and that goes for philosophical as well as scientific explanations, including explanations that purport to be therapy.

Putnam seems to me to go wrong, first, in taking forms of life to be on a par with natural laws and then in criticizing Wittgenstein for a conception that Wittgenstein did not have. Wittgenstein, who did not think that philosophy could offer any sort of explanation, would be the first to acknowledge that 'form of life' is not a general explanatory concept. Explanation has a place only *within* certain forms of life.

4. Philosophy of Mind: Rorty's Support

In taking forms of life on the model of laws of nature, Putnam's complaint is that the 'problem with Wittgenstein's views is that they exaggerate the unrevisability of mathematics and logic'.[35] Without undertaking an examination of Wittgenstein's views on mathematics and logic, I have tried to show that Putnam's arguments rest on a misconstrual of the idea of forms of life. In contrast to Putnam, Richard Rorty sees Wittgenstein as clearing the way for the view that all vocabularies are optional,

a position heartily endorsed by Rorty. I shall try to show that Rorty's support of Wittgenstein rests on as mistaken a basis as Putnam's criticism.

According to Rorty, Wittgenstein, among others, kept 'alive the suggestion that, even when we have justified true belief about everything we want to know, we may have no more than conformity to the norms of the day', and kept alive 'the relativist sense that the latest vocabulary, borrowed from the latest scientific achievement, may ... be just another of the potential infinity of vocabularies in which the world can be described'.[36]

More recently, in an article surveying the current state of philosophy of mind, Rorty applauds Wittgenstein for his role in promoting a particular thesis (that language 'goes all the way down'), which Rorty does not clearly distinguish from a second thesis (that vocabularies are chosen for convenience). Not only is the second thesis distinct from the first, but also, I believe, Wittgenstein would have endorsed the first (insofar as he would have endorsed any philosophical thesis) and would have repudiated the second. The second is in direct conflict with his conception of forms of life.

The first thesis is that language is ubiquitous. Rorty applauds Wittgenstein, along with Sellars, for having undercut 'the premise that we have intuitive knowledge, knowledge which is pre-linguistic and which thus serves as a test for the adequacy of languages'.[37] Rejection of this premise leads to the view that reality is always encountered 'under a description', and 'that there is no such thing as comparing a linguistic formulation with a bit of non-linguistic knowledge, but only a matter of seeing how various linguistic items fit together with other linguistic items and with the purposes for which language as a whole is to be used'.[38] Call this thesis that there is no comparing language to some extra-linguistic reality, the ubiquity thesis.

The second thesis is that there are no privileged vocabularies. We are free to invent any vocabulary, to use any kinds of descriptions, that suit whatever purposes we may devise. On this view, '*any* vocabulary for describing anything – particles or persons – is just one vocabulary among others, useful for some purposes (otherwise nobody would have bothered to dream it up) and useless for others'.[39] A clear example of this thesis is given by Rorty's comments on the nature of mental states: A mental state may be defined as,

> the sort of state of the human organism which psychologists study. This sort of definition has the same advantage as defining legal, as opposed to moral responsibility, as the sort of responsibility which the courts are willing to adjudicate. Such definitions remind us that distinctions like legal vs. moral, or mental vs. physical, are not written on the face of the world. Rather, they are cultural artifacts, to be judged by their utility in accomplishing our aims.[40]

There is 'no deep reason why we should lump pains and beliefs together'; it is just that psychologists find it convenient to use a vocabulary that contains 'belief' and 'pain', and that '[a]t the moment, at least, there seems to be no reason to portion things out differently'.[41] Call this second thesis, that we are 'free to shift vocabularies for the sake of convenience',[42] the thesis of linguistic convenience.

Rorty says that to take such a view of mental states (i.e. conforming to the thesis of linguistic convenience) is 'to carry through on the Rylean-Wittgensteinian-Sellarsian attitude towards knowledge', (i.e. conforming to the ubiquity thesis).[43] It seems to me that, far from carrying through Wittgenstein's insights, the suggestion that the nature of mental states is a matter of whatever vocabulary is convenient at the moment annuls those insights.

On the one hand, there is little doubt that Wittgenstein supports the ubiquity thesis: a major thrust of the later work is to oppose any assumption of pre-linguistic knowledge against which the adequacy of language can be tested. ('. . . [A] language-game does not have its origin in *consideration*. Consideration is part of a language-game.')[44] On the other hand, our language is not arbitrary or freely chosen: it develops out of our 'primitive reactions'. For example, regarding our 'primitive reaction to tend, to treat, the part that hurts when someone else is in pain', Wittgenstein comments: 'But what is the word "primitive" meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behaviour is pre-linguistic: that a language-game is based *on it*, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought'.[45]

Rorty writes as if the only two alternatives are to hold that there is extra-linguistic intuition to which each of us has privileged access and to which we can compare our linguistic formulations or to deny that there are *any* privileged vocabularies. That is, Rorty takes an endorsement of immediate awareness in the spirit of Descartes to be the only possible basis for a privileged vocabulary.

If the interpretation here of forms of life is correct, then one of Wittgenstein's important results is that there is another, nonprivate basis for a privileged vocabulary – viz., forms of life. It is important that forms of life are not just temporary arrangements, convenient for the moment, which may be adjusted or replaced at will. Our practices, and hence the vocabularies possible for us, are 'materially' constrained by our 'mindedness' (Lear's term), by the actual set of responses that we agree upon without reflection, e.g. '. . . 998, 1000, 1002 . . .'. On Wittgenstein's view, not just any invented vocabulary is a live option for us; our being minded as we are shapes the possibilities for usable vocabularies. (This last point, along with others that I want to make, is, for Wittgenstein, more showable than statable.)

The interpretation of the idea of forms of life given here thus supports the ubiquity thesis and undercuts the thesis of linguistic convenience. It appears, then, that Rorty is wrong to conflate the two theses: not only would Wittgenstein deny Rorty's view that vocabularies are freely chosen for convenience, but also he would offer considerations that actually cast doubt on that view.

Where Putnam tends to assimilate the idea of a form of life to that of an empirical regularity, Rorty errs in the opposite direction in assimilating the idea of a form of life to that of an arbitrary decision. Clearly, neither of these conceptions does justice to Wittgenstein's idea of a form of life.

5. Do Davidson's Criticisms of the Idea of a Conceptual Scheme Apply to the Idea of a Form of Life?

In 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme',[46] much of Davidson's argument is designed to show that conceptual relativism is incoherent. So, if Wittgenstein were committed to conceptual relativism (or, rather, to a pragmatic counterpart, form-of-life relativism), Wittgenstein's position would be incoherent. If Wittgenstein were to endorse Rorty's thesis of linguistic convenience, he would be committed to an incoherent relativism. It would be supposed that forms of life, like Rortian vocabularies, could be compared, selected, and discarded. However, since we cannot even imagine in any significant detail forms of life that are genuine competitors to ours, the idea of forms of life must be construed nonrelativistically.

Again, it is not by arbitrary choice that we proceed in the progression of adding two '... 998, 1000, 1002 ...' and not '... 998, 1000, 1004 ...'. When Wittgenstein imagines alternatives to our forms of life, he describes them – what choice does he have – by means of *our* concepts that presuppose *our* forms of life. As Williams puts it,[47]

> The imagined alternatives are not alternatives *to* us; they are alternatives *for* us, markers of how far we might go and still remain, within our world – a world leaving which would not mean that we saw something different, but just that we ceased to see.

Thus, there is no room in Wittgenstein for form-of-life relativism, and Davidson's arguments against conceptual relativism can take no hold on Wittgenstein.

There are two further features of Davidson's case against the idea of a conceptual scheme. Davidson argues, first, that the notion of uninterpreted reality is required for there to be a diversity of conceptual schemes, and second, that if there is no diversity of conceptual schemes, the idea of a conceptual scheme fails to make sense. Urging that we can make no sense of the notion of an uninterpreted reality variously interpreted by diverse conceptual schemes, Davidson concludes that the idea of a conceptual scheme must be abandoned.

Are there analogous considerations that should lead us to abandon the notion of a form of life? Of course, the idea of form of life does not itself presuppose that we have an idea of uninterpreted reality even if Lear is right that belief in an independently existing world is part of our form of life. The application of the concept of an independently-existing world, like the application of any concept for Wittgenstein, presupposes forms of life, not vice versa. So the incoherence of the notion of an uninterpreted reality does not affect the idea of a form of life.

The other feature of Davidson's case against the idea of a conceptual scheme seems more threatening to the idea of a form of life. Davidson holds that we must give up the idea of a conceptual scheme because we lack an 'intelligible basis on which it can be said that schemes are different'.[48] Although we speak of forms (in the plural) of life, the argument has been that the relevant community to which to apply the term 'form of life' is the human community. There is no more intelligible basis on which it can be said that (the totality of) forms of life are different from ours than on which it can be said that conceptual schemes are different from ours. But in the case against conceptual schemes, Davidson insists that it would be,

> wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind – all speakers of language, at least – share a conceptual scheme. For if we cannot intelligibly say that conceptual schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one.[49]

Wittgenstein, however, need not accept application of Davidson's principle to the idea of forms of life. (Davidson himself points out that even monotheists have religion.) The incoherence of conceptual relativism does not suffice for the incoherence of the idea of a conceptual scheme. The reason that the idea of a conceptual scheme is incoherent is that it is founded on an untenable distinction between scheme and content. The idea of a form of life rests on no such untenable base. Thus, without jeopardizing the idea of a form of life, Wittgenstein can take form-of-life relativism to be as incoherent as Davidson takes conceptual relativism. In addition, I suspect that Wittgenstein, unlike Davidson, would countenance unstatable insights, which, if they could be stated, would be true and important, and furthermore, that would-be discourse about forms of life is an attempt to express such insights.

The idea of a form of life emerges as the result of a kind of transcendental argument: We have language that we use to communicate; we could have no such language if the locus of meaning were the individual or any facts concerning individuals; therefore, meaning requires a community. 'Form of life' is Wittgenstein's way of designating what it is about a community that makes possible meaning. Given this role of the idea of a form of life, it is hardly surprising that little meaningfully can be said about it.[50]

NOTES

1 E.g., see Norman Malcolm, 'Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*', in George Pitcher (Ed.), *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y. 1966, p. 91; also Stanley Cavell, 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', ibid., p. 158.

2 G. E. M. Anscombe, 'The Question of Linguistic Idealism', in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein. The Collected Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe*, Vol. 1, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1981, p. 122.

3 The fact that forms of life cannot be made wholly explicit, coupled with the fact that computer programs, even 'heuristic' programs, are perforce wholly explicit, may account for the fact that computers are much more successful at keeping the books than they are at ordering hamburgers. It is a difficult and specifically philosophical task to bring our forms of life into view and to search out their ramifications in a piecemeal way, and, I believe that Wittgenstein would hold, a futile project to attempt a global description of them.

4 See, e.g., essays in Pitcher, op. cit., and in O. R. Jones (Ed.), *The Private Language Argument*, St. Martin Press, New York 1971.

5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Macmillan Co., New York 1958: Pt. II, p. 178. Hereafter abbreviated as *'PI'* and references made in the text; e.g., *PI*, II, 178.

6 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford 1979, p. 32.

7 Stanley Cavell, 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', op. cit., p. 161.

8 I owe this point to Gareth B. Matthews.

9 Cavell, 'The Claim of Reason', op. cit., p. 111.

10 E.g., see W. D. Hudson, 'The Light Wittgenstein Sheds on Religion', in Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., Howard K, Wettstein (Eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. VI, *The Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1981, pp. 275–92.

11 E.g., see Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Explanation in the *Geisteswissenschaften*', in Steven H. Holtzmann and Christopher M. Leich (Eds.), *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1981, p. 202.

12 Hanna F. Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1972, p. 135.

13 Barry Stroud, 'Wittgenstein and Logical Necessity', in Pitcher (Ed.), op. cit., p. 488.

14 See Kripke's discussion of this point in the solution of the skeptical paradox below.

15 Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1982, p. 88.

16 Ibid., p. 92.

17 See Kripke's remarks on the 'inversion of the conditional', ibid., pp. 93–95; also Jonathan Lear, 'Ethics, Mathematics and Relativism', *Mind*, Vol. 92 (1983), p. 40.

18 Lear, 'Ethics, Mathematics and Relativism', op. cit., p. 40.

19 Jonathan Lear, 'Leaving the World Alone', *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 79 (1982), p. 395.

20 Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1967: par. 401, par. 549. Also the extended discussion of the 'non-

cognitive thesis of avowals' in P. M. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Wittgenstein on Philosophy and the Metaphysics of Experience*, Oxford University Press, London 1975, Ch. IX.
21 See Gareth B. Matthews, *Philosophy and the Young Child*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1980.
22 Kripke and others have pointed out in passing that Wittgenstein's is a version of a transcendental argument; for a detailed discussion, see Stanley Bates, forthcoming.
23 Lear, 'Leaving the World Alone', op. cit., p. 385; cf. Bernard Williams, 'Wittgenstein and Idealism', in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981, p. 163.
24 Anscombe, 'The Question of Linguistic Idealism', op. cit., pp. 118, 121.
25 Williams has made this point regarding mathematics. See 'Wittgenstein and Idealism', op. cit., p. 163.
26 Williams in 'Wittgenstein and Idealism', op. cit., p. 153; cf. Lear in 'Leaving the World Alone', op. cit., p. 385.
27 Hilary Putnam, 'Analyticity and A Priority: Beyond Wittgenstein and Quine', in Peter French *et al.* (Eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. IV, *Studies in Metaphysics*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 1979, pp. 423–42. Reprinted in Hilary Putnam, *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 3, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983, p. 117, orig. emphases. Page references are to the latter. Putnam takes his charge against Wittgenstein to override the differences between Dummett's and Stroud's interpretations of Wittgenstein's views on mathematical and logical necessity.
28 Putnam, 'Analyticity and A Priority', op. cit., p. 118.
29 Lear, 'Leaving the World Alone', op. cit., p. 386.
30 Putnam, 'Analyticity and A Priority', op. cit., p. 126.
31 Anscombe includes rights, rules, and promises in 'The Question of Linguistic Idealism', op. cit.
32 Putnam, 'Analyticity and A Priority', op. cit., p. 118.
33 Ibid., p. 126, orig. emphasis.
34 Ibid., p. 138.
35 Ibid., p. 127.
36 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1979, p. 367.
37 Richard Rorty, 'Contemporary Philosophy of Mind', *Synthese*, Vol. 53 (1982), p. 332.
38 Ibid., p. 344.
39 Richard Rorty, 'Comment on Dennett', *Synthese*, Vol. 53 (1982), p. 185.
40 Rorty, 'Contemporary Philosophy of Mind', op. cit., p. 336.
41 Ibid.
42 Rorty, 'Comment on Dennett', op. cit., p. 186.
43 Rorty, 'Contemporary Philosophy of Mind', op. cit., p. 337.
44 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, op. cit., par. 391.
45 Ibid., par. 541, cf. par. 543.
46 Donald Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. XLVII (1973–74), pp. 5–20.
47 Williams, 'Wittgenstein and Idealism', op. cit., p. 160.
48 Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', op. cit., p. 20.
49 Ibid.
50 The impetus for this work lies in conversations with Stanley Bates, to whom I am indebted both for pointing the direction to take with Wittgenstein and for commenting on a draft of this paper.