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Ends of Life: Forms of Life as the "Ruins of an Enduring Fable"?

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Abstract: This paper addresses the possibility of using the Wittgensteinian conception of "forms of life" ("*Lebensformen*") as a potentially transformative philosophical framework that responds to contemporary challenges. These challenges can be understood as resulting from parallel discourses of "ends": that of "nature" and that of the "human". These challenges are relevant, especially, for a Cavellian interpretation of Wittgensteinian *Lebensformen* as an expression of cultural and natural factors. My purpose is to show how Cavell's elaboration of Wittgensteinian *Lebensformen* can be maintained against the critical pressures exerted by prevailing discourses of ends.

Keywords: Wittgenstein; Cavell; forms of life; Anthropocene; Transcendentalism

1. Introduction

The appeal to forms of life is one of the central themes of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein. This appeal serves a complicated function within what might already appear to be a unique, if not idiosyncratic, style of practicing philosophy. Notwithstanding the difficulty of understanding what is meant by the term, appealing to forms of life ("*Lebensformen*") also reverses the order of explanation expected of philosophical practice: to critically reflect upon experience in order to reveal rational structures or a priori conditions. In taking *Lebensformen* as given, the Wittgensteinian model here, as elsewhere, cannot avoid conflict with a familiar image of the practice and work of philosophy. Appealing to *Lebensformen* seems to surrender both the specific authority attributed to philosophical inquiry as well as the field in which traditional philosophy has found the objects of its practice. How can we appreciate, let alone project a future for, a philosophical method that takes *Lebensformen* as an authority to which appeal is made, instead of as the *object* of philosophical analysis? One of the purposes of this paper is to answer this question, but, as we will see, the answer prima facie appears to be threatened by separate considerations of the historical moment as the "Anthropocene".

Principally, Wittgensteinians are referring to *human* forms of life, where this is understood to be the form of life of those beings who have or are subject to language (a modern characterization of the Aristotelian *zoon logon echon*) in such a way that capacities made available through and in language are not accidental to the human animal but are constitutive of the forms in *Lebensformen*. In a manner that, after Sellars, follows the collapse of the "myth of the given", Wittgensteinian *Lebensformen* are intricately interwoven with language so that human capacities of experience or cognition are always also given in what can be called a linguistic or grammatical space[1] [1]. This thought has prompted some recently to characterize Wittgenstein's approach as focusing on kinds of "convention allowing human beings to share understandings" ([2] p. 25)[2] [2–4]. The understanding of human language, thus forms of life, as entirely "conventional" seems to produce an apparently complete philosophical methodology that bears marked similarities with what is understood to be a quietist impetus driving Wittgenstein's philosophical outlook. But the root and branch conventionalization of *Lebensformen* fails to do justice to the subjective, skeptical, and even political concerns of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, especially as these have been interpreted by Cavell[3] [5,6].

But how should we think of the supplement that would correct an over-conventionalization of Wittgenstein's philosophy? As Cavell put the matter in a late essay, we are capable of distinguishing in Wittgenstein's philosophy two "directions" of interpreting *Lebensformen*: "a social or conventional or horizontal direction [. . .] and a biological or natural or vertical direction [. . .]" and that such a distinction casts "Wittgenstein's idea of philosophy as presenting [. . .] a form of the natural history of the human" ([4] pp. 207–208). The very idea of combining orthogonal directions for evaluating *Lebensformen* already indicates the relevance of considering how the "human is the animal that is unnatural [. . .], fated to chronic dissatisfaction with its lot, to torment, disappointment, exile, and the rest—unless you wish to say that the compulsion to escape the human lot [. . .] is precisely what *is* natural to the human" ([4] p. 208). This is to say that the correction to a conventionalization of forms of life involves a recognition of a doubled and conflicting role played by an idea of the natural[4] [7]. On one hand, we seem to be spurred to consider grammar as a kind of anthology of natural-historical descriptions of human life[5] [8]. Yet, the very relevance of a natural factor, external to convention, is immediately undercut by the curious dialectic of emphasizing that one essential characteristic within this natural-historical account is its disavowal. How on earth could "natural" or "unnatural" be thought to function here, let alone as two orientations (vertical and horizontal) for coordinating an account of human *Lebensformen*? Clarifying this bipartite division of the factors that structure human *Lebensformen* is surely crucial for projecting the notion of a potential future for philosophy in a Wittgensteinian key.

Leaving unresolved, for the moment, the question of the possible alignment or synthesis of conventional and natural sources of *Lebensformen*, coming to understand the notion of human *Lebensformen* also must face a series of related queries to which we must not allow ourselves to become insensate. The reader will note how even a preliminary accounting of the idea of *Lebensformen* has depended upon the following terms: the "human", "nature", "natural history", "convention", the intricacies that link a form of life with the use of language (e.g., "grammar"), and perhaps the most basic and accordingly more mysterious conceptions of "life" and "form". Each of these terms has been put under question in multiple ways, not least by the mounting awareness of the Climate Crisis and the designation of our historical epoch as Anthropocene. Are we (still) able to convincingly talk about an idea of "nature" if, as some have suggested, non-human nature is at an end in becoming thoroughly interweaved with social mediations?[6] [9,10]. Is there any role possible for a non-disenchanted and, hence, re-animated conception of nature? Similar questions may and have been asked of the idea of the "human", with reference to recent notions of posthumanism [11] or, indeed, older accounts of an end of the human as, in the conclusion to Foucault's *The Order of Things*, "an invention of recent date [. . .] nearing its end [. . .] like a face drawn in sand at the end of a sea" ([12] p. 387). Yet, relatedly, the designation of the epoch as the "Anthropocene" has been contentious since it seems to preserve an idea of the human (*anthropos*) that is a homogeneous and unified global category ("humanity") that also identifies the major driver of geological changes[7] [13–15]. In short, these threads of longer discourses concerning the present planetary crisis, the adequacy of a unified and global conception of human life, and current trends of theorizing the factors of human relations with non-human beings seem to at least knot together into a challenge—call these, for the sake of expediency, the "challenges of the Anthropocene"—of apparently fundamental terms of an analysis of the logic of *Lebensformen*. For example, if there is no longer a sense of talking about nature (independent of social mediation) or the human, then how can it be maintained that (human) *Lebensformen* should be thought of as a coordination of independent natural and social factors? Philosophical attention to *Lebensformen* will only be rewarding to pursue if the concept can be shown to be responsive to the several challenges of the Anthropocene.

The apparent opposition between a method attentive to *Lebensformen* and the challenges of the Anthropocene, by itself, already announces a future of the concept, albeit an entirely defensive one. In this paper, plainly, I will not be able to totally exonerate *Lebensfor-*

men against *all* suspicions of complicity with pre-Anthropocene ("Holocene") conceptions. My aspiration is to at least indicate in broad strokes how *Lebensformen*, interpreted through the work of Cavell, can withstand the pressure of the challenges of the Anthropocene. In the next section, I supply some brief remarks on the role of *Lebensformen* in Wittgenstein's late philosophy. Following that, I provide an account of what I take to be the most relevant features and consequences of a Cavellian account of the logic of forms of life. In Section 4, I turn to some challenges of the Anthropocene (focusing on the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty) that I take to be elucidating and representative instances where the Cavellian account of *Lebensformen* already anticipates and circumvents these recent challenges.

The subtitle of the present essay ("Ruins of an Enduring Fable") refers to the title of one of Chakrabarty's essays ([16] pp. 133–152) where he attempts to both exhibit and undermine what might be called a Holocene division of epistemological labor, a filtering of human life into what are called "animal" and "moral" lives ([16] p. 141). Kant is assigned the unfortunate role as a central fabulist of modernity as a time that depended upon the separation of human history (as the progressive actualization of rational moral capacities) from animal life on the planet. According to Chakrabarty, since "we cannot any longer afford the assumption that Kant along with many others made –that the needs of our animal life will be attended to by the planet itself" ([16] p. 146), we must turn to other modes of thought that suture this division and place moral life in the service of tending to "our natural life, if not of the natural lives of all nonhumans as well" ([16] p. 146)[8].

Kant's attributed role as modernity's central fabulist is important to observe here because, as I will begin illustrating, Cavell's interpretations of a logic of human forms of life are often given as emerging out of Kantian philosophy, as continuing and also transforming Kant's transcendental framework. It is important to underscore that the transformation, as Cavell is often at pains to emphasize, is informed by an itinerary that also includes Romanticism and American Transcendentalism in the writings of Emerson and Thoreau. This itinerary presents a genetic reason for extending Chakrabarty's accusations against Kantianism to Cavellian–Wittgensteinian *Lebensformen*. These conceptions, it might be argued, are luxuries we can no longer afford to entertain. From a different perspective, however, the plausibility of this simple extension depends upon *muting* the ways that Cavell's account of Wittgensteinian *Lebensformen* has *already* brought into conversation that which Chakrabarty thinks we still must *expectantly look toward*: human "moral" life not as separate from "animal" life or the planet but as needing to be placed in a relation of mutuality with the latter in order to undermine what I will call the anthropocentric protagonism of post-Kantian Enlightenment philosophies. Indeed, as I will conclude, the scene structuring Cavellian–Wittgensteinian philosophy is precisely in the ruins of philosophical fables, "leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble" ([17] §118).

2. "Is This a 'Weltanschauung'?" The Description of Forms of Life

To begin to approach Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein's conception of *Lebensformen*, it will be useful to be reminded of the passage of thought that leads to the relevance of the appeal to *Lebensformen*. In the first third of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein is slowly moving towards a conception of the methodology of philosophical practice, one which is responsive to what he came to identify as lapses in his earlier work. Citing the earlier *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein emphasizes that an orientation towards logic is essentially mistaken if it is thought to provide an "a priori order of the world", meaning, "the order of *possibilities* that must be common to both world and thought" ([17] §97). He continues in a mood that is deeply antipathetic, at times mocking (in the "super-" characterizations), towards the desideratum of formal unity conceived along the lines of his earlier work:

> We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential, in our in-
> vestigation resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language
> [das unvergleichliche Wesen der Sprache]. That is, the order existing between the
> concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a

super-order [*Über*-Ordnung] between—so to speak—*super*-concepts. Whereas, of course, if the words, 'language,' 'experience,' 'world,' have a use, it must be as humble [*niedrige*] a one as that of the words, 'table,' 'lamp,' 'door'. ([17] §97)

This passage of thought turns towards a recognition of the lowly (*niedrige*) and away from a schema of analysis governed by an expectation of discovering "the strict and clear rules of the logical structure of propositions [. . .] as something in the background" ([17] §102). Wittgenstein explicitly describes himself as affecting a *rotation* away from an expectation of a logically crucial factor that only appears in the background or above the "rough ground" beneath our feet ([17] §107): "The *preconceived* idea of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole examination around" ([17] §108). It is clear in this passage that Wittgenstein is moving away from a philosophical methodology conditioned by the presupposition of a hidden and a priori formal organization. The "crystalline purity of logic was [. . .] not a result of investigation: it was a requirement" ([17] §107). He hazards an initial account of a different model of investigation that does not depend upon requiring the use of lowly words to surrender a secret they are suspected to be concealing in the following way: "When philosophers use a word [. . .] and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home? What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" ([17] §115).

One of the justificatory tasks facing this nascent methodology is to provide a partial explanation of the reason why it is not already obvious or available as a philosophical method. I say it is a "partial" explanation since Wittgenstein confines himself here to positing a drive (*Trieb*) to misunderstand the workings of our language ([17] §109), that such a drive projects a "character of depth" ([17] §111) beneath the surface forms of our language, and an allegory of captivity held firm by the apparent workings of language itself ([17] §115). Bearing in mind these drives and dangers of projecting false depths, that which he calls the "bewitchment [*Verhexung*] of our intelligence by means of our language" ([17] §109), Wittgenstein explicitly disavows "explanation" as a part of his philosophical project: "We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place" ([17] §109). In order to understand the appeal to *Lebensformen*, we ought to bear in mind Wittgenstein's sense of caution and danger surrounding a drive to provide "deeper" explanations rather than to merely describe what is already humbly available, without recourse to further unfathomed depths.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein goes slightly further than merely cautioning against a bewitchment brought on by language itself repeatedly inviting and stimulating drives towards unseen, logical, depths. He forthrightly declares that we are not in possession of that which is projected to be lacking, the supplement that is sought within the repeated drive invited by language. "A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words [wir den Gebrauch unserer Wörter nicht *übersehen*—perhaps more literally rendered as "we cannot survey the uses of our words"]. Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity" ([17] §122). The unsurveyability of possible uses of our words, by itself, gestures at a reason for a disavowal of formal a priori methods that require what might be called universal surveillance. He goes on to claim that perspicuous representations (übersichtliche Darstellung) are the form of account that we should aim to give, but that this just means an ability to present "intermediate cases" that foster an ability to "see connections" ([17] §122.). For my present purposes, it should be noted not only that the idea of surveillance apparently sponsored here is from an intermediary perspective, not a "super-" vantage point, and these are essentially plural, not decompositions of some deeper unity. Wittgenstein also asks whether this method amounts to a *Weltanschauung*, a world view, which for my purposes, can be heard as asking whether it outlines a program, an article of faith, perhaps even a modern fable of the human. But rather than answering this question, he soon follows with a claim that philosophy cannot give language a foundation, that philosophy has no authority to interfere with the actual use of language; it "may in no way" do so ([17] §124).

The universal unsurveyability of the use of our words echoes an earlier passage in *Philosophical Investigations* where Wittgenstein confronts himself with a question of whether there are finite (i.e., a priori enumerable) kinds of sentences. An a priori enumerable set of the kinds of possible sentences would seem to be a useful foothold in elaborating a general hypothesis of the "deep" forms, a "dark side" to their "surface" appearances, that are necessary for there to be pregiven kinds of possible uses of language. We might be tempted to think, as the *Tractatus* regularly seems to invite its readers to entertain, that there must be some sort of correspondence here with the possible states of affairs that constitute the world. The reader may also be reminded of the function of canonical logical propositions in Kant's own account of the categories (the "pure concepts of the understanding" ([18] A79/B105)) broadly modeled on Aristotelian metaphysics ([18] A80/B105). But Wittgenstein refuses the Kantian bait in claiming that:

There are *countless* [*unzählige*] kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call 'symbols,' words,' sentences'. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. [. . .] Here the term 'language-*game*' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life [*Lebensform*] ([17] §23)[9].

We can begin to see here the methodological connection between the refusal of a certain idea of what philosophical practice involves, expecting an explanation of depths because of a bewitched compulsion to do so, and the importance of *Lebensformen* as a replacement for Kantian categories within which are included a countless multiplicity of evolving, halting, nascent, and obsolescent activities. We can also make a connection here that the logic of *Lebensformen* is disclosed in the intermediate connections that are brought into view through perspicuous representations. The famed term "language-games" serves as reminders of the practical and historical character of language use as well as the ungrounded (because of the unsurveyable yet depthless) activity of our lives in language.

Emphasizing the notion of the "ungroundedness" of human activity in language can lead quite straightforwardly to the sense that language and human forms of life are completely conventional. I have already noted, above, how the total conventionalization of *Lebensformen* has been contested by Cavell's account. But before launching into that, we can briefly appraise Wittgenstein's wider concerns that flow from the introduction of *Lebensformen* as the transformation of a traditional framework of logical–metaphysical categories[10] [19]. We might think, along with the interlocutory voice of the text, that Wittgenstein's dawning methodology seems to be saying that "human agreement decides what is true and what is false" ([17] §241). But the author, in propria persona, retorts by delimiting the true and the false as already within the region of language: "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" ([17] §241).

In other words, convention arrives too late if it is thought to be the basis of norm-construction *through* the use of language. This is the "queer as this may sound" thought expressed in the subsequent passage: "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments" ([17] §242). To be in agreement (*Übereinstimmung*) in judgments is presented as necessary for the possibility of *communication*. Agreement in judgment, so presented, is a condition of human communication that invites questions of how we come to learn and subsequently go on to use our language[11] [17]. separate questions of how shared, historical, and socialized words and phrases can come to mediate one's own personal judgments[12] [17] and questions concerning the interpretation of the significance of this agreement.

In the passage immediately following the remark of the "queer as this may sound" thought concerning agreement in judgment (as opposed to agreement in definitions, [17] §242), Wittgenstein imagines human beings who "speak only in monologue", giving a constant live commentary on what they are doing at any time ([17] §243). Anyone, say, an "explorer" (Forscher), who was able to learn the language of these constant commentators

(call them "CCs") could be expected to predict what any one of the CCs will do, since each narrates their resolutions, decisions, expectations, and so on. But Wittgenstein also posits a different kind of commentator (call them "CC*s"), who also accompany all of their behaviors and actions with "expressions" of their "inner experience". But CC*s are distinct from CCs because the expressions of CC*s would be in words that "are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his [sic.] immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language" ([17] §243). The introduction here of the distinguishing feature of CC*s is the imagined possibility of their being able to express (aufschreiben, aussprechen) "inner experiences [. . .] feelings, moods, and the rest" (inneren Erlebnisse (. . .) Gefühl, Stimmungen, etc.) but in a way that does not line up in agreement with those of any other person.

The question of the *basis* of the shareability, communicability, of language in general, which is invited by the sketch of CC*s (and, of course, by other real or imagined natural histories in the *Philosophical Investigations*), can be described as asking about the possibility of learning a language, or knowing something through language, on the basis of *aussprechen* or *aufschreiben*. An explorer among the CC*s would certainly hear the sounds that are thought to accompany their actions, just as she would be able to cast her eyes over the notes written out by them. If she were among CCs, then she might be able to do something that could be called "learning the language(s) of the CC". The hypothesis that characterizes the CC* is their expressions find no agreement, so it seems clear that our explorer could not be in a position to learn what any CC* is saying. But we might wonder why she is not able to do so, and, in turn, whether the CC*s are intelligible as a possibility.

Imagine that our explorer has lost none of her acuity and accuracy in perception or recording that she finely exhibited in translating the CC's language(s), but she cannot get any nearer to anything that any CC* is expressing. What does this tell us? One conclusion is that it would be insufficient to think that a language can be built up only out of "outward" (i.e., public, shareable) signs, as, say, phonemes or graphemes. Without a sharing of "agreements in judgment", there is ex hypothesi no way to connect a sound or a jotting (the "exterior") with a private sensation (the "interior"). We imagine now that our explorer, formerly bound by the typical ethical regulations of anthropological research, has lost her patience and circumspection after a prolonged time among the CC*s without being able to come to any understanding of any one of "their" "languages"[13]. She approaches a CC*, who is providing a private commentary, as CC*s are wont to do. Our explorer forcefully steps down on the small toes of the CC*, eager to witness a corresponding change in the expressed commentary, but to no avail. We have presumed that there is no way to harmonize how we ordinarily partake of and interpret our shared agreements in judgment and the way(s) that CC*s comment on their "inner experiences". No way, thus, to interpret pain, confusion, or outrage; no way to understand if a louder or quieter series of sounds is expressive of familiar patterns of feeling or interest. If there were some sort of recognizable change, then we alight upon a shared pattern, a common root, and thereby unmask this CC* as a CC in disguise. This response suggests that the very idea of attributing "experiences" at all to CC*s, or, indeed a "commentary", is called into question; we may go further and wonder whether such beings could be said to be sensate at all, human, or alive[14] [17].

The suggestion that CC*s comment upon their inner experiences now seems to be incoherent since we seem to be unable to do anything with the idea that there could be any meaningful correlation (instead of accidental accompaniment) in the *ersatz* commentary or anything like internal "experiences" totally independent from shared routes of feeling, interest, and judgment. In order to be able to interpret an unknown language, any explorer or researcher must resort to what Wittgenstein broadly characterizes as the "common behavior" of humanity (Die gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise) as a "system of reference" (Bezugssystem) ([17] §206). We can make the bolder claim now that a criterion of understanding some series of phonemes or graphemes as a language (i.e., what it means for something to be a language) is that there *is* a possible coordination with commonly shared, overlapping, courses of action or behavior (Handlungsweise). At the very least, we

can recognize the thrust of this thought experiment as claiming that embodied life, human behavior, is functioning here as a thesis. Although the idea of putting forward theses, generally, is suspected in the Wittgensteinian method (cf. [17] §128), it at least approaches the requisite obviousness (along with the tendency to be overlooked, cf. [17] §129) to say that it is embodied human life, meaning the capacity for exhibiting the "common behavior" of humanity or the requisite "agreement in judgment", that is a necessary condition for the possibility of human language.

All of this can now be understood to be a justification of the claim that is only made explicit in the second half of *Philosophical Investigations*, that "What has to be accepted, the given, is [. . .] *forms of life*" ([17] p. 192). In light of the Kantian background mentioned earlier, the function of an a priori enumerable table of judgments (the "clue" to the discovery of the categories ([18] A75/B95)), one which was detonated by Wittgenstein's insistence on countless kinds of uses of language, we are able now to regard the idea of *Lebensformen* as being Wittgenstein's revision of Kant's categories[15] [20].

The poignancy of this transformation can be seen if we ask about our entitlement to claiming that grammar (disclosed at times by "what we say"[16] [5]) or *Lebensformen* reveal a (transcendental) logic. The "thesis" concerning embodied human life contributes to an answer insofar as it seems to ground our entitlement in characteristic, common, human behaviors, actions, and agreements in judgment. But it also must be noticed that an understanding of particularly *human* behavior underwrites this activity, although the sense remains somewhat blurry whether this names a *restriction* of forms of life to those that are recognizable as human. Because it is not completely surveyable, it seems that the idea of the "human" which establishes something of a tuning for *Lebensformen* must be open-ended. In this way it is no different from others of Wittgenstein's leading concepts, compared, for example, with the discussion of whether "game" is the name of a "concept with blurred edges" ([17] §§70–71)[17]. Yet, as we saw with the CC*, we could not move towards a shared behavior or shared language without finding that we *do* share in practice (we "look and see", to draw upon a onetime description of a Wittgensteinian methodological directive) more than we could have possibly articulated in advance. A language stands or falls with a given form of life; this is the unsoundable depth of the remark that "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life [*Lebensform*]" ([17] §19).

What would it add or clarify to insist that the form of life at issue here is a *human* one? It seems to add nothing to the idea of a *Lebensform* as such; we might describe it as a kind of mutual attunement of *Lebensformen*, but the question is whether a human tuning is one of several possible tunings of *Lebensformen*. Note that we can still recognize plural *forms* of life within the human, without declaring that one exclusively possesses a human "essence". "Human" is, undoubtedly, something that I learn from within the language that is already given in and with the form of life that is necessary for being able to ask the question. So, we seem compelled to conclude, in being able to use, or at least imagine uses of, a human language, I am also imagining a form of life, and so find unforeseen unions and commonalities in behavior, action, things judged noteworthy or painful, etc., and thus, I understand myself as a human being precisely because I am able to act from a constitutively incomplete union of possible actualizations of this form of life: to speak, listen, converse, respond to stimuli, expect someone to arrive, show disappointment, and so on. If regarded as a mere behavior, performed by an automaton, then no one of these things would be sufficient for grounding some being as exhibiting a human form of life, none by itself shows "humanity". This consideration leads to a question concerning the availability of *Lebensformen* as something that can provide a "standard" (tuning) and when this can be shown. I will return to this question below.

The Wittgensteinian approach to *Lebensformen* represents a momentous shift away from what is presumed to be foundational in philosophy. Our attention is directed, instead, towards appreciating *Lebensformen* as something of a "natural history of human beings" ([17] §415), a space Wittgenstein describes in the preface as a landscape crossed and re-crossed throughout his book, as a book of pictures or sketches, wherein what we might

regard as crucial notions (e.g., "humanity") can only be seen through other presentations in what one might call an *ecology* of linguistic creatures. It must also be added that one need not share the Kantian concern with either the transcendental or the possibility of pure practical reason to find oneself in opposition with Wittgenstein's account. One question to consider here is to ask ourselves about the potential fallout from pursuing this heterodox method which seems, from the perspective of tradition, "only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.)" ([17] §118).

We might also ask how we should respond to the apparent givenness of our own humanity, i.e., is this (i.e., "humanity") what is given as *Lebensformen*? There is no general surveyability of the relevant criteria that would constitute an a priori foothold for a concept of "humanity", and this is vanishingly little in the way of epistemological or moral comfort. The frailty of Wittgenstein's thought, the sense in which it brutely exposes me and all linguistic creatures to an unguided and unenclosed participation in *Lebensformen*, becomes particularly menaced by the bewitchments that language itself seems to solicit from the human creature. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* bears testimony, through the infamous interlocutory voices, to countervailing tendencies within uses of language, notably the drive (Trieb) mentioned above to misunderstand the workings of language. Surely, the conception of human being as driven towards misunderstanding, idleness, emptiness, illusory needs, *by* language is an important datum for our consideration. To weigh the question of the future of an idea of *Lebensformen*, we will have to confront the question of whether or not this presumption of a specific derangement characteristic of human beings can be shown to be merely Wittgenstein's prejudice.

It is also, perhaps especially, alarming to consider that if we adopt the Wittgensteinian image of the human as unessentialized, ungrounded by *Lebensformen*, we are inexorably led towards a skeptical possibility, especially sharp since *nothing* holds in place our agreements in judgment. This threat can be phrased as the claim that particularly *human* forms of life were nothing other than a romantic idyll, as something that we must regard now as an object of nostalgia rather than as something living within the ecology of present linguistic creatures. To properly approach these challenges, I will move to the work of Stanley Cavell.

3. Cavell: Atoning Attunement

In one of the opening areas of investigation in *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell identifies Wittgenstein's challenge to a traditional conception of the authority and "direction" of philosophical inquiry in Wittgenstein's use of "grammar". In suggesting that the appeal to forms of life reverses or refuses one ideal of philosophical methodology, I am following a thought that Cavell puts forward in considering the relationship between criteria and linguistic meaning or the possibility of making and understanding judgments. Instead of thinking that linguistic meaning is assembled out of criteria, presumed to be logically antecedent and primitive for an act of judgment, itself thought of as a composite assembled out of these more basic units, Cavell's readers are pressed to imagine the consequences of Wittgenstein's prioritizing "pervasive and systematic agreements among us, which we had not realized or had not known we realize" ([21] p. 30, see also [22]). "The 'agreement' we act upon he calls 'agreement in judgments', and he speaks of our ability to use language as depending upon agreement in 'forms of life'. But forms of life, he says, are exactly what have to be 'accepted'; they are 'given'. Now the whole thing looks backwards" ([21] p. 30).

I have already mentioned above that Cavell pursues Wittgenstein as being antithetical to a thoroughgoing conventionalization ([21] p. 31). This is not to suggest that there is no convention in language use; my emphasis instead is that convention cannot bear up as the solitary and foundational role within these considerations. *Lebensformen* are the substitute candidates for that which is "given". Even as foundational, however, their logical function is not given directly, since all that could be exhibited as the putative "foundations" of language use would be "agreement in judgment". Commenting on the idea of exhibiting agreement as *übereinstimmung* ([17] §242), Cavell writes:

> This idea of agreement here is not that of coming to or arriving at an agreement on a given occasion, but of being in agreement throughout, being in harmony, like pitches or tones, or clocks, or weighing scales, or columns of figures. That a group of human beings *stimmen* in their language *überein* says, so to speak, that they are mutually voiced with respect to it, mutually *attuned* top to bottom. ([21] p. 32)

What to make of this anti-climactic agreement? It can hardly be said to be an achievement since it is unremittingly presented as barely legible background conditions necessary for the possibility of noticing their effects. But can anything be done with this conception of that which is given as *Lebensformen*? Is this mutual attunement a "natural" fact, a condition of being linguistic creatures (i.e., beings whose existence is crossed by and sustained in language), endemic, coextensive, and co-constitutive of the specification that these forms of life are *human* ones? For Cavell, this realization concerning the variety of agreements sustaining the possibility of language use is powerless to "prove or explain anything" ([21] p. 32). And it is surely contentious to draw attention to background varieties of agreements, given as *Lebensformen*, when, as Cavell also notes, Wittgenstein seems equally motivated to develop his philosophical approach from the realization that humans are often "out of tune, that they do not agree" ([21] p. 32). Even the emphasis on "agreement" can become misleading, since no one can have agreed ahead of time on everything that could possibly be discovered as shared[18] [21]. *Lebensformen*, thus, are positioned quite precariously in an explanatory position where agreements in judgment are shown, but over which we cannot have totally agreed and, in fact or practice, do not completely agree[19].

Focusing on the place of *Lebensformen* within Wittgensteinian philosophical analysis may prompt us to consider *Lebensformen* as expressive of natural law, a field of normative force somehow more foundational than the forms of agreement established in language[20] [17]. Rather than taking the thrust of Wittgenstein's thought as outlining a kind of tectonic naturalistic hierarchy, constructed upon a natural "foundation", Cavell emphasizes, on one hand, the sense that any conception of "foundation" is misplaced and, on the other hand, that *Lebensformen* are equally expressive of and restrained by what we might call the natural as well as the conventional, no more "natural" than "cultural", not epistemological to the exclusion of moral demands[21] [21,23]. In lieu of foundations, Cavell notoriously sketches a vision of human forms of life as a "whirl of organism" in which *nothing ensures* that "human speech and activity, sanity and community" can be projected into a future ([20] p. 52). In critiquing and delimiting a "conventionalist" reading of *Philosophical Investigations* within a mutual eclipse of the natural and the social, Cavell locates *Lebensformen* within a two-dimensional field, the axes of which are two "senses" of human life: a "conventionalized, or contractual, sense of agreement . . . call[ed] the ethnological sense" and a "biological sense" where "the romance of the hand and its apposable thumb comes into play, and of the upright posture and of the eyes set for heaven; but also the specific strength and scale of the human body and of the human senses and of the human voice" ([23] pp. 41–42, see also [21] p. 83).

In short, Cavell's vision of the human is dialectically shuffling, peregrinating, sauntering (after Thoreau's derivations of the phrase in his "Walking" essay), across a division of the natural and the conventional. It is more accurate to say that the human *is* the mutual cancellation and preservation (i.e., what is meant by a Hegelian *Aufhebung*) of bio-natural and socio-conventional dynamics, irreducible to one or the other, and not a third-party shuffling between two independent factors. Neither of the "factors" here can be understood without also understanding human being as linguistic, and this cannot be achieved without the work of appreciating the human as embodied life. Cavell characterizes Wittgenstein's philosophy as providing a radical vision of the human being as conflicted, precisely because of this amphibious being, engendering a "distrust of language" or ways of living that have been "distorted or waylaid by illusion" ([23] pp. 33, 34), *and also* one that is committed to finding "the antidote to illusion in the particular and repeated humility of remembering and tracking the uses of humble words, looking philosophically . . . beneath our feet rather than over our heads" ([23] p. 34). We may be tempted to isolate—following

some phrases of *Philosophical Investigations* (e.g., [17] §132)—our *words* as being somehow in exile, being unhoused, idle, "on holiday", or our "intelligence" as "bewitched" *by language*, but, nevertheless, as Cavell remarks, "the behavior of words is not something separate from our lives, those of us who are native to them, in mastery of them" ([23] p. 35). Thus, in a transformation of *Philosophical Investigations*, it is not a matter only of "leading our words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" ([17] §116)[22], Cavell writes, "the lives themselves have to return" ([23] p. 35).

Lebensformen mark the possibility of restoration, outlining a path to trace in language out of exile. Conceiving of *Lebensformen* specifically as a normative standard is possible here but only on the strength of an experience of errancy. The conditional or hypothetical normativity of *Lebensformen* follows from the sense that one cannot provide anything like a complete description of the sorts of agreements that are displayed in forms of life, there is no exhaustive list, especially because emphasizing the vivacity of forms of *life* quickly dispels the notion that such a region could be limited a priori. This is not to suggest that we are always autonomously unguided in our speech or activity, meaning acting somehow beyond the routinization of behavior and language, far from it; it is not to say that we are always in principle capable of drawing from out of a wealth of unlimited possibilities. *Lebensformen* do not serve as an a priori map of possible moves to make within a language or set of language-games, but we must always be cautioned against the idea that, though *nothing ensures* the sustenance of forms of life, it is not the case that there are no limits structuring forms of life. A passing familiarity with Wittgenstein's later philosophy will already provide the reader with an assortment of examples of certain points of inflexibility or emptiness that illustrate limitations on an evident human drive to surpass or supplant attunement in *Lebensformen*.

Even if we are invited to think of *Lebensformen* as articulating a dual relation resulting from the mutual eclipsing of nature and culture, this should not be interpreted as an analytical outlet for decomposing forms of life into two discrete elements (e.g., intelligible or normative "form" and the "life" over which such forms provide prescriptive regulatory guidance). Combining the terms of the complex of *Lebensformen* (i.e., forms and life) signals an irreducible plurality of sense-enabling "agreements" unfolding within the range of conditions of human life. It is not a matter of elaborating the intelligible forms in which life, as an independent factor, must be molded and shaped in order to withstand rational scrutiny or become the bearer of sense. As I have been emphasizing here, neither of these relata describes a closed system, one that could be bound to a given "state", since the very idea of a completely determined imaging of *Lebensformen* will be grossly inadequate. Their value and guidance emerges only in the debt of certain excesses, in being driven to act or speak outside of the conditions of their attuning display, pressing forms into becoming otherwise than those of communities of finite and embodied beings. Their value is a redemptive one; they benchmark standards for return and restoration. Needless to say, one can hardly *use* Wittgensteinian *Lebensformen* as a means for rationalizing societal formations or for solving political problems. One hardly seems able to use them at all but for the browbeating of metaphysicians. At this point, one might be forgiven for thinking that the entire enterprise of Wittgensteinian philosophy is uncommonly restricted both in its apparently conservative and nearly authoritarian orientation given by appealing to agreements that seem to transcend individual consent as well as the curious tasks that it imagines for itself. I will conclude this section by drawing out some of the lines of Cavell's thought that show these interpretations and accusations to be unfounded.

Because there is no perspective from which the entirety of *Lebensformen* becomes surveyable, Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein is constantly drawing our attention to themes that draw from a tradition of Romanticism and American Transcendentalism: the common, the low, the ordinary as a clarifying scene for disabusing human life from the drive towards inhuman conditions. Cavell repeatedly takes up this notion of a human drive towards inhuman conditioning as skepticism. Skepticism can be characterized by its quest for certitude, for a foundation that would supplant the givenness of human *Lebensformen*.

Another way of making this point is to say that "skepticism" defines the drive to overturn human conditioning by the agreements of *Lebensformen* and to establish an other, extra- or inhuman, one located beyond the agreements that considerations of "what we say" are thought to disclose. Skepticism is the "central secular place . . . in which the human wish to deny the condition of human existence is expressed" ([24] p. 5)[23] [23].

In Cavell's texts, skepticism is often framed as a struggle that characterizes human life with language. This is not to claim the obviously false portrait that we are always pursuing a Cartesian project of discovering ineluctable grounds for our lives and beliefs. Skepticism can be identified even in expressing dissatisfaction with that which is shared, or how things are shared, in human *Lebensformen*. "The dissatisfaction with one's human powers of expression produces a sense that words, to reveal the world, must carry more deeply than our agreements or attunements in criteria will negotiate" ([24] p. 60). We can identify skeptical conditions in what we take to be aspects of our private lives in a disappointed contrast with that which is publicizable and able to be recognized within our lives with others. We may be driven to skepticism precisely for very traditional epistemological reasons, but we may also identify a Cavellian skepticism in the sketch offered by Giorgio Agamben of "private life" as accompanying each of us as a "stowaway", one which is "separated from us as clandestine and is, at the same time, inseparable from us to the extent that, as a stowaway, it furtively shares its existence with us" ([25] p. xx).

> [T]he weight of this faceless companion is so strong that each seeks to share it with someone else—and nevertheless, alienation and secrecy never completely disappear and remain irresolvable [. . .]. It is as if each of us obscurely felt that precisely the opacity of the clandestine life held within it a genuinely political element, as such shareable par excellence—and yet, if one attempts to share it, it stubbornly eludes capture and leaves behind it only a ridiculous and incommunicable remainder. ([25] pp. xx–xxi)

Among the possible directions of interpretation here, I will emphasize one where skepticism is a complex alternating between the assertion of necessary inexpressiveness (i.e., an aspect we can see in that which is detached and clandestine in Agamben's sketch) or, contrariwise, as a de-animation of experiences and their objects that leads to a flight of transcendence above worldly life. This latter way of drifting out of the tuning of *Lebensformen* decomposes *Lebensformen* into two separable factors, though it is oriented by what can be found on the near side of form, projecting natural or embodied life as on the far and subordinated side of this divide. Instead of thinking of the human as buried beneath its conventional forms, this is the thought that human beings rise through their creations above any and all worldly conditions. We will return to this notion in the following section's account of the anthropocentric protagonism that characterizes an object of Anthropocene critique.

The first kind of skeptical complex establishes a drama of expressivity evolving out of the perpetual self-obscurity of what is "inner" or thought to be "private" in lived experience towards an unattainable horizon of total self-transparency. The notion of necessary inexpressivity flows from a division in *Lebensformen* between life and its forms, the effects of which promote a disappointed vision that all intelligible forms must always be products of convention radiating out from an essentially unknown and undiscoverable background of life[24] [26]. Because of the sundering of form from life, the latter encoded and vaulted out of the reach of the former, awareness of life can be said to be little better than the awareness of a "crypt", sealed out of reach, approximating unchanging timelessness, a *locus* of individual remnants identified as the private place of an undead subject[25] [27,28].

This direction in which *Lebensformen* can drift apart illustrates the human as, in some sense, buried beneath the palimpsest of historical conventions and, as such, merely "haunting" the world in their behaviors, unable to assert their own existence. Cavell reads this anti-Cartesian thought into Emerson's "Self-Reliance" that human beings do not declare their existence but merely "quote some saint or sage"[26] [24]. Cavell understands Kant as

having attempted to fend off skepticism precisely through denying "that you can experience the world as world, things as things; face to face, as it were, call this the life of things" ([24] p. 53). It is from the suspicion that one is merely haunting the world, being carried mutely in the train of socialization, that Cavell situates the motivation of Coleridge's Mariner to shoot the albatross as a "figuration for using words originally to name the world" (1988: 60), an act of poetic assertion that doubles as the "breaking of attunement, the killing of one's connection with others, one's craving for exemption from human nature" ([24] p. 61). The Mariner will return in greater detail below.

By invoking the fatal consequences of killing the albatross in *The Ancient Mariner*, or, for similar reasons, the conception of perversity in Poe's "Imp of the Perverse" or "The Black Cat", Cavell's point is to describe an act that betokens the cosmic derangement comparable to the Fall from Eden, a tendency that could be called ordinary disobedience ([24] p. 58). Our lives with language drift in and out of attunement, a pathway describing a diurnal temporalization of normativity (to be described further below), rather than the deterministically rule-bound linear pathway imaged by a train on railways. The frail textures of agreements given by *Lebensformen* do not serve as a protective barrier so much as a stimulus for overstepping limits. Cavell's interpretation of the logic of *Lebensformen* is one constantly exposed to these drifts and decouplings of life and language, human from nature, self from world and other. "The philosophically pertinent griefs to which language comes are not disorders, if that means they hinder its working; but are essential to what we know as the learning or sharing of language, to our attachment to language; they are functions of its order" ([23] p. 54). The logic of *Lebensformen* is one fit for beings who become lost, who lose themselves, in fitting life within language, who seek to divorce or annul the attunements discovered from the possibility of language. Accordingly, the most salient description of the human, as a specification of a form of life, is a being exposed to grief.

Even so, as Cavell's essay "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture" is constantly astounded by, the simple audacity of Wittgenstein's method does not remain with a sense of the pathological drifts internal to the *ordered function of language use*, nor does the awareness of these manifold drifts and tendencies lead to the subordination of language, *überhaupt*, beneath a separate, higher authority. Instead, Wittgenstein claims in the constitution of his method as such that the only restoration achievable is one that passes through these drifts by assembling reminders that present language in tune. Cavell reads this as both the standing threat of language as well as its unique capacity for relief: "One may perhaps speak of language and its form of life—the human—as a standing opportunity for the grief *for which language is the relief*" ([23] p. 54, my emphasis). This is perhaps the clearest moment to observe how Cavell's conception of specifically *human Lebensformen* is one that is a being led astray by its very means of rescue. The logic of *Lebensformen* is a logic of reiterated discovery of captivity, inexpressiveness, or refusal of the "value of the experience of ordinary words, their shared memories, disappointed in them" ([23] p. 64), primarily characterized by a drive towards fixing the "motion of our ordinary words" into "frozen slides" so that our language becomes "the language of no one" ([23] p 64).

We can, and I think we should, talk about this shading of Cavell's account of skepticism in his lectures from the late 1980s (i.e., [23,24]) as a way of redeploying the psychoanalytic notion of the "death drive" within Ordinary Language Philosophy. A speculative account of skepticism that approaches a Freudian death drive is apposite since it is symptomatically expressed in human life with (and in) language towards the disavowal of this life. In the canonical Freudian account, this drive is witnessed as a compulsion to repeat, and this is understood as a means of both restraining and protecting subjective consciousness [29]. For the onlooker, this compulsion will appear as a kind of arrest[27] [30], and, for the repeating subject, it might be regarded, if at all noticed, as the work of fate or as necessary or unavoidable behaviors. Paradoxically, this compulsion to repeat is also, we must say, "experienced" (though not by the ego of subjective consciousness) as one that, from a different perspective, *rescues* the subject from conscious exposure to that which is repressed, a painful memory,

for example, with which any conscious encounter would release destabilizing energies into the balance of the psychic economy.

This "different perspective" corresponds in Freud's text to a hidden region of inner privacy (a "nucleus" or "kernel of the ego" ([29] p. 19)) maintained in a region beyond subjective consciousness. Because these deflections away from directly encountering the force of the repressed do not defuse the disruptive energies of the repressed, this force is channeled into a rebus of repeated behavior that, at the very least, spares the ego from the more damaging exposure. Repetition serves the ego's coherence by giving energetic expression to the repressed, which cannot be given a full speaking role, in the subordinated expressive roles of the resistances that sustain the need for repeated behaviors. The work of the analyst corresponds to that of the Wittgensteinian–Cavellian in the sense that both are attempting to draw attention to what is said, what some "we" (in the minimal socius of analysand and the analyst) should say, in and about instances of repeated resistance encountered in everyday life. Though these resistances have a deadening impact on their enacting and sustaining subject, the drive towards fixture or stasis is, in both frameworks, an attempt to ward off a particular kind of exposure to an unrecognized, uninherited historical remnant that stems from the formation of a subject in language (or other individuated traumas) that threatens to topple the coherency or authority of a form of self-understanding. This work is given its possibility through everyday practices becoming illegible within that regime of self-understanding that is saddled with resistances, their significance encoded sufficiently for the subject to fail to grasp what is being said through their activity; the work comes to a partial closure through bringing the dead weights of stricture into a space of vivid acknowledgment.

Although the relevance of the death drive for Cavell's account of skepticism might be regarded as an adventitious matter, framing Cavell's account of the logic of *Lebensformen* in this way will help, at least, to underline the sense in which the analyses of forms of life is not, as it were, a matter that only seeks to balance a sense of human life with language between socio-cultural and biological-natural fixed points. The skeptical alternatives that I described above already indicate how *Lebensformen*, in serving a transcendental role outlining necessary conditions in embodied life for the possibility of human language, are *also* situated within a field of drifts and drives that shape daily life, the constant bartering of a sheltered routinization against abandoned exposure. At one moment, Cavell leaps to a conclusion that the forms of *Lebensformen* seem to result from a sense that daily life is exposed to abandonment, "our lives take on and maintain their forms by their need to ward off abandonment" ([24] p. 144). "Warding off abandonment" expresses a resistance to the loss of security in countenancing the ongoing exposure to an inheritance of language. Cavell describes this as the "fatefulness of the fact that language is inherited, learned, always already there for every human" ([24] p. 131). Abandonment enters, and repeatedly re-enters our lives because "the inheritance of language is essentially never over and done with—though any number of accidents, or say fixations, inner or outer, may put an end to it" ([24] p. 132). But "abandonment" also is presented here as the means of restoration, illustrated by the sense of acting or speaking "with abandon".

Invoking the death drive prepares repetition as a symptom of the exposure to abandonment in language use, guided not by determined reason but by the ebb and flow of agreement in forms of life. But a compulsion to repeat can be seen in at least two different ways. The first, broadly, can be experienced in a refusal to remain alive to this inheritance, which is tantamount to avoiding acknowledgment of abandonment, separation, and loss and being waylaid by "fixations". This presents human life as mortified, the history of inheriting language as always having ended since the future of an ongoing inheritance is resisted; it is a melancholic form of temporality persisting in a timeless moment. Against this mortifying image of repetition as the security of lifeless mechanism, Cavell's lectures from the second half of the 1980s insist upon reading Wittgenstein (with Thoreau and others) as a diurnal philosopher, someone whose repetition is intended not as a withdrawal of life from its exposure to its history and the world but as a way of reentering a living

temporality, re-animating that which is constantly drifting towards inorganic captures, re-inhabiting a world.

4. Conclusions: Re-inhabiting a World, Mutuality, and a Dawning Mourning Star

The theme of the "world" returns us to one of the central purposes of this paper. Having portrayed Cavell as a bridge towards a future for considering the logic of *Lebensformen*, I must now turn, in conclusion, to some of what I called the challenges of the Anthropocene. At the end of the previous section, I was tracing out the temporal orientation of an emphasis on the diurnal setting of Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein to situate a sense of repetition that is not one fully in the thrall of an insistence on the mortification of language's ongoing inheritance. The stakes of this are, as I presented it, a matter of being able to re-inhabit a world, to re-animate life in language. To say that *Lebensformen* are always competing with skepticism is just to say that life with language is quite ordinarily a standing occasion for a multiplicity of griefs, mortifying fixtures, abandonment, and attempting to go on in the ongoing inheritance of language every day. Forms of life become visible in the retreat of the penumbra cast by skepticism in the mutual eclipsing of the two elements of Cavell's account of *Lebensformen*: the biological-natural and the socio-cultural. The return of *Lebensformen* is, thus, experienced as a re-entry into a world inhabited by others, exactly because the conditions for human habitability are the discovered fits of attunement with others and with the world in a dawning future. A diurnal image of repetition, as opposed to a mechanical one, places the discovery of shared agreements in *Lebensformen* in a structurally identical place as the experience of the world. *Lebensformen* emerge as discoverable when I find that I have become lost to myself and had been speaking a language of no one; so the world, in this parallelism, is always encountered as something that has been regained, something that is present after discovering its skeptical erasure or fixed petrification.

Perhaps, in taking a step back from Cavell's prose, we need not be quite so melodramatic or despondent about the human or its place in a world through the ebb and flow of *Lebensformen* in language. Perhaps all of this, like the discourses that generated the idea of the "human" according to Foucault, was a passing fad and one that is for better or worse at an end. It ought to be remembered that Wittgenstein was born into an empire that disintegrated in the conflagration that Karl Kraus dramatized as *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (i.e., the last days of humankind). Those interested in considering a future for a particularly Cavellian understanding of the logic of *Lebensformen* will need to be able to respond to the thought that, for differing reasons, we must bid "goodbye to all that", or, perhaps more appositely for the ruins and post-imperial atmosphere of Wittgenstein's formative years, that the Cavellian–Wittgensteinian has been slouching towards an irretrievable "world of yesterday" (after Stefan Zweig's memoirs).

Although the most immediate challenges to Cavell's interpretation of Wittgensteinian *Lebensformen* may be conceived otherwise, the actual threat, essentially, is that those who might have otherwise been called human beings are now either incapable or uninterested in re-inhabiting a world. Nothing guarantees that this take place, just as nothing demands that a future be opened for any philosophy, especially given our tendency to drift skeptically. This would not be a threat to the account given above, in the sense of threatening its coherence or undermining it, but would just leave it as yet another entry in a long catalog of disenchanted items of previous philosophical interest. If the future line will be that *Lebensformen*, too, are shown to be enchanted enrichments of experience that we post-postmoderns can no longer afford, this could not be a result of any external demands, nor would it be the result of a reiterated Enlightenment of humans in their planetary condition. Quite to the contrary, it would be, so I am claiming, yet another skeptical bewitchment.

As mentioned above, discourses of the Anthropocene (e.g., [16]) as well as defenders of posthumanism [11] can be understood as attempting to usher Cavellian *Lebensformen* into a dustbin of history. Both kinds of accounts overlap to the extent that they advocate for "decentering of the human" ([11] p. xv) or, analogously, that all modern inheritances

of post-Kantian thinking must be cast aside due to the failure of a modern project of "freedom" ([16] pp. 31–35), a failure that poisons the historical well of transcendental argumentation, which I have shown Wittgenstein to have employed, albeit quite differently from Kant. "Decentering" is intended to lead towards a dissolution of what might be called a humanistic protagonism, a tendency for setting the human as a privileged agent against a backdrop of a non-human, non-agential, and essentially unchanging environment, as a framework for self-understanding.

For Chakrabarty, we can see the effects of what I am calling humanistic protagonism in the previously cited enduring modern fable of a division of the human from its animal or planetary basis, as well as in the "human loss of reverence for the world they found themselves in" ([16] p. 202). This profaning loss of reverence is characterized by Chakrabarty as a flattening or hollowing out of a value he calls "mutuality" between a world normed as the "sense of the alterity of the planet" in its material complexity and temporal depth. Mutuality requires rejecting the framing of experience of a surrounding environment as a stable and iterable staging for a privilege of human actors ([16] p. 187). Protagonism subordinates mutuality and tends to encourage a process of abstract liquidation, a "thinning or emptying of the 'world'" ([16] p. 190). From one angle, Chakrabarty's emphasis on mutuality between a human and a richly populated and perduring planet cautions intellectual humility and an ethico-political (even "spiritual" [16] p. 192) project of reverence that does not reinstate modernity's one-sidedly protagonistic conception of the worldly non-place of the human. This becomes a question of community ([16] p. 192). From a separate angle, the very idea of the Anthropocene, and attendant notions of another great extinction and a convulsion of possibilities for life on the planet, serves something like an Archimedean fulcrum upon which to launch a dismantling critique of the relation of science to politics, which is tantamount to saying, as Chakrabarty does, a need for a new Enlightenment ([16] p. 14). The two angles here (the ethico-political task of forging more-than-human community and the retrieval of an as-yet-unrealized Enlightenment for a novel epistemology) correspond to central lines of thought gathered in the work of Bruno Latour. [31]

Nothing here as stated need be regarded as standing in contradiction with Cavell's account of Wittgensteinian *Lebensformen*[28] [6,21]. On the surface of the argument, however, a reader might succumb to the sense that by developing an, at times, Kantian, Romantic, or Existentialist reading of Wittgenstein's late philosophical work, one which cannot keep silent for long on the notion of the "human" and providing it with a central if tragic focus, the decentering effect of the Anthropocene might be expected to ripple across the notion of *Lebensformen* as well. But this is misleading superficiality. In many ways, Cavell anticipates the Anthropocene's crisis that collapses the binary opposition between simplified conceptions of non-human nature and human culture[29] [21,32]. Indeed, Cavell should be read as already including the two angles of Chakrabarty's account of tasks presented by the Anthropocene within a triangulation of the two components of *Lebensformen*, with the additional insistence that human *Lebensformen* are constantly double-crossed by skeptical drives that displace the tasks of inheriting life in language without decohering the unity of *Lebensformen*. Instead of regarding the relation of the socio-cultural dimension of human life as if it emerged from out of or stood above a natural dimension, the latter liquidated into thinly insignificant things within a mechanistic space, Cavell presents his conception of our lives with language as striving to overcome the de-animation, the disenchantment, of mechanized or systematized worldly encounters. This kind of striving is not decomposable into separate epistemological, moral, or political projects; rather, it demands a unified dismantling of the resistances that compel de-animation that ripples across the human and the world. The root of the daily recurring problem (which might also be named the problem of repetitive recurrence, especially within a changing planetary climate) is equally the means for resolving it, the recognition that human beings are linguistic creatures, so it is not a matter of "correcting" epistemology or broadly inculcating a sense of reverence for ecosystems or even the planet, if these are isolated from the ongoing task of discov-

ering one's language within *Lebensformen*. This is not to posit conditions of *Lebensformen* as uniquely human or as timeless; it posits bodies (human and inhuman) and worldly conditions of life (and its passing) as given, and it does not require positing an ur-relation of mastery over hollowed-out material beings[30] [33–36].

This still leaves substantial room for understanding how Cavell's account of *Lebensformen* can be read as dynamically challenging accounts of the Anthropocene. Though he ought to be read as anticipating many contemporary questions about the status of the "human" in distinction from its Holocene (or, now, Postmodern, Posthuman) others, it would be erroneous to think that, because of his avoidance of a simplistic opposition of human culture to biological nature, Cavell supposes an untroubled synthesis of human and non-human. One factor that I have mentioned already but will reiterate in a slightly different form in this conclusion concerns the idea of an "end" of human *Lebensformen*. It might be suggested that the only way that human forms of life can end would be through the extinction of human beings. In manifest ways, the end of human beings as a species haunts many discussions in the literature (e.g., Chakrabarty's "Four Theses", collected in [16], as well as the combinations outlined in [37]). But such imagined ends are generally brought about externally, meaning through planetary alterations (or impacts as in Danowski and Viveiros de Castro's discussion of Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, see [37]), and temporally locatable in some future. My emphasis on the death drive as an interpretation of Cavellian skepticism illustrates a different way of reading the "end" of a living *Lebensformen*, one which is not contemporaneous with the extinction of the human species, but, instead, is properly described as ordinary within a diurnal inflection of the idea of an end of human *Lebensformen*. The remaining paragraphs of this conclusion are offered as an illustration of Cavell's domestication of the apocalyptic tone prevailing in Anthropocene discussions.

Cavell's method presumes, generally, that resistances to the conditions (the *conditionedness*) of presence to an other, biotic or abiotic, are endemic to our lives in language. This broad doctrine can be read in Cavell's reading of the condition from which Coleridge's Ancient Mariner seeks redemption, the source of the Mariner's curse, which I briefly mentioned above. Cavell's framing of the Mariner fatefully shooting an albatross presents the killing as skeptical means "to silence the bird's claim upon him and to establish a connection with it closer, as it were, than his caring for it: a connection beyond the force of his human responsibilities" ([24] p. 60). Rather than shining the shopworn moral lesson of "He prayeth best who loveth best/All things both great and small", Cavell appeals for further patience with any lesson from the poem and recasts the shooting as stemming from an urge to name:

> I would take the shooting of the arrow to be a figuration for using words originally to name the world—winged words. Hence the poet may have cause to fear that his art is as fatal as science's; more fatal, because he had hoped to overcome (what has appeared to the likes of him as) science's or the intellect's murdering to dissect; whereas he now finds that he has murdered to connect, to stuff nature into his words, to make poems of it, which no further power can overcome, or nothing further in the way of power. ([24] p. 60)

This is not a matter that can be reduced to intentionally or unintentionally redeploying the forces of a Western epistemic framework. "Nothing further in the way of power" avails here. Moreover, it is not a matter of adding some reverential weight to the far side of an encounter longing to be mutualistic instead of parasitic. To prevent the de-animations that result from "murdering to connect", we would need to unlearn the technes of speech, writing, concepts, grammars, and hence our embodiment and any primitive notion of form with which we shape the passing of days into encounters or experiences. What would be the position from which we or anyone could authoritatively assert a revolutionary change in how things are put together? The very problem seems to be *that we put things together* and, in doing so, must tear them apart, so that, for example, we can say something of them, that they have been. This is another way of bringing up one of the principal theatricalizations

of the Freudian compulsion to repeat, the *Fort/Da* pairing of Freud's grandson in throwing away and recovering a wooden spindle.

What are the conditions of this characteristic human tendency? In the aptly named essay, "The World as Things", Cavell remarks upon human interest in "learning nearness, in the stability of materiality, in achieving comprehensibility to others, and an interest in the endurance of interest itself" ([4] p. 266). This interest in bringing nearer is akin to an expression of candor, refusing a theatricalized or scripted response, as a standing possibility, and Cavell declares that, reading Emerson's account in "Experience" of his grief over the death of his son, "his [i.e., Emerson's] discovery that he must thereupon accept the world's nearing itself to him [. . .], an acceptance of a certain revised form of life (philosophy may poorly call it animism) outside himself, outside any human power" ([4] p. 266). In a few words, Cavell admits that the project of his conception of philosophical work is not severable from its ability to release the world and to discover mutuality as an animated world, as something that can (and only does) come into presence under an animated sign of alterity, of what Thoreau described as the "wild" in his essay "Walking".

So much of Cavell's work can be encapsulated in the skeptical lesson that we cannot ground our relation or capture of the world and others in knowledge. But this does not entail that "anything goes", nor does it imply, conversely, that "nothing goes". Though Cavell's efforts can be read as appeals for releasing epistemic, moral, or aesthetic strictures (including the lack thereof), his work equally insists upon the possibility of discovering anew epistemic, moral, or aesthetic possibilities after surrendering the certainty of stricture. If, as is perhaps regularly done, Cavell's work is read as encouraging practices of "acknowledgment" over "knowledge", then we must also understand that delineating *how* acknowledgment is practiced remains an unenclosed and unsurveyable set of human possibilities that are not guaranteed (i.e., with any degree of a priori certainty) to function. This is just to say that modes of acknowledgment can become routinized, scripted, or morbidly coded, hence calling for renewed efforts. In this way, Cavell's work is constantly devoted to mourning the loss of absolute certainty, sometimes called the "truth of skepticism" by Cavell, at other times "the condition of modernism". If one of Chakrabarty's points is precisely to reject a mere idea of the world as a collection of axiologically thin and epistemically flat things, which eclipse a necessary alterity achieved in mutuality, then Cavell has already trodden this path after Wittgenstein, after Emerson, Thoreau, and Coleridge as well.

But there remains the eschatological remnant, what Cavell is describing in taking up the Heideggerian term in the citation above as "the world's nearing itself" to one who has been abandoned by a false capture of it. Notwithstanding the dour coloring of abandonment and mourning, Cavell's account of a logic of *Lebensformen* seems ultimately to be premised upon the expectation of the comedic possibility of remarriage as a figuration of mutuality. This is not, I take it, a function of partitioning history into a human protagonist and a planetary backdrop, nor is it a novel task exclusive to the new planetary regime or something that emerges from the visibility of the Climate Crisis; instead, this eschatology is offered in saying that what is *given* are forms of life. The remarriage of subject and world, attaining agreement between convention and nature, say, clearly is not a guaranteed if yet unrealized result. Such a prospect of remarriage, acknowledgment across a distance of separation, surges with the tension of *peripeteia*, and, clearly, cannot be presented as perfectly concluded. History as a grand linear telling, as I have already hinted above, hardly fits into the picture of a diurnal, recurring, everyday that is subject to skeptical drifts and drives.

Another way of putting this same point about a misfit in the framing of Chakrabarty's thought and Cavell's is to emphasize the difference between Spengler, specifically his idea of the Decline of the West, and a companion thought that animates Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein's alertness to these threats of mortification. Briefly, Cavell outlines how Spengler and Wittgenstein share a sense of culture as an organic process, not a variety of conventions or activities independently constructed on a "natural" site. Spengler described

the fate of all cultures as succumbing to a condition he called Civilization, the "inevitable destiny of culture", which is the final stage of a process of "externalization", estrangement brought about in increasingly exhibiting decadence or artifice[31] [23]. These are symptoms of irreversible and multilinear decline. Here is Cavell's opposition of Wittgenstein's perception of a destiny of decline:

> Wittgenstein *diurnalizes* Spengler's vision of the destiny toward exhausted forms, toward nomadism, toward the loss of culture, or say of home, or say community: he depicts our everyday encounters with philosophy, say without our ideals, as brushes with skepticism, wherein the ancient task of philosophy, to awaken us, or say bring us to our senses, takes the form of returning us to the everyday, the ordinary, everyday, diurnally. Since we are not returning to anything we have known, the task is really one, as seen before, of turning. The issue then is to say why the task presents itself as returning—which should show us why it presents itself as directed to the ordinary. ([23] p. 66)

Cavell's philosophical work depends upon the possibility of discovery of *Lebensformen* as serving an indispensable role, one that allows the world to become "nearer", and induces ecstasies from out of a lack of guide rails or scripts. It is advice to refuse our own and the world's destruction, though it is difficult to hear: "The redemption of the things of the world is the redemption of human nature, and chiefly from its destructiveness of its own conditions of existence" ([24] p. 66). This line of thought is brought into conjuncture with a centerpiece of Cavell's Moral Perfectionism, Thoreau's concept of our "nextness" to the world, "our neighboring of it, as the condition of ecstasy" ([4] p. 267). Ecstasy also names an idea of decentering, but not every decentering will bring about the joy or reverence of a mutual encounter. In some sense, all of this points to the possibility of *having a future* as a live and daily possibility, meaning, at minimum, that *having a future* requires being able to surrender a past, to surrender things and relations to the past, abandoning oneself to the poverty of one's partiality.

In conclusion, though *Lebensformen* are explicitly articulated by Cavell into categories that seem to participate in what I called a "Holocene division of epistemic labor", I have argued that the way that the concept of *Lebensformen* is used through Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein is not one that maintains the enduring fable of progressive Enlightenment narratives. Though the uses of *Lebensformen* are not intended to foster the division of the human from the non-human, it is compelled by its Wittgensteinian pedigree to filter these terms through an anti-essentializing and uninheritable bequest of language use. In this regard, the Cavellian projection of a future of *Lebensformen* cannot prevent itself from appearing to take up the mantle of a lapsed form of humanism, fallen considerably in contemporary estimation. But it should always be remembered that what is taken up here as human *Lebensformen* does not depend upon closing one's eyes to the ruined estate of protagonistic or Enlightenment narratives of difference or disenchantment. The Cavellian–Wittgensteinian is assigned to witness the ruins of these narratives and to discover and rediscover attunement, and a world, precisely there.

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Notes

[1]   Conant has presented several forceful arguments for this reading of Wittgenstein, as presenting a hylomorphic notion of form against an additive or "layer-cake" conception; see especially [1] pp. 643–647, e.g., "thought cannot begin as something dead and subsequently have its life –its significance for us—breathed into it" ([1] p. 644).

[2]   Importantly, Fassin eventually downplays the emphasis on conventionalization by appealing to Cavell. See [2] pp. 25–27. Although I do not have the space to pursue the significance of this overlap here, I will merely point out that a similar conventionalization of the forms available through *Lebensformen* underlies the infamous rule-following paradox associated with Saul Kripke's interpretation of the *Philosophical Investigations*. As we will see in the text above, Cavell has repeatedly drawn attention to

the dangers of this conventionalized interpretation, most directly in Chapter 2 of [3] along with follow-up remarks in Chapters 6 and 8 of [4].

3   On the ties between the subjective, skeptical, and political valences, see [5,6].

4   One productive thread for commentary that I cannot directly engage in this paper is the similarity between Cavell's conception of the tasks that are internal to this unstably unified conception of human *Lebensformen* and the notion of an "anthropological difference" and its unavoidable tasks in the work of Étienne Balibar. See [7] pp. 275–302.

5   For one such account, see [8].

6   For a popular account of the idea of the "end of nature", see [9]. One recent defense of the plausibility of maintaining an environmental philosophy "after the end of nature" can be found in [10].

7   The designation has been criticized both for reasons of its lapses in the projections baked into an undifferentiated conception of humanity or in failing to recognize, say, other relevant agents of geological change. See [13–15].

8   Chakrabarty offers Latour as modeling a way of "looking ahead" ([16] p. 149).

9   I have only slightly amended Anscombe's translation, with "form of life" for *Lebensform* rather than "life-form".

10   On this point, Wittgenstein was certainly influenced by his encounters with Alan Turing. See [19].

11   That is, how we find ourselves able to agree in our judgments, where this means something other than agreeing in definitions or names; cf. Wittgenstein's long engagements with learning and teaching the application of a rule, e.g., [17] §§217–239.

12   "how do words *refer* to sensations?" [17] §244.

13   Of course, it makes no sense to say that they (the CC*s) all speak the "same" language, that "they" have some language in common, and we will be brought to wonder whether they (who?) have a language at all, whether we are able, even, to imagine these as living beings.

14   Cf. [17] §281: "only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious".

15   This is a point that was recognized in one of Stanley Cavell's earliest essays on Wittgenstein "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," although it is couched in terms of "grammar" ([20] pp. 64–65).

16   For a very rich manner of drawing connections between *Lebensformen*, rules, and grammar, see [5]

17   Cf. also the question of whether rules may be rules if they are not totally binding in their application ([17] §§83–84) and "exactness" as an ideal ([17] §88).

18   "We *cannot* have agreed beforehand to all that would be necessary" ([21] p. 31).

19   In this way, an account of *Lebensformen* is susceptible to analogous pressures faced by the modern idea of the "social contract" with regard to ongoing, generational consent.

20   For the suggestion of a natural law (Naturgesetz) as being revealed in a game, which I am observing but do not understand the language, see [17] §54. But also compare the notion of games as independent from Naturgesetzen, e.g., at [17] §492 and [17] p. 195.

21   Cf. [21] pp. 86-125; for an instance of the "moral demand", see [23] p. 40.

22   With a substitution of "leading" for "bringing" as the translation of "*führen*".

23   "What *challenges one's humanity in philosophy*, tempts one to excessive despair or to false hope, is named skepticism" ([23] pp. 39-40, my emphasis).

24   For a connection between the fantasy of necessary inexpressivity and skepticism of other minds, see [26] pp. 59–91.

25   I am drawing on the sense of "crypt" as a vault, as a kind of coding, and also as a space for the remnants of a life. I owe this to [27]. This account is also influenced by Derrida's preface to [27], often independently published as [28].

26   Cf.: "Emerson goes the whole way with Descartes's insight—that I exist only if I think—but he thereupon denies that I (mostly) do think, that the 'I' mostly gets into my thinking, as it were. From this it follows that the skeptical possibility is realized–that I do not exist, that I as it were haunt the world, a realization perhaps expressed by saying that the life I live is the life of skepticism" ([24] p. 108).

27   Alternately, a "death sentence", "*arrêt de mort*", following Derrida's reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. See [30] p. 285.

28   I am happy to register here my agreement with an anonymous reviewer who desired that I elaborate more from Cavell's discussion of the community and the social contract early in *The Claim of Reason*. See [21] pp. 22–28. My reasons for not including a more thorough discussion of Cavell on community here are twofold: in the first place, it seems to me that the focus on "community" returns us, anyway, to questions about grammar, the collective "we" of "what we say", and the very idea of a formal composure of a unified *Lebensformen*. Cavell's thrust, it seems to me, is to substitute a quest for community as a task that is constantly burdened and shaped by the threat of skepticism. Thus, although it would undoubtedly chime better with this particular connection with Chakrabarty and Latour, I think that it does not introduce a particularly different angle of approach (perhaps with the exception, as the reviewer noted, of a concern with how children come to inherit and modify the terms of

a community). In the second place, I believe there is a more fruitful way of approaching the specific question of community than I can muster through my focus on *Lebensformen* here, one that would require a different background of references and emphases, and so, for reasons of space I am reluctantly content to save this matter for a different paper. My thanks, anyway, for the reviewer's sensitive remarks. The reader is encouraged to consult [6] for approaches to the question of community that resemble ways that map onto lines I have sketched out here.

[29]　This can be seen already in Chapter 1, part IV of [21], "Natural and Conventional", where the oppositional setting of human culture and biological or natural (embodied) limits are brought out in a dialectic that emphasizes how the human is naturally unnatural. This recapitulates the inherent tension in Cavell's constant description of the human being as fated, compelled, and witnessed in the disavowal of human condition. See [32].

[30]　This last element has long been an object advocated by Ecofeminists; see [34,35]. There are grounds for developing a robust critique of Cavell that intersects with the de facto absence of feminist or Global South voices in texts of his concerned with the restoration of voice; on this point, see [36]. See also [33].

[31]　All references to Spengler are apud [23] p. 65.

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