

WITTGENSTEIN

AND

FEMINISM

International Conference and Graduate Workshops



March 26th - 27th, 2021

Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France

Keynotes

Alice Crary (New School for Social Research, New York, USA)

Layla Raïd (Université Picardie Jules-Verne, Amiens France)

Chon Tejedor (University of Valencia, Spain)

Organized by Mickaëlle Provost, Jasmin Trächtler, Sandra Laugier and Carlota Salvador Megias



PROGRAM

Time	Friday, 26th March 2021
10:00-10:15	<i>Welcome</i>
PANEL: RENEWAL OF FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY FROM A WITTGENSTEINIAN PERSPECTIVE	
10:15-11:00	Valérie Aucouturier (Université Saint-Louis, Bruxelles) <i>Philosophy of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Role of Philosophy in our Lives with the Oxford “Women Philosopher Quartet” (Anscombe, Foot, Midgley, Murdoch)</i>
11:00-11:05	<i>Break</i>
11:05-11:50	Isabel Gamero Cabrera (Complutense University of Madrid) <i>What is a woman? Or, has Wittgenstein something to say in the cis/trans debate?</i>
11:50-12:00	<i>Break</i>
PANEL: RETHINKING MORAL AND POLITICAL EMANCIPATION WITH ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY	
12:00-12:45	Salla Aldrin Salskov (University of Helsinki) <i>“The difficulty of a change of attitude” as key to moral understanding, or: what is at stake in contemporary queer and feminist criticism</i>
12:45-14:30	<i>Lunchbreak</i>
14:30-15:15	Miranda Boldrini (University of Roma – La Sapienza) <i>Education as Transformation in the Ethics of Care</i>
15:15-15:20	<i>Break</i>
15:20-16:15	KEYNOTE TALK Chon Tejedor (University of Valencia) & Stella Villamea (University of Madrid) <i>Constructing Feminism with Wittgenstein's Tools: Self-Stultification, Resemblance and Aspect-Seeing</i>
16:15-17:00	<i>Break</i>
17:00-17:55	KEYNOTE TALK Alice Crary (New School for Social Research) <i>Following in the Footsteps of Ecofeminism: a role for Wittgenstein</i>
17:55-18:00	<i>Break</i>
18:00-18:55	WORKSHOP SESSION 1

Time	Saturday, 27th March 2021
10:45-11:00	<i>Welcome</i>
PANEL: RETHINKING MORAL AND POLITICAL EMANCIPATION WITH ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY	
11:00-11:45	Mona Gérardin-Laverge (Sophiapole, Université Paris Nanterre) <i>Ordinary Realism and Family Resemblances: Thinking Gender and Feminist Struggles with Wittgenstein</i>
11:45-11:50	<i>Break</i>
11:50-12:35	Martha Treviño (University of St Andrews) <i>Transfeminism and Political Forms of Life</i>
12:35-14:30	<i>lunch break</i>
PANEL: LANGUAGE AND TEXTURES OF EXPERIENCE	
14:30-15:15	Lisa McKeown (New School for Social Research) <i>The Joke's on Who: The Reorienting Power of Retorts</i>
15:15-15:20	<i>Break</i>
15:20-16:15	KEYNOTE TALK Layla Raïd (Université Picardie Jules-Verne) <i>Attunement and Bafflement</i>
16:15-17:00	<i>Break</i>
17:00-17:55	WORKSHOP SESSION 2
17:55-18:00	<i>Break</i>
18:00-18:55	WORKSHOP SESSION 3
20:00-20:30	<i>Closing meeting</i>

ABSTRACTS

SALLA ALDRIN SALS KOV

University of Helsinki

“THE DIFFICULTY OF A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE”
AS KEY TO MORAL UNDERSTANDING, OR: WHAT
IS AT STAKE IN CONTEMPORARY QUEER AND
FEMINIST CRITICISM

In this paper I discuss what I call intellectualized epistemic habits in contemporary queer and feminist criticism.

I situate my analysis within post-Wittgensteinian moral philosophy, illustrating how attempts, to theorize sexuality, gender and race grounded and politicize knowledge, express epistemological perspectives that foreclose an existential dimension of queer feminist politics. I show how various descriptions of socially conditioned responses entering our personal lives are intertwined with existential difficulties, which can be captured in the notion of moral change. Wittgenstein’s emphasis on philosophical difficulties not being an ‘intellectual difficulty of the sciences but the difficulty of a change of attitude’ is key here.

Moral change lies at the heart of feminist debates in activist and academic settings. The #metoo movement’s demand for change in cultural patterns of sexuality, and demands to dismantle the workings of whiteness by the *Black Lives Matter* movement, address “unlearning” (Gayatri

Spivak, Gloria Wekker) and disidentification strategies (José Muñoz) as means for resistance and change. These political aims, I argue, primarily concern understanding, and moral change (rather than knowledge) but are rarely framed in those terms. Due to a commitment to poststructuralist thinking, (Moi 2017) both activists and academics are “held captive by pictures” entailing epistemic perspectives on moral questions.

In asking how queer, feminist criticism illuminate the questions “who am I?” and “who are you?”, I suggest that the ethics of Wittgenstein’s philosophy as relational, relying on an I-You understanding ((Read 2020, Nykänen 2019), not only problematize epistemic habits in queer feminist thought, but also provide alternatives to them. This liberatory aspect, can deepen our understanding of what is ethically at stake in queer feminist criticism, politics and demands.

VALERIE AUCOUTURIER

Université Saint-Louis, Brussels (Centre Pros-
péro. Langage, Image, Connaissance)

PHILOSOPHY OF EVERYDAY LIFE: RETHINKING
THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN OUR LIVES WITH
THE OXFORD “WOMEN PHILOSOPHER QUAR-
TET” (ANSCOMBE, FOOT, MIDGLEY, MUR-
DOCH)

In §116 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein says, ‘What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’, making the question of what this everyday use refers to a real philosophical question. As we

know, Wittgenstein did not oppose the everyday use to the scholarly, the theoretical or the poetic uses, but to the pseudo-uses (which only have the appearance of use). Everyday use, or rather everyday uses, refer to the infinite variety of possible and real situations in which those uses are meaningful. This raises the question of whose everyday this everyday is.

Now, at Oxford University, in the context of the Second World War, when men were largely obliged to abandon the university benches to take part in the war effort, four women philosophers (Iris Murdoch (1919-1999), Mary Midgley (1919-2018), Elizabeth Anscombe (1919-2001) and Philippa Foot (1920-2010)) formed a group of philosophical reflections that would become a competitor, after the war, to John L. Austin's famous 'Saturday Mornings', to which these women philosophers were not invited.

At the heart of the concerns of this 'wartime quartet' (the expression is from Clare Mac Cumhaill and Rachael Wiseman) of women philosophers: putting the importance of being human back at the centre of ethics. These women opposed 'modern moral philosophy' and its many presuppositions, including the claim that ethical questions are independent of the facts of human life or concern a purely rational subject abstracted from everyday issues and from its belonging to the human species.

It is by putting the importance of being human back at the heart of their ethical reflections that these women philosophers came to reflect on issues that directly concern women's lives (such as abortion, for instance), far from the philosophical abstractions on the meaning of moral concepts that interested their men homologues.

In my presentation, I would like to question the extent to which this re-inscription of philosophy into everyday life, especially that of women, and into ordinary human concerns, opens the way to a feminist philosophy and ethics.

MIRANDA BOLDRINI

Sapienza University of Rome

EDUCATION AS TRANSFORMATION IN THE ETHICS OF CARE

Carol Gilligan (2011), in her perspective on the ethics of care, proposed to consider the relationships between adult women and adolescent girls in the context of education as a key source for resistance against patriarchy. Through her fieldwork with women teachers, Gilligan shows how the voices of adolescent female students bring their teachers to rediscover their own moral voice, silenced since the adolescence, and to interrogate their own role in the reproduction of oppressive norms as educators within a patriarchal society. According to Gilligan, in fact, adolescence for women consists in a psychological stage in which they are initiated to patriarchy but at the same time engaged in a form of psychological resistance against it.

In this talk, I will propose a perfectionist interpretation of the case presented by Gilligan through the reference to Wittgensteinian approaches to ethics, especially Stanley Cavell's Emersonian perfectionism and the idea of criticism of the forms of life. My aim is to show how the ethics of care expresses and promotes a perfectionist conception of education which is not

limited to initiation, but is considered as transformation of the self and of culture.

ISABEL GAMERO CABRERA

Complutense University of Madrid

WHAT IS A WOMAN? OR, HAS WITTGENSTEIN SOMETHING TO SAY IN THE CIS/TRANS DEBATE?

This paper is focused on the recent controversy in feminism about who is the “true” subject of feminism. The quotation marks are indicators of how the analysis will be developed. That is, I will employ some ideas of the late Wittgenstein’s work, specifically his notion of ordinary language, to bring some light into this controversy.

The question I address is classic and has been already posed by Moi (1999): “What is a woman?”. However, it acquires new nuances and complexity in the current debate about transfeminism.

More than solving this question, my aim is to dissolve it, following Wittgenstein’s critiques to the metaphysical conception of language (2009:§89ff). My thesis is that there is not a “true reality” that our concepts mirror; but different language-games, which change and are related with different practices and goals (2009:§23).

Therefore, it is not possible to state that there is a “real essence” of women or something that every “real” woman shares. It does not make any sense either to circumscribe the subject of feminism to “real” women. On the contrary, the noun “woman” has multiple and changeable uses, and is open to contestation (Medina, 2010). It is also related to our practices, as for example Heyes

(2000) has argued in the specific case of the subject of feminism.

However, the defendants of cisfeminism maintain that this open understanding of women entail relativistic stances; so then anyone can become a woman. I would reply that Wittgenstein’s notion of concept with blurred edges (2009:§71) proves that these fears are not well-founded.

Bibliography

Heyes, Cressida (2000) *Line Drawings: Defining Women through Feminist Practice*. Cornell UP
Medina, Jose (2010) “Wittgenstein as a Rebel”, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 18:1, 1-29
Moi, Toril (1999) *What is a woman?* Oxford UP
Wittgenstein, Ludwig (2009) *Philosophical Investigations*. Blackwell

ALICE CRARY

New School for Social Research

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ECOFEMINISM: A ROLE FOR WITTGENSTEIN

This lecture makes a case for regarding *ecofeminism*—which is sometimes taken, wrongly, to rest on an intellectually questionable and politically problematic representation of women as essentially close to nature—as one of the most urgently needed, politically pertinent critical theories of our time. The lecture proceeds by identifying three complementary strands of thought running through the ecofeminist tradition, namely, a *historical* strand, a *structural* strand and a *critical* strand. It brings out how all three strands reinforce each other, and it claims that the later philosophy of Wittgenstein is uniquely helpful for developing the crucial critical strand.

MONA GÉRARDIN-LAVERGE
Sophiapol, Nanterre University

ORDINARY REALISM AND FAMILY RESEMBLANCES: THINKING GENDER AND FEMINIST STRUGGLES WITH WITTMENSTEIN

The *role of language* in doing gender, and even sex, is a very important theme in the post-structuralist approach of queer theorists: Butler, for example, has mobilized a concept from the ordinary language philosophy (“performativity”) to analyze gender and what she calls the “discursive construction of sex”. Her conception has been *criticized* by various feminist theorists for “derealizing” social relations: forgetting the materiality of the body, neglecting the material conditions of women's work and life, and focusing on the subversion of gender categories.

In this communication, I suggest that a Wittgensteinian approach of language may support Butler's perspective: it helps to develop a *realistic understanding* of the relationship between language and the social world, and to *explore our uses*, our real discursive practices, in their interweaving with other practices and other activities. This allows to go beyond a dualistic reading that would oppose ideology to structures, language to the material, the symbolic to the concrete, to *understand how gender is produced* by practices that are inseparably material and discursive.

The reproach to queer theory of derealizing social relations has often been accompanied by a *strategic critique*, accusing it of advocating individual practices of subversion rather than collective struggle. Butler underlines issues encountered by the struggles based on a substantial and foundationalist approach to identity, for

example, to the identity of “*woman*”, and develops the idea of “*coalitions*”, alliances of heterogeneous individuals or groups which learn to struggle together. But how coalitions work? Isn't feminism grounded on a common experience of oppression? To explore this question, I will discuss Cressida J. Heyes' proposal to develop, for feminist struggles, a Wittgensteinian understanding of the similarities between women based on the concept of “*family resemblances*”.

LISA MCKEOWN
PhD Candidate, New School for Social Research

THE JOKE'S ON WHO: THE REORIENTING POWER OF RETORTS

I argue that humour is an underutilized tool in countering social injustice. Within feminist epistemology much has been made about implicit bias stemming from knowledge gaps. Yet studies have shown that mere awareness of our implicit bias does little to change our behaviour. Instead, I argue that overcoming bias often requires a more creative approach. Wittgenstein speculated that one could write a book of philosophy entirely in the form of jokes. In part, he thought that jokes offer an illuminating synopsis or overview of a state of affairs. We might even say jokes offer a fresh gestalt. First, a joke can reframe the perspective suggested by the slur. Second, the joke can allow the speaker to make a lateral conversational move, one that evades being trapped in a defensive argumentative position. Using tone to open up new discursive planes allows for more communicative possibilities which in turn

may lead to more avenues for understanding injustice.

LAYLA RAÏD

Université Picardie Jules-Verne

ATTUNEMENT AND BAFFLEMENT

My talk deals with the vulnerability of women and girls' voices in sexist contexts. Bafflement is a common experience in women and girls in sexist surroundings that deny their entitlement to speak of their own experiences. I propose a Wittgensteinian approach of this experience of bafflement.

The following remark by Wittgenstein in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* VI, 35, deals with a similar experience, one of 'confusion'. Wittgenstein asks the following question : "How do I know that the colour that I am now seeing is called 'green' ?", and answers by pointing to what would happen if other people did not agree with me, when I asked them for confirmation : " (...) I should become totally confused and should perhaps take them or myself for crazy. That is to say : I should either no longer trust myself to judge, or no longer react to what they say as to a judgement." I argue that the characteristic female experience of not being believed when expressing their experiences in sexist contexts can be understood as a lack of attunement with the community of male locutors. This lack of attunement is essential

to the patriarchal order and its perpetuation. Attunement appears to be fragmented along political lines.

CHON TEJEDOR

University of Valencia, Spain

& STELLA VILLARMEA

University Complutense of Madrid, Spain

CONSTRUCTING FEMINISM WITH WITTGENSTEIN'S TOOLS: SELF-STULTIFICATION, RESEMBLANCE AND ASPECT-SEEING

In this talk, we consider whether the methodological tools inherited from Wittgenstein's philosophy can make a positive contribution to feminism. In particular, we examine the extent to which they can contribute to the critique of patriarchal languages and to the positive development of emancipatory linguistic practices. To this purpose, we consider two distinct Wittgensteinian approaches to conceptual elucidation: the notion of dispositional clarity that emerges in the *Tractatus*; and the notion of perspicuous presentation, developed primarily in *Philosophical Investigations*. According to the first, Tractarian understanding, philosophical elucidation involves identifying and dissolving nonsense, where nonsense is understood in terms of self-stultification, or self-subversion. In the second, perspicuous presentation approach, philosophical elucidation involves skilfully probing language, through methodological devices such as the surveying of use, family resemblance and aspect-seeing.

We argue that, although the former – Tractarian – understanding of philosophy's elucidatory task

can make an important contribution to feminist critique, it is the latter understanding of elucidation as perspicuous presentation that is most useful to the development of emancipatory linguistic practices. We reach this conclusion by applying Wittgenstein's methods to a series of concrete examples drawn from feminist debates on consent, and seeing how these devices fare in the face of said discussions. Interestingly, this process ends up shedding light not only on the debates in question, but also on Wittgenstein's own tools. In particular, it helps to highlight that, in spite of the differences between the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*, the elucidatory process remains, for Wittgenstein, an activity aimed at regaining and adeptly honing particular forms of know-how.

MARTHA TREVIÑO-TARANGO

University of St. Andrews

TRANSFEMINISM AND POLITICAL FORMS OF LIFE

It is sometimes argued that there are pre-political, 'natural' characteristics that render the political subjects of political movements, for instance that women are the subjects of feminism. These same arguments criticise transfeminism as usurper of the political priorities of feminism. This essay argues that such is a foundationist reasoning which wrongly assumes that a stable identity must be in place in order for political

theories to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken by the bearers of such identity. It will first present a cogent account of transfeminism, its views, aims and demands for action. It will then show how transfeminism can be read analogously to Wittgenstein's concept of forms of life, that is to say, just as there are multiple forms of life within the human form of life, we can argue that there are diverse feminist struggles that do not lose their feminist sense just because they focus on transversally related problems like racism or sexual dissidence. Neither Wittgenstein nor transfeminism deny that there are biological and environmental features that constitute the human form of life, but they also acknowledge that within these shared conditions there are possibilities for diversity, to make sense of various forms of life (Moyal-Sharrock 2015) without being relativistic; and thus, crucially, they help us understand that there is no such thing as a pre-political human form of life. This is linked to Butler's claim that in political action 'there need not be a "doer behind the deed", but that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed.' (2007). In other words, the feminist subject is not given, but constructed in action, so it must continually be self-critical and open to participate in diverse political movements. We conclude that transfeminism is a key alternative to institutionalised and market-driven gender politics that only simulate to address feminist concerns.

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