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“Let us imagine...”: Wittgenstein’s Invitation to Philosophy

Abstract

Wendy Lee-Lampshire writes that Wittgenstein’s conception of language has something valuable to offer feminist attempts to construct epistemologies firmly rooted in the social, psychological and physical situations of language users (1999: 409). However, she also argues that his own use of language exemplifies a form of life whose constitutive relationships are enmeshed in forms of power and authority. For example, she interprets the language game of the builders as one of slavery, and questions how we read and respond to it. She asks: “Who are ‘we’ as Wittgenstein’s reader(s)?” This is an important question, and how we answer offers insight not only into our own philosophical practices, but also into Wittgenstein’s use of language games. With the words “Let us imagine...”, Wittgenstein invites readers to participate in creative, collaborative, and improvisational language games that alter not only the texts themselves, but our relationship with others.

1. Introduction

In the opening of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein introduces the language game of the builders (in response to Augustine’s description of the learning of human language):

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams. B has to pass the

stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words “block,” “pillar,” “slab,” and “beam”. A calls them out; -- B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. --- Conceive this as a complete primitive language. (PI 2)

Lee-Lampshire imagines the language game of the builders as one of slavery (i.e. a relationship of obedience grounded not only in building, but also in the power and subordination which define the epistemic situations of builder A and assistant B differently) (1999: 415).¹ She suggests that it is easy to overlook the differentiation of power which animates the relation between these builders because of the nondescript context. Thus, although Wittgenstein’s example contextualizes the epistemic situation of language users, Lee-Lampshire claims that his philosophy:

exemplifies a form of life whose constitutive relationships are enmeshed in forms of power and authority and which, reflected in the language-games that help to support them, serve to delegitimate the knowledge claims of some while reinforcing the privileged status of others. (1999: 410)

In other words, the language game of the builders reveals a conflict between what Wittgenstein says and what he does.

According to Lee-Lampshire, recognition of the builders (as men whose lives are like our own) conflicts with philosophical claims about generic “man”. For generic “man” is a subject characterized by a lack of context: “Reference to “him” is reference to no one in particular located nowhere in particular; neither slave nor builder, “he” is literally unimaginable” (Lee-Lampshire 1999: 416). She continues:

Moreover, we could not simply substitute references to generic “man” with more clearly contextualized references to specific “men.” For as the example of slavery makes starkly clear, if we imagine the builders to be nongeneric, epistemically situated men, the references to “lives like our own” cannot possibly be understood to refer to all of “us”. (Lee-Lampshire 2002: 416)

¹ She acknowledges that it is possible to imagine the language game of the builders “*sans* slavery,” but she does not pursue this possibility in her paper (Lee-Lampshire 1999: 412).

This leads to questions concerning our role and identity as readers. It is worth quoting Lee-Lampshire's response at length:

"Who are 'we' as Wittgenstein's reader(s)?" turns out to be a very difficult question to answer. For to take him seriously about the epistemic situations of, for example, the builders, requires "us" to take seriously "our" own situations as readers in relation to the builders-game. The first thing "we" discover is that "we" cannot be merely female or male but, rather, must identify "ourselves" as either female or male. For to view "ourselves" as merely one and/or the other is to view "ourselves" as generic, that is, as not epistemically situated (and thus not situated as readers).

Secondly, "we" cannot identify "ourselves" as female, for in the attempt to include "ourselves" in the builders-game "we" expose what is in fact the underlying masculinity of generic "man" and hence "our" difference -- however "we" conceive this -- *qua* female. (1999: 416)

According to Lee-Lampshire, women can only identify with Wittgenstein's builders if they agree to identify with the stereotypical masculine men whose images are evoked by this construction site (1999: 417).² Ferrucio Rossi-Landi raises a similar concern (although in non-inclusive terms) when he writes: "Why no one ever embarrassed [Wittgenstein] by asking who "we" referred to can only be explained in terms of all those possible separatisms whose tacit acceptance made possible the pretence that "we" stood for "all men" which is really missing altogether" (1983: 144). Lee-Lamphsire concludes: "That Wittgenstein is himself caught in a language-game that supports a particular and oppressive form of life is an instructive case in point. For it suggests something about Wittgenstein's...own obliviousness to the social institutions which privileged him" (1999: 424).

Throughout her analysis, it is unclear whether Lee-Lampshire is claiming that the language game of the builders supports a particular and oppressive form of life (as a form of slavery), or whether Wittgenstein's philosophy (as a whole) supports a particular and oppressive form of life through the use of such

² She does not address whether women can identify with Augustine's description of the learning of his "mother tongue," nor whether women can identify with Wittgenstein as he sends someone shopping with a slip marked "five red apples" (PI 1).

language games, or both simultaneously. The tension Lee-Lampshire identifies between the use of generic “man” and the use of language games is important. However, it does not reveal an inconsistency in Wittgenstein’s practices, but draws attention to the fact that the use of language games is a methodological alternative to the grammatical (or theoretical) use of generic “man”. With the exception of the language game of the builders, Lee-Lampshire does not demonstrate the use of (or reference to) generic “man” in Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*. This is necessary, however, because one of the most noteworthy aspects of his writings is the grammatical complexity of his texts and methods. This complexity includes a rich and varied use of personal pronouns (often presented in dialogue form).³ Wittgenstein’s use of first- and second-person pronouns (both singular and plural) far exceeds his use of third-person pronouns (whether singular or plural, specific or generic). In other words, the pronoun “he” (and related nouns such as “builders”, etc.) occur less often than the use of “you”, “we”, or “I”. Inherent in Wittgenstein’s method of investigation is an acknowledgement of the diversity and complexity of the use of words. He uses language in all of its persons, tenses, and numbers.⁴

2. The grammatical complexity of language games

Not only is generic “man” conspicuously absent from Wittgenstein’s texts, but Lee-Lampshire herself notes that generic “man” is unimaginable. It is precisely for this reason that

³ In the *Investigations*, “man” occurs 83 times, while “you” occurs 719 times, “we” occurs 1074 times, and “I” occurs 2032 times. (Given these numbers, it is important to note that Wittgenstein characterizes his use of “I” as the opposite of Descartes’.) Grammatically, his use of pronouns remains relatively consistent throughout the later writings. In *The Blue and Brown Books*, for example, “man” occurs 154 times, “you” occurs 690 times, “we” occurs 1725 times and “I” occurs 1273 times. (“He” occurs 616 times in the *Investigations* and 701 times in *The Blue and Brown Books*.) The figure of the child is also significant in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. “Child” (which is gender neutral in German) occurs 38 times in the *Investigations* and 51 times in *The Blue and Brown Books*. His use of “one”, (as in “It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words” (PI 1)) is also gender neutral. This grammatical complexity is evident even without the aid of electronic databases.

⁴ The issue of whether Wittgenstein’s use of the first-person plural is a veiled reference to generic “man” is discussed below.

Wittgenstein asks us to imagine specific and detailed language games. In an early lecture, he explains:

We must invent a surrounding for our examples...We thus would have invented a surrounding for a word, a game in which its use is a move. It does not matter whether in practice the word has a place in a game, but what matters is that we have a game, that a life is given for it. (AWL 124)⁵

We are asked to imagine or invent language games in order to bring examples to life.⁶ In other words, we are invited to participate in these philosophical investigations (whether spoken or written). To imagine the language game of the builders is to imagine a particular use of words in order to investigate the concept of “meaning”. It is a complex and challenging act of imagination, and one that is worth revisiting in light of Lee-Lampshire’s interpretation.

As noted above, Wittgenstein opens the *Investigations* with a quotation from Augustine’s *Confessions* (one that expresses a particular picture of the essence of human language). He writes that Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of words. He continues by addressing the reader (or readers) directly: “If you describe the learning of language in this way you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns...” (PI 1) As quoted above, he then asks us to imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. (This is the opposite of standard practices of adversarial criticism.) Reflecting on his method, he explains:

People who make metaphysical assertions [such as “the meaning of a word is the object for which it stands”] pretend to make a picture, as opposed to some other picture. I deny that they have done this. But how can I prove it? I cannot say “This is not a picture of anything, it is unthinkable” unless I assume that they and I have the same limitations

⁵ He writes: “If we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its *use*” (BB 4). The invented surrounding of a word is a grammatical game in which its use is a *move*. Wittgenstein does not speak of contexts, situations, circumstances, or conditions. Rather, he puts words into motion or gives them life.

⁶ When Wittgenstein uses the pronoun “we” in the above remark, he is addressing students. Similarly, when he uses the pronoun in his texts, he is addressing readers. The tone, form, and content of his writings is identical to that of his lectures.

on picturing. If I indicate a picture which the words suggest and they agree, then I can tell them that they are misled, that the imagery in which they move does not lead them to such expressions. It cannot be denied that they have made a picture, but we can say that they have been misled. We can say “it makes no sense in this system and I believe this is the system you are using”. If they reply by introducing a new system, I have to acquiesce. (AWL 27)⁷

Each time Wittgenstein addresses readers directly, we are given the opportunity to respond by affirming, denying, or applying the picture that is offered. In response to §1, for example, I may affirm or deny that Augustine’s picture of the essence of human language is one that I share, or that I am thinking primarily of nouns when describing the learning of language in this way. (I may respond in the first-person plural if studying the text with students who share similar confusions or concerns.) If I do not share this picture I may stop reading at this point, or simply deny that the philosophical subject is of interest or concern. Or, I may keep reading and investigate the application of this picture. Wittgenstein never claims that I (or others) share (or ought to share) these philosophical confusions or concerns. In the *Investigations*, he acknowledges that Augustine’s picture of the essence of human language is one that he shared.

3. Language games as improvisational

In response to Augustine’s picture, Wittgenstein presents the language game of the builders. It is an imaginative game played with language, involving improvisation on a general scene (with stock characters and the use of particular words). Lee-Lampshire refers to the comparatively nondescript context of the language game of the builders. However, it is this context that allows us to

⁷ This passage was originally written in response to metaphysical assertions such as “Only the present is real”, but it applies equally well to Wittgenstein’s response to Augustine’s picture of the essence of human language. He also writes (in another context): “The best that I can propose is that we should yield to the temptation to use this picture, but then investigate how the *application* of the picture goes” (PI 374). It is important to note that when Wittgenstein refers to “systems” he is referring to the fact that the description of the use of a word is a description of a system, but he does not have a definition of what a system is [nor is there any issue of providing one] (LWPP 294).

use our own imagination and bring the example to life in a variety of different and detailed ways. (This is one way in which we can take seriously our own situation as readers in relation to the language game of the builders.) The language game of the builders is meant to be played out, and there are various ways to imagine or enact this scene. More often than not, students and scholars imagine a scene unfolding in silence; with builder A and assistant B slowly, ploddingly, moving individual building stones from one place to another. These builders are often compared to cave men, trained animals, marionettes, or automata (Goldfarb 2006: 21).⁸ This is similar to Lee-Lampshire's slavery interpretation. However, we can also imagine this scene as a bustling building site, filled with a cacophony of sounds, and populated by workers using a variety of tools and machinery.⁹ Individuals engage in different tasks, perform a variety of different physical movements, use different tools, and are accompanied by various sounds, signals, whistles, etc. In this case, builder A and assistant B can only communicate with words like "block", "pillar", "slab", and "beam" due to the deafening sounds around them.

We can also imagine language game (2) as a game played with building blocks, or as a scene of *commedia dell'arte* or slapstick.¹⁰ For example, imagine this language game with Laurel and Hardy, or Mabel Normand and Charlie Chaplin, as builder A and assistant B.¹¹ Then imagine A teaching B the use of these words, and expanding language (2) to include i) a series of words used as numerals, ii) words like "this" and "there", and iii) colour samples (PI 7-8). Further, imagine a language game in which A asks and B reports the number of blocks in a pile, or the colour and shapes of the building stones that are stacked in such-and-such a place (PI

⁸ Also see Rhees (1960) and Ring (1983).

⁹ For further detail and discussion see Savickey (2013).

¹⁰ The playwrights John Mighton and Tom Stoppard imagine variations on the language game of the builders in their plays *Possible Worlds* and *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*.

¹¹ See, for example, Laurel and Hardy in *The Finshers*, a 1928 silent film in which they attempt to complete a house and, in the process, destroy it. Although currently not as well known as Charlie Chaplin (with whom she frequently worked), Mabel Normand was a brilliant comedic actress, director, and producer. Not insignificantly, she was the thrower of the first custard pie.

21). Wittgenstein asks, “What is the difference between the report or statement “Five slabs!” and the order “Five slabs!”?” (This question elicits numerous comic responses.) Imagine mixing up the order and the report: An order is given and instead of bringing the slabs, assistant B simply repeats the words (in imitation, in mockery, in confusion, in defiance, or in jest).¹² Such scenes provoke laughter, while simultaneously offering philosophical insight.

Wittgenstein also asks us to imagine language (2) as the whole language of A and B, or even the whole language of a tribe (PI 6). In other words, A and B may speak this simple language within the context of a more complex language (or languages), or the community as a whole may have a primitive (or simple) language. According to Wittgenstein, Augustine’s conception of meaning can be viewed as part of a primitive idea of the way language functions, or as the idea of a language more primitive than our own (PI 2). The first view alludes to ideas articulated by Augustine, Russell, and Wittgenstein himself, while the second is exemplified in the language game of the builders.¹³ Wittgenstein’s use of the word “primitive” is synonymous with the word “simple”, and he uses it to describe his own grammatical method. He writes that it is helpful to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application, in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of words (PI 5). Lee-Lampshire considers Wittgenstein’s use of the term “primitive” inaccurate, for the relationship inherent in such a language game is complex (Lee-Lampshire 1999: 415).¹⁴ The implication is that Wittgenstein can only view the language game of the builders as primitive because he overlooks the complexity of such relationships. However, he

¹² Perhaps assistant B is the Count on Sesame Street: “One, two, three, four, five slabs, ha, ha, ha”.

¹³ Wittgenstein writes: “The concept of meaning I adopted in my philosophical discussion originates in a primitive philosophy of ‘language’” (PG 56) (Lugg 2012: 26).

¹⁴ Schulte considers Wittgenstein’s use of the word “primitive” rude, although he acknowledges the complexity of its use in the *Investigations* (where it is often synonymous with “simple” and “rudimentary”, and where a “primitive language” often signifies a “model language” or a “language game”). He attributes the choice of term (with its various meanings and connotations) to irony and wordplay (Schulte 2004: 24-5).

studies the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application, in order to make such relationships and activities clear. This is one important aspect of playing language games.

4. The purpose of language games

Lee-Lampshire reads the language game of the builders as an attempt to explain the epistemic situation of language users by appealing to a familiar or shared form of life (rendering it a veiled reference to generic “man”). However, in §7 of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein introduces four distinct ways in which he will use the term “language game”. To paraphrase, he indicates that he will call the whole process of using words in §2 a “language game” and that, for the purpose of investigation, we can also imagine §2 as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language; as a process of instruction that resembles language; or as a primitive language (complete in itself). He cautions:

Do not make the mistake of supposing that I am showing how language is built up or how it has evolved. Sometimes it is easier to imagine these invented languages as languages of a primitive tribe and sometimes as the actual primitive language of a child...It will be noticed that the elements we have already introduced are of a great variety. The difficulty of this method of exhibiting language games is that you think it is perfectly trivial. You do not see its importance (AWL 105).

Wittgenstein anticipates (and acknowledges) the difficulties and challenges inherent in his method. In a remark found in *Zettel*, he gives voice to a concern similar to the one raised by Lee-Lampshire; the concern that he is simply assuming that people in language game (2) are like people as we know them (Z 99). An interlocutor claims that if Wittgenstein imagined the builders acting mechanically, he would not call this a rudimentary use of language. Consider his response:

What am I to reply to this? Of course it is true that the life of those men must be like ours in many respects, and I said nothing about this similarity. But the important thing is that their language, and their thinking too, may be rudimentary, that there is such a thing as ‘primitive thinking’ which is to be described via primitive behaviour.

The surroundings are not the ‘thinking accompaniment’ of speech (Z 99).¹⁵

It is important to note that this objection is raised in response to the language game of the builders, and that Wittgenstein’s reply offers clarification of his method. He acknowledges the possibility of developing this language game further in response to such concerns. Lee-Lampshire interprets this passage as presenting grounds or justification for his method, rather than clarification of it. As a result, Wittgenstein appears to be making unsubstantiated factual claims about lives similar to our own (or our own lives in comparison), rather than a methodological claim about the depiction of this invented or imaginary language game. In other words, Wittgenstein is not assuming that the lives of the builders must be like our own. Rather, he is acknowledging that in this particular fictitious example, the lives of the builders are like our own in many respects, and that he has said nothing about this similarity. He claims that this similarity is of no importance for the purpose of this investigation; not because he is dismissive of such concerns (or oblivious to his own privilege), but because he has set up this particular fictitious example in response to Augustine’s picture of the essence of human language. This description gets it light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problem (PI 109).

Lee-Lampshire describes the purpose of Wittgenstein’s language games as follows: “To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life – a context – within which a language is useful” (1999: 409). However, to imagine a language and to imagine a form of life is not to imagine two different things, but to imagine the same thing in two different ways (PI 19). A form of life is not a context within which language is used (or is useful), but a life expressed in language. To imagine or describe a form of life is to imagine or describe a living language (and vice versa). Lee-Lampshire writes that “if we understand the builders-game, it is because it resembles games we recognize as played in the contexts with which we are

¹⁵ Wittgenstein’s use of examples involving reading machines and other creatures demonstrates that he is not making such assumptions.

ourselves familiar” (1999: 414). But this is to read Wittgenstein at cross-purposes. The language game of the builders is offered as a means of investigating concepts of “meaning”, “understanding”, (etc.). In other words, Wittgenstein plays with language in order to defamiliarize the forms of life, language, and concepts we take for granted. Language games mark the *beginning* of the investigation. The philosophical or methodological purpose of the language game of the builders is far more complex than merely recognizing (or identifying with) what is familiar. As Rhee notes in the preface to *The Blue and Brown Books*, one of the earliest uses of language games was to shake off the idea of a necessary form of language (BB vi). Wittgenstein describes language games as “objects of comparison which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities” (PI 130).

For we can avoid ineptness or emptiness in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison -- as, so to speak, a measuring-rod, not as a preconceived idea to which reality must correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy.) (PI 131)

Lee-Lampshire draws epistemological implications from a scene specifically created to investigate a use of language before all claims to knowledge or understanding. (Wittgenstein introduces possible scenes of instruction, as well as an investigation of the concept of “understanding”, later in the text.) The purpose of the invented or imaginary language game is not to present implicit (or explicit) claims, explanations, or justifications for the particular linguistic practices of generic “man”, contextualized men, or human beings (as a whole). Rather, it is a detailed and specific conceptual investigation.

5. The methodological implications of playing language games

The language game of the builders in the opening of the *Investigations* is similar to language games found throughout Wittgenstein’s later writings. As it demonstrates, improvisation and imagination are required in order to bring it to life. Thus, Wittgenstein’s method of using language games is distinct from

theory and argumentation. We are asked to imagine both real and fictitious language games, not because it is impossible to identify with them (although it may be), but because the purpose of these examples is not one of identification.¹⁶ Lee-Lampshire claims that women can only identify with Wittgenstein's builders if they agree to identify with the stereotypical masculine men whose images are evoked by Wittgenstein's construction site. However, identification is irrelevant for both men and women, and there is nothing inherent in this language game that excludes women (or men) from imagining or enacting such a scene in a variety of different ways. In response to Wittgenstein's language games, each act of imagination may vary, and out of each remark extraordinary detail and richness may develop. Both imagination and improvisation require subtlety and nuance (rather than abstraction or generalization). By their very nature, language games challenge stereotypes and the use of generic "man". Wittgenstein's use of language games (and the first-person plural) is not a rhetorical ploy to implicate readers in his own attitudes or conclusions. Nor, as readers, must we subordinate ourselves to either the text or its author.

Significantly, these improvisational exercises vary with each reader (or group) on every occasion. Different participants, with different experiences and interests, create new and unique improvisational acts. Such differences are encouraged throughout Wittgenstein's texts. Fresh situations, opportunities, and obstacles become part of the material with which we work. In the words of Gilbert Ryle, "if individuals are not improvising, they are not engaging their somewhat trained wits in some momentarily live issue, but perhaps acting from sheer, unthinking habit" (1976: 77). Each language game is new, specific, and spontaneous. (Wittgenstein's texts invite chance and change.) Such spontaneity is the opposite of repetition, argumentation, explanation, or theory. It is, however, consistent with Wittgenstein's aim not to spare others the trouble of thinking but, if possible, to stimulate them to thoughts of their own (PI xe). Such engagement or participation is, by its very nature, creative, collaborative, and co-operative. We act,

¹⁶ Wittgenstein's writings are filled with strange and wonderful examples that often challenge familiarity and make identification difficult, if not impossible.

react, and interact with one another while investigating words and the actions into which they are woven. Such improvisation begins, but does not end, with personal experience, for each contribution to a language game is collaborative. As a result, improvisation offers the possibility of communication and community, not by appealing to generic “man”, but by encouraging diversity and complexity. Improvisation is inherently multi-perspectival and not a solitary act. In other words, this method does not privilege a first- or third-person perspective (whether singular or plural). When improvising, we act together and speak many-to-many.

Although Wittgenstein’s improvisational language games can be imagined by one reader alone, they come to life in the company of others. When read with others, the *Investigations* encourages us to express our own individuality and creativity, while also enabling us to “transcend philosophical solitude” (to adapt a theatre expression from Jerzy Grotowski). Wittgenstein’s texts challenge us to move beyond our role as individual, passive readers (or spectators) to become active participants. In other words, we learn Wittgenstein’s philosophical method by practising it, not merely by reading about it. Bringing the text to life involves active engagement, not only with the text itself, but also with others. If the language games presented by Wittgenstein strike us as problematic (such as the language game of the builders as a scene of slavery), we are free to develop and investigate this in detail. We are also free to present alternate or additional examples.¹⁷ Students often describe working backstage at a theatre, or working in the busy kitchen of a restaurant, as scenes involving similar uses of language. Thus, invented language games do not support a form of life (as Lee-Lampshire claims), they exhibit or express one. Wittgenstein remarks: “All I can give you is a method; and I cannot teach you any new truths” (AWL 97).¹⁸

¹⁷ Lee-Lampshire does this through the use of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Robert Musil’s *The Man without Qualities* in her paper, but not in terms of the language game of the builders itself.

¹⁸ Wittgenstein writes: “We could say people’s concepts show what matters to them and what doesn’t. But it’s not as if this *explained* the particular concepts they have. It is only to rule out the view that we have the right concepts and other people the wrong ones. (There is a continuum between an error in calculation and a different mode of

Although participation is encouraged, it is not necessarily easy. Wittgenstein offers both encouragement and reassurance in philosophical risk-taking, and creates a safe (though not always comfortable) environment in which to explore concepts. Improvisation, whether in theatre or philosophy, requires openness, receptivity, and generosity towards others (and towards the grammatical possibilities of language and life itself). Improvisational skills include listening well, supporting others, being flexible, and asking questions. Combining the imagination of two or more individuals results in philosophical acts greater than the sum of their parts. Imagination and improvisation also offer pleasure and delight. This is an important and often overlooked aspect of Wittgenstein's texts (and philosophy itself). Passivity and inactivity may be the result of disparities of power, but they can also be the expression of boredom or paralysis. Wittgenstein's art of investigation offers the pleasure of active participation and philosophical play. Through improvisational language games, we are able to express and renew our interests by engaging our imagination.

6. Conclusion

Lee-Lampshire claims that Wittgenstein's writings exemplify a form of life whose constitutive relationships are enmeshed in forms of power and authority (that serve to delegitimate the knowledge claims of some while reinforcing the privileged status of others). However, the use of language games itself alters such relationships. Wittgenstein's texts do not present a single, authorial point of view, nor is their meaning independent of their readership. Rather, his use of the first-person plural is an acknowledgement of the inherently collaborative nature of these philosophical investigations. Through collaborative participation in the works themselves, readers contribute to (and alter) the text. As such, we are called upon to take seriously our situation as readers in relation to the language game of the builders. In other words, we do philosophy together, and language games are enacted in the space

calculating.)" (RC 293).

between us. Thus, the question “Who are ‘we’ as Wittgenstein’s readers?” is not a difficult question to answer, although it cannot be answered in advance, nor once and for all. If it is genuinely asked, we must answer for ourselves (through our engagement with the texts). Wittgenstein does not speak on our behalf, nor does he make claims about generic “man”. Through his writings, Wittgenstein speaks to us; he does not speak for us or about us. In fact, his texts require that we speak for ourselves and improvise on his examples (without either echoing or mimicking him). At its best, this method of philosophical investigation challenges and enables us to find our own voices in response to his texts.

Although Lee-Lampshire concludes that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is useful for feminist epistemology and theory, her reading of the language game of the builders weakens the feminist implications of Wittgenstein’s writings. She writes:

It offers “us” an opportunity to examine a use of “man” in light of the notion that whatever its meaning, it cannot be divorced from those practices which make it useful; and this, I suggest, raises a critically important epistemological question which situates Wittgenstein among feminists -- namely, useful to whom? (Lee-Lampshire 1999: 424)

Equating the use of language with its usefulness renders language merely instrumental. In the words of Wittgenstein, it is a primitive idea of the way language functions, or the idea of a language more primitive than our own. Such a picture (like the one presented by Augustine in the opening of the *Investigations*) is appropriate, but only for a narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of language. Thus, it is not an accurate interpretation or representation of the concept of language, or language games, in the *Investigations*. Like numerous others, Lee-Lampshire applies Wittgenstein’s philosophy to feminist theory and concerns.¹⁹ However, his method of using language games challenges theory itself. It suggests that in order to address and resolve feminist concerns, a

¹⁹ Davidson and Smith use the term ‘appropriation’ to characterize their use of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, as well as its application in the work of others (Davidson and Smith 1999). They list Green and Curry 1995; Lee-Lampshire 1992; Nicolson 1994; Scheman 1996; and Stoljar 1995. For additional feminist interpretations and applications of Wittgenstein’s philosophy see Scheman and O’Connor (2002) and Tanesini (2004).

new method of philosophical investigation is required. The significance of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is not that his concept of language has something valuable to offer feminist attempts to construct epistemologies, but that the practice of playing language games itself encourages and enables us to express and enact our diverse interests and concerns.²⁰

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