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Introduction: Wittgenstein and Feminism

Although not unheard of, the conjunction of Wittgenstein's name with "feminism" may (still) seem strange, if not contradictory. Numerous anecdotes and reminiscences testify to Wittgenstein's, well, not exactly high opinion of women; for example, as a young man he spoke out firmly against women's suffrage in an argument with David Pinsent because "all the women he knew were such idiots" and his female fellow students at Manchester University had "nothing else on their minds but flirting with the professors" (Pinsent, *Diaries*: 7.2.1914, cf. Monk 1991: 72). At a lecture, he exclaimed "Thank God we've got rid of the women!" – to G.E.M. Anscombe, one of the very few women exempt from Wittgenstein's general dislike of women academics and philosophers (cf. Monk 1991: 498). As is well known, Wittgenstein solved this 'contradiction' by affectionately addressing Anscombe as "old man", thus making her an "honorary male" (cf. ibid.; cf. Szabados 1997). No less well known is his high opinion of the misogynist and antisemitic book *Sex and Character* by Otto Weininger, to whom Wittgenstein also attributed a great influence on his philosophical work (cf. CV: 16; cf. Szabados 1997). But even beyond his sexism, Wittgenstein was "deeply sceptical about the possibility of social change through the application of programmatic political thought" (Heyes 2003: 1); and perhaps more importantly, his philosophy, in particular, is characterised by what might be called "political abstinence".

So why, one might ask given this precarious starting point, should one choose the philosopher Wittgenstein, of all people, to contribute something interesting to feminism, or conversely, why choose the topic of "feminism" to explore, apply and think further about Wittgenstein's philosophy?

First, tensions, frictions, even contradictions are not inherently bad things – on the contrary, as Wittgenstein himself famously said, there is no moving forward on slippery ice, but "[w]e want to walk: so we need friction" (PI: § 107). Furthermore, the *meaning*, as 'sense' and 'importance', of a philosophical work is revealed precisely in the multiplicity of its possible points of reference, applications and interpretations, which often exceeds the context and imaginative space of its author: By emphasizing the myriad ways we use language in different contexts, Wittgenstein's work encourages its readers to pay attention to the particularities of ordinary, situated uses of language and the complexities attendant upon our linguistic practices. Wittgenstein conceived of language itself as a practice and philosophy's task as that of describing and making explicit how language and reality intertwine. Philosophy should not then seek to explain the metaphysical foundations of language, but to clarify the forms of our speech, the functions speech fulfils in different contexts and the ways in which speech permits people to come together.

In this sense, one can say about the (supposed) contradiction of the conjunction "Wittgenstein and feminism" by adapting Wittgenstein's way of dealing with such tensions, that Wittgenstein was an "honorary feminist".

Indeed, the attempt to make Wittgenstein's philosophy fruitful for feminist ideas is not new, rather it is a development that began some thirty years ago and has shown what a rich resource Wittgenstein's writings can be for feminist philosophy. There is a large body of literature that rethought moral and political philosophy as well as social science coming from and with Wittgenstein, thus preparing the ground for more recent attempts to link Wittgenstein's philosophy with feminist theory (including, e.g., Winch 1958, Cavell 1979, Lovibond 1983, Diamond 1991, Crary and Read 2000, Mouffe 2000, Scheman and O'Connor 2002, Zerrilli 2005 and many more). Among the earliest explicit attempts to overcome the (supposed) contradictions between Wittgenstein's philosophy and feminist theory in a mutually fruitful way is Cressida Heyes' study *Line Drawings: Defining Women through Feminist Practice* (2000), where she argues with Wittgenstein for an anti-essentialist, more inclusive

conception of the category 'women'. The question of the drawing of boundaries with respect to categories and species is also discussed in the anthology *Re-Reading the Canon: Feminist Interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein* edited by Naomi Scheman and Peg O'Connor (2002). In addition, the essays in this volume are devoted to topics such as the philosophical and political subject, feminist epistemology as well as the possibility of a moral and political philosophy inspired by Wittgenstein.

However, it was also developments in moral philosophy and feminist theory itself that facilitated fruitful and inspiring connections to Wittgenstein's thoughts. In moral philosophy, attention to particulars, and an emphasis upon descriptions of ordinary language use, have led to new directions (cf. Murdoch 1997), among them the ethics of care, that have been linked to Wittgenstein's philosophy (cf. Gilligan 1982; Baier, 1995; Laugier and Paperman 2006; Crary 2007; Laugier 2015). Against what Wittgenstein called in the *Blue Book*, the "craving for generality" the ethics of care strive to pay attention to the particularity of the work and emotions generated by care: a work mainly carried out by women, especially (in Western industrialized societies) precarious and racialized women. Where the political distinction between the private and public spheres entrenches a disinterest in care, Wittgenstein's effort to elevate the ordinary to the rank of philosophical objects may have appeared as a singular path for envisaging the "importance of importance" (Cavell, 1984): what is usually neglected, devalued, invisible although under our eyes (cf. Laugier 2015). The absence of care (*carelessness*) has emerged as a gendered moral and political disposition – cognitive, perceptive and affective – thus exposing the feminist and transformative potential of the Ordinary Language Philosophy.

These perspectives in moral and political philosophy have shifted attention within feminist epistemology to the question of marginalized voices – primarily those of women – previously excluded from public conversion. Wittgenstein's great strength, in fact, is to consider language from the concreteness of its expressions from an embodied conception (variations of the voice, the tone, the sound quality of a conversation). Feminist re-appropriations of

Wittgenstein are thus valuable in considering in a non-metaphorical sense what political "voice" and public conversation really means. This is why ordinary language philosophy more generally has given feminist theory the tools to attend to our linguistic practices to eradicate linguistic sexism, inclusive of inventing new ways of talking about and performing our selfhood (cf. Gérardin-Laverge 2018). Poststructuralist feminism, and in particular Judith Butler, has thus seized upon the philosophy of ordinary language to analyze the way in which language reproduces gender but also the subversions and resignifications that it makes possible by reversing the insulting stigma, queering the language or inventing new ways of incorporating the language (cf. Butler, 1997; Ambroise 2003).

The question of the exclusion of voices and of silencing is also relevant within science and epistemic practices. Feminist epistemology and philosophy of science have drawn on Wittgensteinian ideas on "objectivity", epistemology and language in order to interrogate the problem of male (and other) bias in the production of knowledge (cf. Diamond 1991, Crary 2001, Boncompagni 2019, Ashton 2019). The Wittgensteinian investigation of scepticism has been explored in order to show the social and gendered production of doubt, loss of confidence or difficulty in expressing in words what is experienced as violence (cf. Das 2006). At stake here is the way in which our thoughts, "language games" and our subjectivities are shaped within forms of life – in the double sense evoked by Stanley Cavell of biological life (what sustains and cares for it) and horizontal or social life, that is the fabric of practices through which subjects construct the common (cf. Cavell 1979).

The utility of Wittgenstein's work is thus twofold: It helps us, on the one hand, to clarify the particular epistemologies and philosophical methodologies employed by feminist theory at the crossroads of anthropology (cf. Das 2020), literary studies (cf. Moi 2017) and social philosophy (cf. Ferrarese and Laugier 2018; Jaeggi 2009) and, on the other, to better grasp political problems tied to our public discourses and ideology, discrete acts of speech, and the gendered aspects of our embodied language. It accomplishes this in part by giving us the latitude to be more attentive to lived, embodied

experiences of linguistic practice (e.g., the tone of voice we use, the rhythm of our speech, our body language, etc.) and a renewed attention to the texture of our everyday life.

For all these reasons, the aim of this Special Issue is to mobilize the theoretical tools and methods of Wittgenstein's philosophy within feminist and queer studies. Focusing on Wittgenstein – in contrast to Austin, who has often been mobilized within feminist theories – seems to be helpful to underline the Wittgensteinian understanding of language, distinct from the way some poststructuralist feminisms conceive of "discourse", ideology or the material dimensions of language. By opening up such a dialogue, this journal issue proposes to rethink how our embodied practices subvert gender in language (Gérardin-Laverge, McKeown), thus opening up feminist politics to new possibilities of subjectivation and to a more inclusive conception of the "political subject" of feminism (Gamero-Cabrera; Treviño-Tarango). It thus proposes to shift the contours of epistemology, elucidating the forms of gender injustices at work in the reduction or silence (Raïd), the political dimensions of scepticism (Trächtler) or the difficulties of putting into words and interpreting one's own experience (Lobo). The result is an original understanding of expression and the female voice (Ascarate, Raïd) that challenges certain merely metaphorical understandings of political voice.

Finally, although our goal is to underline the relevance of using Wittgenstein's thought as a "toolbox" for feminist theory, we also intend to propose a feminist rereading of Wittgenstein's philosophy to open new narratives in the history of ordinary language philosophy and to underline the possible limits of certain parts of his thought, once it is confronted with feminist or women's issues (Aucouturier, Trächtler). By this, it is not a question of merely integrating Wittgenstein into feminist philosophy but rather of confronting his thought with the feminist linguistic and embodied practices of our time and with the philosophy that goes beyond them.

Summary of Contributions

In "Philosophy of everyday life: Rethinking the role of philosophy in our lives with the Oxford women philosopher quartet (Anscombe, Foot, Midgley, Murdoch)", VALÉRIE AUCOUTURIER raises different feminist issues emerging from the inscription of philosophy into everyday life through the exploration of the Oxford women philosopher quartet. Her purpose is to open new narratives in OLP by confronting its history with feminist and feminine issues.

In her text "Linguistic Injustice. The Fragility of Women and Girls' Voices in Sexist Contexts", LAYLA RAÏD deals with the fragility of women and girls' voices in sexist contexts and relies on Wittgenstein and Cavell to describe this fragility as one of linguistic injustice.

In "Speaking Silences: A Wittgensteinian Inquiry into Hermeneutical Injustice", CAMILA LOBO discusses Fricker's concept of "hermeneutical injustice" in examining cases in which no linguistic or discursive resources are available, but marginalized subjects can still be said to resist dominant interpretations of their experiences.

In "From Doubt to Despair – A Wittgensteinian Perspective on Gaslighting", JASMIN TRÄCHTLER reworks the phenomenon of "gaslighting" as a form of epistemic and sexist injustice. Drawing on Wittgenstein's remarks on doubt, Trächtler uses Wittgenstein's tools and methodological framework to understand the political construction (and perpetuation) of the loss of confidence, doubt and scepticism.

In "The Joke's on Who? – The Performative Possibilities of Humour", LISA MCKEOWN understands humour as a tool in countering social injustice. Mobilizing Wittgenstein and Cavell, McKeown aims to include a reflection on humour – as a picture of fact *and* as an attitude involving voice and tone – within feminist epistemologies and social understandings of injustice.

LUZ ASCARATE's article, "In search of a feminist theory of expression" proposes a cross-reading between Wittgenstein's and Merleau-Ponty's reflections on language and expressiveness. The author explores philosophical and poetic texts to show the political significance of women's voices, thus drawing the contours of female expressiveness.

ISABEL G. GAMERO-CABRERA, in "Acknowledging women. Some Wittgensteinian ideas to clarify the cis/trans debate" mobilizes the later Wittgenstein's work and feminist interpreters of Wittgenstein, to shed some light on the cis/trans debate, calling into question what a woman is and who the subject of feminism is.

MONA GÉRARDIN-LAVERGE, in "A Realistic Approach to the Performativity of Gender" shows that an conversation between Judith Butler's constructivist understanding of gender and OLP and especially Wittgenstein's approach to language might be fruitful in the development of a realistic and political comprehension of the power of language.

In "Transfeminism and Political Forms of Life", MARTHA TREVIÑO-TARANGO uses Wittgenstein's concept of "forms of life" and Judith Butler's work on gender to explore the openness of feminist struggles and replace transfeminism at the heart of contemporary feminist issues.

Finally, the Special Issue ends with an Interview with ALICE CRARY (realized by MICKAËLLE PROVOST) whose philosophical work on Wittgenstein, Cavell and Critical Theory has paved the way for a reflection on feminist epistemology and epistemic and social injustice, inspired by the thought of Wittgenstein.

The contributions to this special issue mainly stem from the conference "Wittgenstein and Feminism: Ordinary Language Philosophy's Contribution to Feminist Theory and Practice" organised by the editors in March 2021 as part of a Franco-

Norwegian exchange between the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and the Bergen Network for Women in Philosophy (University of Bergen). The editors would like to thank all the participants in the Conference and Workshops as well as the reviewers of this special issue who helped in selecting and improving the contributions and in particular Lisa McKeown who helped proofreading some of the articles. Special thanks also go to the editors and the editorial board of the Nordic Wittgenstein Review who supported the publication of this special issue.

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