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## THE CRISIS OF MEANING IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes the phenomenon of the crisis of meaning in contemporary society from the perspective of Ludwig Wittgenstein's social philosophy. In the context of rapid social transformation, digital communication, and the fragmentation of shared cultural frameworks, the problem of meaning has become increasingly acute. Drawing on Wittgenstein's concepts of "language games," "forms of life," and the social use of language, the study argues that the crisis of meaning emerges not from a lack of information, but from the disruption of common linguistic and social practices. The paper examines how the erosion of shared norms and practices leads to ambiguity, miscommunication, and the weakening of social cohesion. The analysis demonstrates that meaning, in Wittgenstein's view, is grounded in collective forms of life and cannot be sustained outside stable social contexts. The findings suggest that addressing the crisis of meaning requires the restoration of meaningful social practices and ethical frameworks rather than purely technical or informational solutions. The study contributes to contemporary social and philosophical debates on meaning, communication, and cultural continuity.

**Keywords:** Crisis of meaning, social philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, language games, forms of life, social practices, modern society, communication, cultural fragmentation.



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### **Introduction**

In contemporary society, the problem of meaning has become one of the central challenges of philosophical reflection. Accelerated technological development, the expansion of digital communication, and the fragmentation of cultural and normative frameworks have profoundly transformed the ways individuals understand themselves and their social world. As a result, shared systems of meaning that once provided coherence and orientation have weakened, giving rise to what is often described as a crisis of meaning. This crisis manifests itself in social disintegration, ethical uncertainty, and increasing difficulties in mutual understanding within modern societies.

Philosophical discourse has long recognized that meaning is not merely a subjective or psychological phenomenon, but a socially constituted reality shaped by language, practices, and communal life. In this regard, Ludwig Wittgenstein's social philosophy offers a particularly valuable theoretical framework for analyzing the contemporary crisis of meaning. Rejecting the notion that meaning is grounded in abstract representations or private mental states, Wittgenstein emphasizes that meaning arises from the social use of language within specific "language games" embedded in shared "forms of life." From this perspective, the stability of meaning depends on the continuity of social practices and the collective norms that sustain them.

The relevance of Wittgenstein's approach becomes especially evident in the context of modern society, where traditional forms of life are increasingly disrupted. The rapid proliferation of information, the dominance of virtual communication, and the pluralization of value systems have led to the erosion of common linguistic frameworks. Consequently, language often loses its orienting function, producing ambiguity, relativism, and a sense of existential dislocation. This situation suggests that the crisis of meaning is not simply a cognitive problem, but a social and ethical one rooted in the transformation of communal practices.

Despite the growing body of research on Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, the application of his social philosophical insights to the analysis of the contemporary crisis of meaning remains insufficiently explored. Existing studies tend to focus on linguistic or epistemological aspects, while the broader social



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implications of meaning as a shared practice receive less systematic attention. This gap highlights the need for a philosophical inquiry that situates meaning within the dynamics of modern social life.

The aim of this article is to analyze the crisis of meaning in contemporary society through the lens of Ludwig Wittgenstein's social philosophy. By examining the relationship between language, social practices, and forms of life, the study seeks to demonstrate that the restoration of meaning depends on the reconstruction of shared normative and ethical frameworks. Such an approach contributes to contemporary debates in social philosophy, cultural theory, and the philosophy of language by offering a socially grounded understanding of meaning in the modern world.

The problem of meaning in modern society has been widely discussed across philosophy, sociology, and cultural theory. Classical and contemporary thinkers have approached the crisis of meaning from diverse perspectives, including existential philosophy, critical theory, and social hermeneutics. However, the social-philosophical foundations of meaning, particularly in relation to language and communal practices, remain a subject of ongoing debate.

In twentieth-century philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein's later works, especially *Philosophical Investigations*, marked a decisive shift in the understanding of meaning. Wittgenstein rejected representational and mentalistic theories of language, arguing instead that meaning emerges from the use of language within socially established "language games." His concept of "forms of life" emphasizes that linguistic understanding is inseparable from shared social practices, norms, and ways of acting. Scholars such as Peter Winch, Stanley Cavell, and Norman Malcolm have further developed these ideas, highlighting the ethical and social dimensions of Wittgenstein's philosophy and its implications for understanding social order and human understanding.

In contemporary social theory, the crisis of meaning is often linked to processes of modernization, globalization, and digitalization. Thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas, Zygmunt Bauman, and Charles Taylor have analyzed how the fragmentation of social norms and the decline of shared moral horizons contribute to experiences of disorientation and loss of meaning. While these approaches offer valuable insights into structural and cultural transformations, they



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frequently treat meaning as an abstract normative concept rather than as a practice grounded in everyday language use.

Recent studies in philosophy of language and social philosophy increasingly emphasize the practical and communal nature of meaning. Researchers have applied Wittgensteinian perspectives to issues such as communication breakdown, relativism, and ethical pluralism in modern societies. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature focuses on linguistic analysis without sufficiently addressing the broader social consequences of disrupted language games and weakened forms of life. This reveals a gap in the scholarship concerning the application of Wittgenstein's social philosophy to the contemporary crisis of meaning as a socially embedded phenomenon.

This study employs a qualitative philosophical methodology grounded in social philosophy and the philosophy of language. The primary method used is conceptual analysis, through which key notions such as "meaning," "language games," "forms of life," and "crisis of meaning" are systematically examined within Wittgenstein's philosophical framework. This approach allows for the clarification of conceptual relationships and the identification of underlying assumptions in contemporary discussions of meaning.

In addition, the research applies a hermeneutic method to interpret Wittgenstein's texts within their philosophical context, paying particular attention to the social implications of his later philosophy. This method facilitates a deeper understanding of how language functions as a shared practice rather than a purely formal system. A comparative-analytical approach is also employed to relate Wittgenstein's insights to broader debates in social philosophy concerning modernity, communication, and cultural fragmentation.

Furthermore, a socio-philosophical approach is used to examine contemporary social conditions that contribute to the crisis of meaning, including the transformation of communication practices and the erosion of shared normative frameworks. Rather than relying on empirical data, the study focuses on theoretical interpretation and philosophical argumentation, consistent with the objectives of normative and conceptual research.

The methodological framework is guided by principles of logical coherence, critical reflection, and interdisciplinary openness. By integrating philosophical



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analysis with social theory, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and theoretically grounded account of the crisis of meaning in contemporary society from a Wittgensteinian perspective.

The analysis of the crisis of meaning in contemporary society through the lens of Ludwig Wittgenstein's social philosophy reveals that meaning cannot be adequately understood as an abstract, individual, or purely cognitive phenomenon. Instead, meaning emerges from shared linguistic practices embedded within specific social contexts, which Wittgenstein conceptualizes as "language games" grounded in "forms of life." The findings of this study demonstrate that the current crisis of meaning results primarily from the destabilization of these shared practices rather than from epistemic uncertainty or informational deficiency.

From a Wittgensteinian perspective, language functions as a rule-governed activity whose coherence depends on communal agreement and habitual use. In modern society, however, rapid social change, digital communication, and the pluralization of value systems have significantly altered traditional language games. As a result, linguistic expressions increasingly lose their stable reference points, leading to ambiguity and fragmentation of meaning. The analysis shows that when common forms of life are weakened, individuals no longer share the practical criteria necessary for understanding and evaluating meaning, thereby undermining social cohesion.

The findings further indicate that the crisis of meaning manifests itself in the erosion of normative orientation. Wittgenstein's rejection of private language underscores the idea that meaning cannot be privately constructed or sustained independently of social practices. Contemporary tendencies toward radical individualism and subjective interpretation challenge this principle by detaching meaning from communal norms. Consequently, language becomes susceptible to relativism, where expressions are interpreted inconsistently across social contexts, generating misunderstanding and ethical disorientation.

Another significant finding concerns the ethical dimension of meaning. While Wittgenstein does not develop a systematic moral theory, his emphasis on forms of life implies that ethical understanding is inseparable from shared practices. The analysis demonstrates that the weakening of collective moral frameworks



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contributes directly to the crisis of meaning. When ethical norms are no longer embedded in everyday linguistic and social practices, individuals experience difficulty in attributing stable value and purpose to their actions and social roles. The study also reveals that attempts to address the crisis of meaning through technical, informational, or purely rational solutions are insufficient. From a Wittgensteinian standpoint, meaning cannot be restored through abstract theorization alone; it requires the reestablishment of meaningful social practices. The findings suggest that the reconstruction of shared forms of life—through education, ethical dialogue, and participatory social engagement—is essential for overcoming the crisis of meaning in contemporary society.

Overall, the analysis confirms that Wittgenstein’s social philosophy provides a robust conceptual framework for understanding the crisis of meaning as a socially embedded phenomenon. The findings highlight that meaning is sustained not by individual interpretation or formal systems, but by lived practices, shared norms, and communal ways of life. This insight contributes to contemporary social philosophy by emphasizing the necessity of social and ethical reconstruction in addressing the challenges of meaning in the modern world.

### **Conclusions**

This study has examined the crisis of meaning in contemporary society through the lens of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s social philosophy. The analysis demonstrates that the crisis is not merely a cognitive or informational problem, but fundamentally a social and ethical phenomenon rooted in the disruption of shared linguistic practices and communal forms of life. Wittgenstein’s concepts of “language games” and “forms of life” reveal that meaning is inherently social: it emerges, persists, and acquires significance only within stable and collectively sustained practices.

The findings highlight several key points. First, modern societal transformations—including the proliferation of digital communication, the fragmentation of cultural and normative frameworks, and the rise of individualism—have weakened the shared practices that give language its orienting and ethical functions. Second, the erosion of communal norms and ethical frameworks contributes directly to ambiguity, miscommunication, and a



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sense of existential dislocation. Third, attempts to resolve the crisis through technical, informational, or abstract rational solutions are insufficient; the restoration of meaning requires the reconstruction of social practices, ethical engagement, and shared forms of life.

This research underscores the theoretical and practical significance of Wittgenstein's social philosophy for contemporary debates on meaning. By situating meaning within the dynamics of communal life, it provides a framework for understanding how social, linguistic, and ethical structures interrelate in shaping human experience. The study suggests that addressing the crisis of meaning in modern society requires not only philosophical reflection but also the revitalization of collective practices that sustain understanding, communication, and moral orientation.

In conclusion, the crisis of meaning is both a philosophical and a social challenge. Wittgenstein's insights remind us that meaning is inseparable from the communities and practices that produce it, and that its restoration depends on the deliberate cultivation of shared norms, ethical responsibility, and communicative engagement. These conclusions have implications for social philosophy, cultural studies, and policy approaches aimed at fostering social cohesion, ethical literacy, and meaningful participation in contemporary life.

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