Article

Forms of Life and Linguistic Change: The Case of Trans Communities

Anna Boncompagni ⬤

Department of Philosophy, University of California, Irvine, CA 92697, USA; anna.boncompagni@uci.edu

Abstract: Wittgenstein mentions "forms of life" only on a limited number of occasions in his writings; however, this concept is at the core of his approach to language, as the vast literature on the subject shows. My aim in this paper is neither to adjudicate which of the many competing interpretations of "forms of life" is correct nor to propose a new one. I start with a methodological take on this notion and test it by applying it to a specific case. In my view, the notion of forms of life is a methodological tool that Wittgenstein uses to draw attention to the embeddedness of language in our lives and practices. This reading, I suggest, allows us to oppose those who want to see in Wittgenstein a conservative thinker, based on his remark on forms of life as "the given" that must be accepted. In particular, it becomes possible to put his notion to use in the study of linguistic and social change. Hence, I propose as an example the case of innovative language games in trans communities. In this context, the notion of forms of life enables us to see with more clarity how linguistic change occurs, which also helps us better understand phenomena such as disagreement, conflict, and hermeneutical injustice.

Keywords: Wittgenstein; forms of life; language games; linguistic change; trans; LGBTQ; disagreement

1. Introduction

Wittgenstein mentions "forms of life" only on a limited number of occasions in the *Philosophical Investigations* [1] and other writings; however, as has been argued, this concept is central in his later work. Indeed, it calls attention to the way in which language games are embedded within practices and ways of living and to how they are properly understandable only by acknowledging such embeddedness. This is at the core of the Wittgensteinian approach to language.

The secondary literature on this concept is immense, and it includes several competing interpretations. Some see this concept as embodying a form of naturalism, and others interpret it as a manifestation of a kind of transcendentalism; there are authors who highlight the connection between forms of life and the organic nature of us human beings, and others who instead focus on the multiplicity of cultural forms of life each characterizing a specific social and historical community or society (more below). However, my aim in this paper is neither to adjudicate which interpretation is correct nor to propose a new one. Rather, I will start from a methodological interpretation of forms of life, which I defended elsewhere, and test it by applying it to a specific case.

In what follows, I first briefly delineate my reading of forms of life, according to which this is not a substantive notion but a tool that Wittgenstein uses to draw attention to the embeddedness of language in our lives and practices. This reading, I suggest, allows us to oppose those who want to see in Wittgenstein a conservative thinker, based chiefly on his remark on forms of life as "the given" that must be accepted. Rather, we can put his notion to use in multiple ways, including the study of linguistic and social change. Hence, I propose the case of innovative language games in trans communities as an example. In this context, the notion of forms of life, I argue, enables us to see with more clarity phenomena such as linguistic change, conflict, disagreement, and hermeneutical injustice.

2. Forms of Life as a Methodological Tool

Wittgenstein mentions "*Lebensform*" or "*Lebensformen*" (form or forms of life) three times in part I of the *Investigations* and twice in part II [1]. The term also appears occasionally in other published writings as well as in manuscripts and typescripts. These remarks (especially those in [1]) are generally considered crucial in Wittgenstein's philosophy and have spurred much discussion, often generating competing views about their meaning and significance. In fact, Wittgenstein himself never explicitly defines "forms of life", and this also has licensed many speculations about the role that this notion plays in his thought. One reason that might at least in part explain Wittgenstein's seeming reluctance to say more about what he meant by "forms of life" is that this term was very common in his time, and a definition was probably not perceived as needed [2]. The term was used both in biology and other natural sciences and in what we might call broadly the history of ideas or the history of culture, and Wittgenstein's employment of it seems to be receptive to both aspects. Indeed, his remarks on forms of life refer both to natural and even biological features of human beings and to historically situated cultures and ways of living. Here is an example of the former (form of life as what characterizes human beings as organisms, as opposed to other animals):

> [...] A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe that his master will come the day after tomorrow?—And *what* can he not do here?—How do I do it?—What answer am I supposed to give to this?

> Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of a language. That is to say, the manifestations of hope are modifications of this complicated form of life (*Lebensform*). (If a concept points to a characteristic of human handwriting, it has no application to beings that do not write.) ([1], part II, #1).

Here is an example of the latter (form of life as a contingent, historically, and geographically situated human way of living):

> Were we to arrive in a foreign country, with a foreign language and foreign customs, it could be easy in some cases to find a form of language and form of life [*Sprach- und Lebensform*] which we should define as giving orders and following orders; or maybe they would not possess a form of language and of life corresponding to our giving orders etc. And there may be a people which does not hold a form of life corresponding to our greeting. ([3], MS 165, p. 110[1]).

Overlooking the coexistence of these aspects in Wittgenstein's employment of this notion has led commentators to make opposing claims. On the one hand, there are those who privilege the biological dimension and claim that "forms of life" describes natural, biological features of human beings as organisms (see, for instance, Hunter [5], one of the first articles on Wittgenstein's forms of life). On the other hand, others (such as [4] or [2]) focus more on the cultural dimension and claim that Wittgenstein referred to multiple, socially situated ways of living that are not reducible to our organic nature, though they encompass it. Notably, Stanley Cavell ([6], p. 255) observes that both dimensions are present, and it is precisely the interaction between them that makes Wittgenstein's notion interesting and fruitful. He calls them the vertical (biological) and horizontal (cultural) dimensions of forms of life.

However, even if one acknowledges the coexistence of multiple aspects in the Wittgensteinian notion, and even if one is aware of the fact that it was a quite common notion in Wittgenstein's time, the question remains as to why, given the relevance that this notion has in his work, Wittgenstein was not more explicit about it. In my view, the point is that Wittgenstein was not interested in explaining what a form of life is because he was not investigating forms of life as an object of study: he was employing this notion instrumentally, as a means to highlight the embeddedness of language games within the wider context of human practices and ways of living. If we are to investigate the workings of our language, in other words, we need to look at the practical contexts in which they take place. This

is in line with Wittgenstein's appeal to look at the use of a word in order to understand its meaning (cf. [1], part I, #43) instead of focusing on either reference or a private mental state. It is consistent with both the earliest and the latest remarks that Wittgenstein wrote about this notion ([1], part I, #19, 23, part II, #345). The latter is particularly interesting for its methodological aspect, which appears when one examines the genesis of this remark. Wittgenstein affirms here: "What has to be accepted, the given, is—one might say—*forms of life*". In its original formulation (MS 133, 1946–1947, later published in [7]), it reads:

> Instead of the unanalysable, specific, indefinable: the fact that we act in such-and-such ways, e.g., *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affair thus and so, *give* orders, render accounts, describe colours, take an interest in others' feelings. What has to be accepted, the given—it might be said—are facts of living. ([8], vol. I, #630).

In the manuscript, what must be accepted was "*Lebensformen/Tatsachen des Lebens*," forms of life/facts of life ([3], MS 133, p. 28v); and Wittgenstein will choose the expression "forms of life" in the later MS 144, the manuscript of [1] part II (see [3], MS 144, p. 102).

"Forms of life", then, is Wittgenstein's alternative to "the unanalysable, specific, indefinable", as "the given". What did he mean by these terms? I believe that what he was concerned with was the philosophical notion of "the given" as the final datum where the analysis must stop, and the temptation that he was warning against is the tendency to seek, as such an ultimate datum, something utterly "specific" that we cannot properly define. In particular, he was referring to the temptation to appeal to private experiences and sensations as "the specific". We can obtain more clarity about what he was after by looking at the lectures on philosophical psychology that he was giving at that time. On November 8, 1946 (the day after writing the remark on the given in MS 133), Wittgenstein began his class with these words:

> Something specific is that which cannot be explained; for example, colour, thinking. But you explain 'red' by ostensive definition. This consists not in pointing to the impression red, but, to something that is red. Here one is liable to make a peculiar mistake. It is that the physical object is not essential in the explanation, so that it would be sufficient if you had the impression in some other way than having the object pointed to. This is a private explanation. "At least it helps *me*." But this is not an explanation for anyone, or for me. ... How are we to use the private explanation? Suppose I recognize this object as being red. How do I compare and say: the same impression? ... The explanation of 'thinking' is similar to that of 'red'. ([9], p. 139).

This is, basically, a version of Wittgenstein's criticism of private ostension and private language. He continues:

> There's a temptation to say, "Colour experience, sound experience, hoping, fearing, thinking, are specific"—as if you could define by concentration—but you can't. The specific is something that has to be shown publicly. What can be shown publicly and are specific are certain phenomena of life. [...] Take any such phenomenon as comparing colours, measuring time, comparing lengths, playing games. These are specific. "I'll show you a thing we humans do" ([9], pp. 23–24[2]).

"The given", then, the "specific" which can be shown publicly, are *things we humans do*: facts of life, forms of life. The criticism underlying this remark is directed against the search for an ultimate "datum" that philosophical analysis cannot further analyze, where such an ultimate datum is to be found in the immediacy of experience, an assumption that, in some form, logical positivism, phenomenology, and phenomenalism shared. Wittgenstein's move instead is to divert our attention from this philosophical temptation and draw it toward the "given" of our practices—notably: our normative practices, those that are governed by rules we have been trained to accept and follow. It is a methodological remark in that it tells us something about what philosophy (philosophers) should do: look at *this* as the

given, not at *that*. The notion of forms of life, accordingly, appears then to be a means to this end, a reminder, or a pointer, for the philosopher.

Seeing these lines on the given in this light also helps us get rid of a common interpretation that, chiefly on the grounds of [1], part II, #345, has depicted Wittgenstein as a conservative thinker and a defender of the status quo. Indeed, if one thinks of "forms of life" as socio-cultural systems and reads this remark—"What has to be accepted, the given, is—one might say—*forms of life*"—out of context, it is all too easy to conclude that for Wittgenstein cultural systems just have to be accepted as they are and cannot be criticized. This apparently squares well with other passages in which Wittgenstein claims that philosophy "leaves everything as it is" ([1], part I, #124), suggesting that philosophical quietism is the natural ally of political conservatism. Some well-known interpreters that saw in Wittgenstein a conservative defender of the status quo include Herbert Marcuse [10] and Ernst Gellner [11] and, within the Wittgensteinian scholarship, Kristóf Nyíri [12].

However, once the methodological nature of the remark on forms of life as "the given" is acknowledged, these interpretations lose at least part of their grip, and other, non-conservative ways of recognizing the basicness of forms of life become available. In fact, if the point is methodological—telling philosophers where to look in their investigations of the workings of our language—rather than political—telling philosophers (and everyone) that they cannot criticize forms of life—then acknowledging that there are some practices and ways of living that are just "bedrock" for us ([1], part I, #217) does not entail that they are forever immune to criticism (cf. [13], p. 85).

Wittgenstein's reflection on rule-following, similarly, has sometimes been read as the claim that at the bottom, we follow rules blindly (as he states in ([1], part I, #219) and, therefore, there is no room for criticism and change (see, for instance, [14]). However, the recognition that we do sometimes simply act the way the rule expects us to act without reflection does not entail that we always do or that this is in the nature of rule-following organisms. Being part of a form of life and having mastered techniques and competencies in following its rules, on the contrary, not only allows but *requires* one to also be able to apply the rule to new cases, decide about its appropriateness to new contexts, and know how to adapt rules or even escape them if needed (e.g., if such rules have "loopholes"; cf. [15], #139; [16]). In other words, the rule follower is not an automaton, and rules exhibit flexibility: they can change, and they can be challenged [17,18].

To clarify, I am not claiming that Wittgenstein invited criticism or that he himself would endorse a politically progressive view, as opposed to the conservative side with which he is sometimes associated. In fact, I do not find the debate about his own political views particularly interesting or productive; what I do find interesting and productive is that if the notion of forms of life is a tool, it can be *used*. What does it mean, however, to use "forms of life" as a tool? Rather than stopping the conversation with the acknowledgement of a datum, a tool can *open* a conversation—in this case, on the intertwinement of the way we live and the words we use. By paying attention to the actual dialectic between tradition and change, rule and novelty, the lived and enacted conceptual competencies of agents come to the fore, including the way in which agents, in their practices, master, adapt, and alter concepts through time. Additionally, not only actual concrete changes but also new conceptual possibilities become visible: Wittgenstein's numerous imaginary examples of alternative, sometimes alien, forms of life train the mind to imagine extensions and alterations. Instead of judging and maybe limiting other ways of living based on given meanings, one can learn to see other ways of living as grounds for other meanings.

In the next section, I apply this approach to the case of new and unusual linguistic uses in trans communities.

3. Linguistic Change in Trans Communities

Most of the literature on trans issues and language has focused on how individuals in the dominant culture should behave, linguistically, to promote the inclusion of trans and gender non-conforming people, and on how language should be engineered in order

to include and not harm marginalized individuals and communities. Without denying the relevance of such efforts, Hernandez and Crowley [19] aim to enlarge the scope of linguistic and philosophical research in this field by examining how trans individuals and communities themselves actually use language and discursive styles in creative and innovative ways for their own purposes. In this section, I explain the relevance of this point within a Wittgensteinian framework: by paying attention to the ways of living and the sets of interrelated practices enacted in specific communities (forms of life as the "given", [1], part II, #345), we can obtain a better understanding of the "workings of our language" ([1], part I, #109). While here I focus on language use within trans communities, in Section 4, I examine the relationship between marginalized and dominant cultures, including the issues of uptake and disagreement.

Using sociolinguistic research as their source, but also building on Austin [20] and Butler [21], Hernandez and Crowley [19] bring to the attention of philosophers the richness and performativity of language without limiting the analysis to referential lexical terms such as 'man' and 'woman' or 'he' and 'she'; rather, they extend the analysis to *ways* of speaking, including the pitch and tone of voice, the bodily movements and gestures accompanying the utterance of words, speech styles, and the repetitions and habits that institutionally perform and perpetuate genders. In particular, Hernandez and Crowley examine the uses of gendered language (as opposed to the use of neutral pronouns and suffixes) on the part of trans and gender non-conforming individuals[3]. One way in which gendered language is used in these communities is for the purpose of recognition. This includes creating new terms or using gendered morphology in nonnormative ways. For instance, in linguistic communities where there are no gendered pronouns, some individuals who want to *affirm* their non-conforming gender sometimes adopt pronouns and terms from other languages. An example is Indonesian *tombois*, who borrow the masculine pronouns from the Mingangkabu language ([19], p. 14). Besides pronouns and terms, it is the *voice* that can be used and/or altered to signal or index oneself as belonging or not belonging to a certain gender or to subvert expectations about one's gender (for instance, one can work with the pitch of their voice or the pronunciation of certain phonemes). These uses of language function as sorts of covert illocutionary acts that attempt to ascribe, or self-ascribe, gender. In some cases, the speaker does not want the listener to see the intention that motivates their utterances, and the illocutionary act is all the more successful when it solicits the desired response on the part of the listener without them being aware that this is the effect the speaker wanted to produce.

Inspired by Lugones [22], Hernandez and Crowley also highlight how certain playful ways of using language help marginalized individuals safely navigate dominant world-views without being trapped in oppressive definitions and perceptions. Examples include the adoption of dominant terms for bodily parts that are recontextualized (e.g., trans masculine people who did not go through plastic surgery using "dick" for their genitals) or the creation of humorous new terms that help de-pathologize medical treatments (e.g., trans feminine people calling their hormones "antiboyotics", or their after-surgery genitals "robopussy").

Interestingly, Hernandez and Crowley refer to a Wittgensteinian framework when they suggest that moves within the language game of playful uses of gendered language have the power to alter not only the norms of the language game itself, that is, how the moves are made within the game, but also the (one might say) hierarchically higher norms governing gender ascription and the use of gendered language in general ([19], p. 21). In line with Scheman [23], they also observe that by paying attention to how individuals and groups, *in fact*, use language, one is able to see how certain uses of language respond to "real needs" (cf. [1], part I, #108) such as dealing with dominant and oppressive views and practices and, at least in part, trying to reshape the conceptual landscape of the dominant culture. Attention to how language is, *in fact*, used also helps avoid being guided by a preconception of how language ought to be, or of how it ought to be engineered. In the case studied by Hernandez and Crowley, what emerges is that there can be different aims and

different needs and different ways for using language to accomplish such aims or satisfy such needs: sometimes, neutralizing gender (for instance, with gender-neutral pronouns) is the way, sometimes adopting and subverting gendered words (for instance, using gendered terms differently than they are supposed to) is the way. The point is that this is the "given" that needs to be recognized: the given is what people actually do with language, including speech styles and non-verbal language, in their form of life.

The embeddedness of language games in forms of life shows that the way we use words and the way we live are inextricable from one another and learning the meaning (use) of a word just *is* learning what something is in our form of life. This calls for a closer examination of the relationship between linguistic practices and various kinds of social norms, among which are implicit norms about what we deem as "real" (gender, for instance; cf. [24], p. 5). The performativity of language indeed goes much beyond specific illocutionary acts and encompasses a large part of linguistic uses, which are constantly in the business of confirming, reinforcing, or else questioning norms and habits. Words, far from being mere representational devices, function in our life as part of a system of interrelated meanings connected in specific ways with each other and with our practices, interests, needs, and values. This is all the more so for words related to social and personal identities. In particular, the performativity of language intertwines here with the performativity of gender. The way one calls oneself and others and the way one treats oneself and others are typically *gendered* together. Gender is constantly presupposed and, at the same time, reinforced in our social life, which is a life with words. In this sense, learning, for instance, what it is to be a woman is not only learning the meaning of a word, but it includes learning to use the feminine pronoun for oneself, to have certain expectations about one's life, to walk, sit, move, behave, and talk in a certain way, to have a certain attitude towards others, and to expect others to have a certain attitude towards oneself. Similarly, gendering a child as a girl includes speaking to her in the feminine, using such and such words and tone of voice, expressing approval, disapproval, or surprise in front of certain actions, surrounding her with certain colors, toys, and objects, and expecting and encouraging certain behaviors ([24], p. 9). The "she" and the "woman" words are embedded in these normative practices: they at the same time confer sense to them and obtain their sense, their point, from them.

Change, similarly, occurs at multiple levels, as a change in normative practices engenders (!) and is engendered by a change in linguistic uses. In the case at hand, linguistic styles and (un)gendered words experimented in trans communities are embedded within practices, often transgressive and innovative ones; these linguistic and practical experiments mutually reinforce each other, finding in the relatively protected environment of like-minded and like-(un)gendered people a fertile terrain for growth. Words, gestures, tone and pitch of voice, clothing, bodily movements, jokes, etc., contribute to establishing a sense of belonging and of reciprocal recognition that is empowering and healing.

Playing with language by modifying or adapting or distorting it, instead of being played by language, can bring joy and relief. Playing, however, requires players: there must be some kind of uptake by others who share an awareness of the rules of the game and sometimes the willingness to alter them. This uptake is a matter of what Wittgenstein calls agreement in forms of life, as opposed to agreement in opinions (cf. [1], part I, #241): individuals who agree in forms of life go beyond agreeing in what they think—for instance, in equality, the importance of respecting one's pronouns, and the like. They share ways of living, and *in that they share ways of living*, they speak the same language, which includes the ability to see its limitations and potentialities and to act with it and on it. Adapting and subverting language uses, and not only following given rules, presupposes this deeper sharing of practices and ways of living.

What happens, however, when there is no agreement in forms of life? What happens when a trans person plays with language outside the relatively safe space of their own community and brings these words and expressive styles into traditional, cis-normative environments? Is there understanding, is there conflict, is there uptake? Are there gatekeepers

that prevent linguistic change from spreading? The next section examines the dynamics of the relationship between dominant and marginalized forms of life and how they interlace with the dynamics of linguistic change.

4. Change, Uptake, and Disagreement

To a certain extent, a mutual and tacit understanding grounded in shared forms of life helps individuals belonging to marginalized communities navigate the dominant culture by recognizing each other even "out there": coded words, glances, hints, allusions, and signals, contribute to a sense of belonging that crisscrosses dominant environments in virtue of the simple fact that they are taken up and openly or covertly reciprocated by others. This is a case, though, in which the marginalized and the dominant environments, even when physically co-existent, are still, to a certain extent, separated. In a sense, individuals belonging to a marginalized group share a language that privileged individuals are not able or willing to perceive. A sort of code might intentionally be kept secret for a variety of reasons, going from mere fun to concrete risk of violence and persecution.

The case, however, becomes more interesting when the two forms of life do interact, especially if the marginalized community needs or wants its language, or its variations on the dominant language, to be perceived and potentially accepted and adopted by the dominant culture. A trans person using (un)gendered words in non-conforming ways outside the trans environment might generate immediate reactions of puzzlement, discomfort, refusal, sometimes laughter, and derision, but also sometimes insult and aggression on the part of other individuals or groups. What might be lacking for the trans words to be properly understood is an implicit, shared form of life that makes each other's needs, desires, aspirations, and expressions—each other's "normality"—intelligible. However, even in the absence of a shared form of life, an "alien" form of life can, at least in part, be known or represented. Forms of life are, after all, not isolated from one another, and while a person might not share some aspects of their way of living with another, they would most likely share other aspects. Individuals indeed belong to multiple forms of life at the same time: a trans person lives in a trans world, but also (for instance) in California, in their neighborhood, in the African-American community, in academia, in the Western and English-speaking world, in their family and circle of friends, and so on and so forth, where all these environments overlap in several ways. Furthermore, of course, each person is a human being, and, as such, they share some fundamental features with all other human beings. Here is a context in which acknowledging the two dimensions of the Wittgensteinian notion of forms of life—to use Cavell's terminology, the vertical and horizontal dimensions, that is, the biological and cultural aspects of it—is particularly fruitful. It is the coexistence of a shared form of life and of more local ways of living that makes communication and understanding possible *and*, sometimes, difficult, tricky, and conflictual.

Philosophical discussions about disagreement typically overlook the multiplicity, complexity, articulation, and multi-dimensionality of forms of life. For instance, Fogelin's [25] famous employment of a Wittgensteinian framework to distinguish deep disagreement from mere disagreement (we might say: disagreement in forms of life from disagreement in opinions) pictures a situation in which the two parties share no background at all; however, their common belonging to humanity, and most likely to some relevant segments of humanity, should be ground enough for some minimal channels of communication to remain navigable. In my view, the Wittgensteinian notion of forms of life does not prevent but rather allows us to see the possibility (and not only the difficulty) that such communication still takes place.

To stick to the case at hand, a cis person who has never met a trans person or heard about their world, after an immediate reaction of (presumably) puzzlement and perhaps refusal, is not necessarily prevented from understanding what the trans individual is doing when they play with (un)gendered language. For instance, the cis individual might be told a story, or they might elaborate on a story, to make sense of what they witness. A quite

standard one is the "born in the wrong body" story. Glossing over the essentialist and Cartesian heritage that such a narrative embodies, it is a strategic simplification that has helped many trans individuals not only communicate their world of sense to others but also, in the first place, understand their own experiences as they were growing up. A cis person, too, by imagining what being born in the wrong body might mean, can come to see the point of—for instance—calling one's vagina a penis. They can come to see that it is not only a matter of words and labels applied incorrectly but of ways in which language can be used unconventionally to make sense of something that demands understanding. It is by imagining different, unusual, sometimes disturbing circumstances, that different words or concepts, previously simply not heard or deemed senseless, start to appear meaningful.

An exercise in imagination is what Wittgenstein appeals to in his remarks about concepts, concept formation, and the possibility of different concepts.

> (...) If anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize— then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him. ([1], part II, #366).

Let someone imagine being born in a body of the opposite sex, and the naturalness of calling one's vagina a penis—even if only in this imagined possible world—will become apparent. Once a cis person comes into contact with the trans form of life, in the sense that they see or imagine some different "very general facts of nature" that characterize it, the chance of making room for other words and concepts opens up. It is not, obviously, an automatic mechanism: it requires the willingness to acknowledge such facts as *real*. However, the very use of a modified language on the part of trans individuals and communities can be a factor in this acknowledgment. Once more, the performativity of language and the performativity of gender are interlaced, and certain language uses can elicit proper responses that are also a contribution to a new version of the collective "real".

Once individual responses of acknowledgment multiply and progressively reinforce the conceptual shift that is emerging, some regions of the dominant culture will become more hospitable and permeable to new uses of language. However, an effective linguistic and conceptual change will eventually demand a more structural step. If new language uses are to impact dominant customary uses of language, they need some sort of institutional backing: they need to reach and pass a threshold that is typically well-defended. Meanings are negotiated at the boundary and within the overlapping terrain between dominant and marginalized forms of life. When I say "negotiated", I am not referring exclusively to an explicit process in which parties trade and decide about words, but there might be cultural and institutional sites in which something of this sort effectively takes place: for instance, changes in dictionaries that have an authoritative public status, or the introduction of terms and definitions in laws and bureaucratic procedures. Think of official forms that require checking a box for one's sex or gender, and that in some cases now allow one to check the "other" box beside "F" and "M"; of driver's licenses and birth certificates that include the X gender as an option; and of new legal definitions of family and new procedures that formally acknowledge same-sex marriage and parenthood. These shifts in procedures often start from shifts in language use. Successful shifts in language use indeed do not remain confined within language: they also occur pervasively in forms of life, which means in procedures, manuals, dictionaries, practices, formal and informal rules, multiple cultural expressions, physical spaces, and ultimately habits and traditions.

Acknowledgement and uptake of linguistic shifts, of course, do not always happen and are not always successful: conflict and disagreement, sometimes deep and irresolvable disagreement, must not be neglected. However, the upshot that attention to the interconnectedness of language and forms of life brings in this respect is the avoidance of an easy Manicheism that often characterizes the debate, according to which there is ordinary disagreement on the one hand, and this is rationally solvable, and deep disagreement on the other, and this is ultimately irresolvable [16,25]. So, it is the complexity of the picture,

sometimes involving positive change but also often involving rigidity, friction, backward movements, conflicts, confusion, and various forms of violence, that demands theoretical recognition. When the disagreement is about the meanings of our words, attention to forms of life helps put this complexity under focus by highlighting the uses of these words in their various interconnected contexts. This way, our concepts reveal to be sites of contested uses [23] that neither simply overlap nor just pass each other. Our simultaneous belonging to different forms of life, with their power structures and multiple scales of privilege and oppression, and the way such forms of life intersect with each other, form an intricate pattern in which shades of meaning, nuances, shifts, and creative connections emerge. So does the dimension of power, which determines conceptual conflicts, blockages, taboos, ostracisms, and the appropriation and misapplication of meanings and words.

When the trans community introduces new uses of language, indeed, it is easily met with reactionary defenses of commonsense notions and traditional conceptual boundaries. While in ordinary circumstances, these boundaries just stay in the background, undisturbed and silent, if unusual and transgressive linguistic uses are introduced, boundaries are typically made explicit and sometimes blatantly flaunted. Institutional gatekeepers that monitor and safeguard "correct" uses of language are often operating here and preventing linguistic shifts from taking hold. To make an example, in recent years in Italy, advocates of trans and non-binary rights have promoted the use of the "schwa" (ə in the international phonetic alphabet), a sign standing for a phoneme whose sound is between the "a" (the usual feminine suffix in Italian) and the "o" (the usual masculine suffix); however, Accademia della Crusca, one of the most important research institutions of the Italian language, intervened to discourage its introduction in the juridical language. Interestingly, the Accademia's argument relies on language being primarily *spoken*:

> Language is first of all *spoken*, in fact the spoken language enjoys a priority in the eyes of many linguists, and the written language must correspond to it as much as possible [. . .]. Juridical language is not the suitable place for minority innovative experiments that would lead to inhomogeneity and idiolect. In a language such as Italian, which has two grammatical genders, the masculine and the feminine, the best tool for all genders and orientations to feel represented continues to be the unmarked plural masculine, provided one has the awareness that this is actually a way of including and not of prevaricating. ([26], my translation).

However, it is precisely in the name of actual shifts in the use of language (be it spoken or written) that this and other innovations are advocated. Proponents of the "schwa" also point out that this phoneme is and was historically already used, in the spoken language, in some parts of Italy. Moreover, this push towards gender-neutral phonemes in Italy (as well as other countries) is partly the result of changes occurring in other languages, that is, in other forms of life (chiefly, but not only, the Anglo-American world). In languages that have grammatical genders and no use of the plural as a gender-neutral term, these changes easily appear artificial. However, what is interesting is that the interactions among people belonging to two (or more) forms of life and maybe using both languages can be a relevant factor in this change. Importantly, it is not merely a matter of importing a foreign custom and trying to artificially implant it in a different environment; rather, certain modifications that innovative uses of language allow in a certain form of life spread, thanks to the interaction of people, to another, even if meeting more resistance because of the grammatical features of its language. Differences and interactions between forms of life, that is, determine both friction and disagreement on the one hand and fertile modifications in practices and linguistic uses on the other. Neither friction nor the possibility of change must be neglected.

When interactions between radically different ways of living take place—and language is a site where they do—they typically make a community's "hinges" or deepest convictions emerge. As Diamond [27] observes, in the very process of disagreement, in thinking about one's own and the other system of beliefs and how distant they are, our concepts and convictions about reality (including, what it means to be a human being, what is human

agency, and what is reasonable evidence) come into play. *In thinking about the conflict*, she observes, we articulate thoughts about reality. "Our understanding of what is real and what is unreal can be in part shaped by how we take such conflicts and by how we reason in response to them" ([27], p. 120), and "what counts as a reason in thinking about such conflict cases is not given in advance of the conflict itself" ([27], p. 128). In such conflicts, we do not appeal to standards of rationality allegedly available independently of the confrontation that is taking place. Rather, we (might) engage in the elaboration or the rethinking of our idea of rationality, which may or may not come to share something with the idea expressed by the other form of life. In front of linguistic uses that, for instance, challenge sexual binarism or the taken-for-granted conception of "woman", an individual or a community might just shut the door to any possible communication, or they might realize that some tacit hinges concerning human nature are normatively operating and manifest themselves in a variety of ways: they regulate interpersonal relationships, shape the way one sees oneself, constitute and maintain the heterosexual family as the building block of society, organize physical spaces in the built environment, and much more. Once such hinges come to the fore, they also become vulnerable to criticism and subject to change. Crucially, whether this happens or not depends on the existence and visibility of forms of life in which different concepts are practiced, and different words are used.

Centering the framework on the notion of forms of life also helps see hermeneutical injustice in another light. In Fricker's view, hermeneutical injustice is the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to "a gap in the collective hermeneutical resource" ([28], p. 151), which is caused by hermeneutical marginalization. As has been already highlighted, however, conceiving of the hermeneutical "resource" in the singular oversimplifies the picture and neglects the actual hermeneutical world of marginalized communities, which often do elaborate and possess fully fledged concepts that make sense of experiences and oppression, as well as fully fledged expressions that communicate them; what is lacking, rather, is the acknowledgment and uptake on the part of the dominant culture or cultures [29–31]. Conversely, by bringing to the fore the interconnectedness between concepts and forms of life, hermeneutical injustice emerges as a phenomenon that has to do with practices and ways of living rather than the mere conceptual level (if it makes sense to speak of a "mere" conceptual level). That is, it is the complicated and power-shaped relationship between different and interlaced forms of life, with all their practices, *including* linguistic practices, that determines hermeneutical conflicts and problems in understanding, expression, communication, and uptake. What the connection with forms of life allows us to avoid is a simplified picture of the hermeneutical resource as a repository of concepts and notions that correspond (or do not) to objective phenomena, such that either one has the appropriate concept and is able to understand and communicate their experiences, or one has a lacuna where the appropriate concept should be and hence lacks understanding and the capacity to express and communicate their experiences. Attention to forms of life helps us overcome the theoretical separateness between what we do and what we say and identify the origins of hermeneutical injustice—as well as the possibility of hermeneutical justice—at the level of everyday practices, which are always already imbued with meanings.

5. Conclusions

I have argued that the Wittgensteinian conception of forms of life is best understood as a conceptual tool rather than a substantive notion, which coheres with Wittgenstein's use of the term as well as his seeming reluctance to explain what a form of life is. As a conceptual tool, the notion of forms of life is meant to be a reminder of the interconnectedness of words and doings that permeates our life, especially our life with others. In order to put to use such a tool, I made the example of linguistic changes in trans communities, arguing that the connection between linguistic expressions and style on the one hand and practices on the other suggests seeing changes in the use of language as parts of broader changes in forms of life. This allows us to see how new uses of language can, at the same time,

reflect and engender new ways of living. Next, I extended the analysis to the relationship between different forms of life and, more specifically, between dominant and marginalized forms of life. In this framework, linguistic innovations challenge not only traditional uses of language but more broadly and more complicatedly established ways of living that manifest themselves in words as well as habits, practices, procedures, laws, and the organization of physical spaces. The resistance that certain linguistic changes face is more understandable once seen in this light. More generally, attention to forms of life and the actual and "messy" [23] ways in which they interlace returns a more accurate picture not only of conceptual conflicts and change but also of the issue of disagreement, stepping out of a Manichean dichotomy between ordinary (resolvable) and deep (irresolvable) disagreement and making room for the study of actual conceptual conflicts and shifts. This includes seeing hermeneutical injustice (and justice) as the result of the interplay between forms of life rather than merely the effect of a gap in the collective conceptual repertoire.

Another aspect that this Wittgenstein-inspired framework can help tackle is the issue of conceptual engineering. I do not have the space to develop this here, but I would like to conclude by hinting at a possible direction in this respect. Attention to forms of life shows how linguistic and hence conceptual change, in fact, takes place, as opposed to how it should be normatively envisioned and implemented: it is when innovative uses of language bring about and are brought about by actual changes in ways of living, and by the mutual interrelations between different forms of life, that they effectively take hold. Such attention suggests a deeper understanding of marginalized ways of living as a precondition for melioristic projects. In this light, rather than engineering concepts, it seems theoretically and practically more promising to acknowledge and *take care of* divergent and innovative uses of language that are already taking hold in their "given" forms of life, eventually helping them grow beyond their safe environment and carve their space in the dominant culture.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1   References to the manuscripts and typescripts follow the standard classification [4] and quotes are from the Bergen Electronic Edition [3].

2   The previous passage and this one are from notes of the same lecture, taken by K.J. Shah and Peter Geach, respectively.

3   While Hernandez and Crowley focus in particular on gendered words because they are interested in exploring this as opposed to the use of ungendered words, I am here including both the use of gendered and gender-neutral language.

References

1.   Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed.; Hacker, P.M.S., Schulte, J., Anscombe, G.E.M., Eds.; Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 2009.

2.   Hacker, P.M.S. 'Forms of Life'. *Nord. Wittgenstein Rev.* **2015**, 1–20. [CrossRef]

3.   Wittgenstein, L. *Wittgenstein's Nachlass: The Bergen Electronic Edition*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2000.

4.   von Wright, G.H. *The Wittgenstein Papers in L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*; Klagge, J., Nordmann, A., Eds.; Hackett: Cambridge, UK, 1993; pp. 480–510.

5.   Hunter, J.F.M. 'Forms of Life' in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. *Am. Philos. Q.* **1968**, *5*, 233–243.

6.   Cavell, S. Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture. *Inquiry* **1988**, *31*, 253–264. [CrossRef]

7.   Wittgenstein, L. *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*; Anscombe, G.E.M., von Wright, G.H., Eds.; Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 1980; Volume 1–2.

8.   Glock, H.-J. *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*; Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 1996.

9.   Wittgenstein, L. *Wittgenstein's Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946–1947*; Geach, P.T., Ed.; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 1988.

10.   Marcuse, H. *One Dimensional Man*; Routledge: London, UK, 1991.

11. Gellner, E. *Language and Solitude: Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1998.

12. Nyíri, J.C. Wittgenstein's later work in relation to conservatism. In *Wittgenstein and His Times*; McGuinness, B., Kenny, A., Eds.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1981; pp. 44–68.

13. Putnam, H. *The Many Faces of Realism*; Open Court: La Salle, IL, USA, 1987.

14. Kilpinen, E. Pragmatism as a philosophy of action. In *Pragmatist Perspectives*; Acta Philosophica Fennica; Pihlström, S., Rydenfelt, H., Eds.; Societas Philosophica Fennica: Helsinki, Finland, 2009; Volume 86, pp. 163–179.

15. Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*; Anscombe, G.E.M., von Wright, G.H., Eds.; Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 1975.

16. Celikates, R. Against Manichaeism: The Politics of Forms of Life and the Possibilities of Critique. *Raisons Polit.* **2015**, *57*, 81–96. [CrossRef]

17. Putnam, H. Rules, Attunement, and 'Applying Words to the World'. The struggle to understand Wittgenstein's vision of language. In *The Legacy of Wittgenstein: Pragmatism or Deconstruction*; Nagl, L., Mouffe, C., Eds.; Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2001; pp. 9–24.

18. Colapietro, V. Allowing our practices to speak for themselves: Wittgenstein, Peirce, and their intersecting lineages. In *New Perspectives on Pragmatism and Analytic Philosophy*; Calcaterra, R.M., Ed.; Rodopi: Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2011.

19. Crowley, A.; Hernandez, E.M. How to do things with gendered words. In *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Philosophy of Language*; Anderson, L., Lepore, E., Eds.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2022.

20. Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1975.

21. Butler, J. *Undoing Gender*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2004.

22. Lugones, M. *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*; Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD, USA, 2003.

23. Scheman, N. Disrupting Demands: Messy Challenges to Analytic Methodology. *J. Soc. Philos.* **2023**, *53*, 473–493.

24. Gérardin-Laverge, M. A Realistic Approach to the Performativity of Gender. *Nord. Wittgenstein Rev.* **2022**, 1–12. [CrossRef]

25. Fogelin, R.J. The Logic of Deep Disagreements. *Informal Log.* **1985**, *7*, 1–8. [CrossRef]

26. Accademia della Crusca. L'Accademia Risponde a un Quesito Sulla Parità di Genere negli atti Giudiziari Posto dal Comitato Pari Opportunità del Consiglio Direttivo della Corte di Cassazione. 9 March 2023. Available online: https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/contenuti/titolo/31174 (accessed on 11 April 2023).

27. Diamond, C. Criticizing from Outside. *Philos. Investig.* **2013**, *36*, 114–132. [CrossRef]

28. Fricker, M. *Epistemic Injustice. Power and the Ethics of Knowledge*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2007.

29. Mason, R. Two Kinds of Unknowing. *Hypatia* **2011**, *26*, 294–307. [CrossRef]

30. Medina, J. Hermeneutical Injustice and Polyphonic Contextualism. *Soc. Epistemol.* **2012**, *26*, 201–220. [CrossRef]

31. Pohlhaus, G. Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance. *Hypatia* **2012**, *27*, 715–735. [CrossRef]