

International Conference and Workshop

Wittgenstein & the Concept of 'Woman'

Perspectives from Ordinary Language
Philosophy, Art and History

23-24 March 2023

Philosophy Faculty, Room 217

Complutense University of Madrid

Keynotes:

Maria Balaska (University of Hertfordshire)

Esa Díaz-Léon (University of Barcelona)

Organized by Camille Braune (Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University), Isabel Gamero (Complutense University of Madrid), Jasmin Trächtler (TU Dortmund), Sandra Laugier (Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University) & Angeles Jiménez Perona (Complutense University of Madrid)



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École Doctorale de Philosophie ED 280

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Thursday, March 23rd, 2023

10:00-10:15	<i>Welcome</i>
10:15-11:00	Manuela Teles, <i>The W Rule in the Language Game: Wittgenstein and the Concept 'Woman'</i>
11:05-12:05	Maria Balaska, <i>Diamond-Arendt-Murdoch & Being 'a Woman'</i>
<i>Break</i>	
12:20-13:05	Nadia ben Hassine, <i>Wittgensteinian Metaphilosophy and Overgeneralization</i>
<i>Lunchbreak*</i>	
14:30-15:15	Camilla Kronqvist, <i>'Now No One Can Tell Me...' Certainties and Doubts When Exploring the Grammar of 'Woman'</i>
15:20-16:05	Nico Orlandi & Carol Hay, <i>The Concept of a Woman: Virtues & Vices of Family Resemblance</i>
<i>Break</i>	
16:20-16:25	Workshop introduction: Astrid Wagner
16:30-16:50	Adriana Pérez Cortés, <i>Basic Certainties and Fluency: Wittgenstein and Performativity</i>
16:55-17:15	Ellie Robson, <i>Perspectives on Forms of Life: Is Mary Midgley a Wittgensteinian?</i>
17:20-17:30	Questions & conclusive remarks
19:30	<i>Conference Dinner*</i>

Friday, March 24th, 2023

10:00-10:15	<i>Welcome</i>
10:15-11:00	Valérie Aucouturier, <i>The Concept of "Woman" and the Issue of Linguistic Idealism</i>
11:05-12:05	Esa Díaz-León, <i>Multipropositionalism about 'Woman'</i>
<i>Break</i>	
12:20-13:05	Marie Wegener, <i>Why Dogs Can't Pretend and Women are Bad Philosophers – (Gender) Stereotypes and Grammatische Sätze</i>
<i>Lunchbreak*</i>	
14:30-15:15	Salla Aldrin Salskov, <i>Wittgenstein's Philosophy as a Form of Cultural Criticism</i>
<i>Break</i>	
15:30-15:35	Workshop introduction: Astrid Wagner
15:40-16:00	Maria Victoria Pérez Monterroso, <i>Epistemological Foundations of the Inclusive Language Project(s)</i>
16:05-16:25	Silvia Locatelli, <i>From Irigaray & Wittgenstein: Is There a "Woman Form of Life"?</i>
16:30-16:40	Questions & conclusive remarks
18:30	<i>Apéritif</i>

* Lunches and the conference dinner are at the participants' charge.

ABSTRACTS

Salla Aldrin Salskov

University of Helsinki

Primary research interests

Feminist and Queer theory, Wittgenstein, Ethics

Wittgenstein's Philosophy as a Form of Cultural Criticism

This lecture discusses what Salla Aldrin Salskov calls “epistemic habits” in queer and feminist theory, and aims to show that Wittgenstein’s philosophy, understood as a form of radical cultural criticism, can open up and deepen the understanding of many key questions within queer and feminist debates today (both academic and activist). Starting with addressing how some perspectives in feminist theory are held captive by pictures as Wittgenstein would say, in their understanding of the problems that pervade debates around “power”, “knowledge” and various identity categories, this lecture would like to suggest that there is a need to rethink the politics and ethics of contemporary feminist thought. By discussing feminist deconstructions of the category of woman – as including a radical critique of philosophy and of the subject of philosophy – this lecture wants to illuminate the radicality in feminist critiques of philosophy, but also to problematize tendencies to be tempted by a suspicious hermeneutics, a tendency Wittgenstein challenged in his work.

Valérie Aucouturier

Saint-Louis University, Brussels

Primary research interests

Philosophy of mind, Philosophy of action, Philosophy of language

The Concept of ‘Women’ and the Issue of Linguistic Idealism

In her 1976 paper on linguistic idealism, Elizabeth Anscombe suggests the following test for what she calls “partial idealism”: “Does this existence, or this truth, depend upon human linguistic practice? That the meaning of expressions is so dependent is evident; that human possession of concepts is so dependent is not quite so evident.” In her presentation, Valérie Aucouturier wishes to explore the extent to which partial idealism applies or not to the concept of “women”.

Maria Balaska

Hertfordshire University

Primary research interests

Aesthetics, Meta-Ethics, Ethics

Diamond-Arendt-Murdoch & Being ‘a Woman’

In this talk, Maria Balaska would like to bring together Cora Diamond, Iris Murdoch and Hannah Arendt on the normative character of thinking: what it means to think well and how the life of the mind connects to the moral life. Using an example from literature – the Greek story of “The Murderess” by Papadimantis – she wishes to explore two cases in which failing to think well connects to ways of

acting that are morally problematic: when one's thinking deflects from what Cora Diamond calls the "difficulty of reality" and when the essentially dialogical character of thought, what Hannah Arendt calls the "two-in-one", breaks down. Both of these cases reveal openness (to the world and to others) as a fundamental trait of good thinking.

Nadia ben Hassine

University of Cambridge

Primary research interests

Metaphilosophy, Political philosophy, (late) Wittgenstein, Conceptual engineering

Wittgensteinian Metaphilosophy and Overgeneralization

Wittgensteinian metaphilosophy is often interpreted through its emphasis on ordinary language: we can discover meaning from the use of words in a given context. What this means for philosophy is a shift in self-assigned tasks: philosophers should not focus on building theories or setting out to uncover meaning through philosophical analysis. This metaphilosophical approach diverges from traditional philosophy in a variety of ways and has been interpreted as a critique on such approaches. In this presentation, Nadia ben Hassine will be focusing on one such aspect of divergence, namely the idea of overapplication or overgeneralization in philosophy. Overgeneralization takes place when one understanding of a word is extrapolated to all contexts in which its

used, leading to philosophical tensions. As Wittgenstein puts it in the *Blue Book*:

The man who is philosophically puzzled sees a law in the way a word is used, and, trying to apply this law consistently, comes up against paradoxical results. (p. 27)

In this paper, Nadia ben Hassine will focus on this phenomenon of overapplication within Wittgensteinian metaphilosophy. This same aspect of overgeneralization has been identified as a problem within political philosophy. She will discuss how this aspect of Wittgenstein's divergence from traditional philosophy impacts the suitability of Wittgensteinian metaphilosophy for political thought, thereby arguing for the importance of moving away from overgeneralization in political thinking.

Esa Díaz-León

University of Barcelona

Primary research interests

Philosophy of mind, Philosophy of language, Philosophy of gender, race and sexuality

Multipropositionalism about 'Woman'

The meaning of the term "woman" has been the subject of ongoing philosophical debate in recent literature. This is connected to questions about the scope of feminism, since feminism is the movement that aims to fight against the oppression of women. Two of the main competing views

in the literature are semantic contextualism about “woman” (Saul 2012, Díaz-León 2016, Ichikawa 2020) on the one hand, and a polysemy or ambiguity view about “woman” on the other (Laskowski 2020). According to contextualism, the meaning of “woman” changes from context to context, in virtue of some factors of the context that determine different contents in each context. According to the polysemy view, the term “woman” expresses different meanings that may or may not be related, and which concept is expressed in a particular context depends on the intentions of the speaker or the community the speaker belongs to. These views are opposed to invariantism about “woman”, that is, the view that “woman” has the same meaning in all contexts of utterance. A very influential invariantist view has it that “woman” refers to those who self-identify as women (Bettcher 2009, Jenkins 2018, Zeman 2021). Another invariantist view has it that “woman” always refers to those individuals who are biologically female (Byrne 2020). This debate has significant political consequences, since this is connected to issues of inclusion, in particular the inclusion of intersex people and trans women in so-called “women-only spaces”. Different views about who should be included in “women-only spaces” can motivate different views about the meaning of “woman”, and vice-versa. This is a topic where semantics and politics are necessarily interconnected. All the views in the debate assume that an utterance of a sentence of the form “X is a woman” expresses a unique proposition. In her talk, Esa Díaz-León wants to examine the prospects of

multipositionalist views about “woman”. The aim is to develop and defend a novel view according to which utterances of sentences of the form “X is a woman” express more than one proposition, each of them involving a different concept of woman with different intentions and perhaps different extensions. This explains why people have such different intuitions about the meaning of “woman” (ranging from invariantist views based on biological sex, to invariantist views based on self-identification, and polysemy views). Multipositionalism can also explain why it is so difficult to deal with inclusion problems. It seems that for every particular semantic value that we ascribe to an utterance of “woman”, the extension may leave some people out, or may include some people that shouldn’t be included. Multipositionalism can explain why we have intuitions according to which the people that are excluded should be included, and the people who are wrongly included should not be included. The explanation may be that our different intuitions are tracking different concepts that the utterance is expressing at the same time in the same context.

Camilla Kronqvist

Abo Akademi University

Primary research interests

Wittgenstein, Philosophies of psychology
& love, Feminist theories

“Now No One Can Tell Me...”

Certainties And Doubts When

Exploring the Grammar of ‘Woman’

Danièle Moyal-Sharrock and Constantine Sandis have suggested that our sense of being “women” (and “men”) can be elucidated by thinking of it as an animal certainty. The suggestion is helpful in resisting the notion that “being a woman” can be modeled either on the idea of indubitable first-person knowledge of one’s inner self or of a third person’s unquestionable knowledge of one’s body. One’s being woman is then rather manifest in one’s ways of acting and reacting, it constitutes a mode of being in the world, which cannot be given further justification. Nevertheless, the emphasis on certainty may render the possible doubts an individual may entertain about being “a woman” at different stages and in different contexts of their life opaque. It may similarly make it unclear why being “a woman” is something many feminist theorists as well as women philosophers not declaring themselves as feminists have wanted to reject. It may also obscure the philosophical analysis thinking of certainty with Wittgenstein may offer to the understanding of “woman”, since the investigation of what is taken for certain in our life for Wittgenstein always ran parallel with the exploration of meaningful forms

of doubt. By looking at everyday doubts about being “a woman”, available in art, music and personal conversation, Kronqvist’s talk wants therefore to shed light on the dialectic between certainty and doubt in the constitution of one’s being in the world as “a woman”. Specific consideration will be given to the significance of second person (singular and plural) assertions and comments for the first person’s experience of being or not being “a woman”, or not being “woman enough”, sometimes in direct contrast to the first person’s certitude, thus pointing to ways in which the other’s (others) responses may both confirm and challenge this sense of being in the world.

Silvia Locatelli

University of Lisbon

From Irigaray & Wittgenstein: Is There a ‘Woman Form of Life’?

A constant feature proposed throughout Luce Irigaray’s writings on linguistics is how men and women do not generate language structures in the same way. Irigaray shows how women seek to communicate, especially to hold dialogue, but addressing above all to “him or them-men”. Furthermore, women focus their sentences especially in the present and the future. On the contrary, men do not take interest in subjective exchanges and turn themselves towards the past. Specifically, men avoid staying and talking as two, especially two who are different, and they would rather remain in a scarcely differentiated group of their own gender.

For Irigaray, it is essential to see this difference in generating languages, because until this difference is recognised, mutual listening between the two sexes will be impossible. In this sense, pathologies – hysterical and obsessive – derive precisely from the impossibility of sharing one’s sexual difference. This linguistic difference can be read within the Wittgensteinian later connection whereby mastering a certain language is one of the basic elements of a certain form of life. If men and women (here understood in the sense of sexual difference, and thus not referring to a clear-cut division between sex and gender, between nature and culture) master different language in the aspects listed by Irigaray, then they do not – at least not fully – share the same form of life. Silvia Locatelli would therefore like to question this idea, trying to understand whether, within a broader form of life, there are different forms of life on the basis of sexual difference, which is mainly reflected in language. The second reflection will be: if it’s so, how can we create a communication between these two forms of life? Can we say that women and men, starting from Irigaray’s reflection and thus not using essentialist thinking, belong to two different forms of life? If so, what are the salient differences between the two? Starting from Irigaray’s idea (“translated” into Wittgensteinian terms) that women and men belong to two different ways of relating to the world (two forms of life), how can we create communication between them?

Nico Orlandi

University of California, Santa Cruz

& Carol Hay

University of Massachusetts Lowell

Primary research interests

Analytic feminism, Oppression studies, Philosophy of sex & love, Philosophy of mind, Cognitive science

The Concept of a Woman: Virtues & Vices of Family Resemblance

Who counts as a woman? Is there some set of core experiences distinctive of womanhood, some shared set of adventures and exploits that every woman will encounter on her journey from diapers to the grave? One of the primary insights of intersectional feminism is that what it’s like to be a woman varies drastically across social lines of race, socioeconomic class, sexuality, disability, and so on, and that if we try to pretend otherwise we almost always end up pretending that the experiences of the wealthy white straight able-bodied women who already have more than their fair share of social privilege are the experiences of all women. Given that there isn’t a set of core experiences distinctive of womanhood some suggest abandoning the category “woman” altogether. According to the account we defend, however, womanhood is best understood as a matter of family resemblance. Traditionally, defenders of family resemblance accounts phrase their analyses in terms of *concepts*, but we argue that, properly speaking, what is actually at issue in such discussions are *categories*. A category is (roughly) a set of entities in the

world that is held together by some principle; a concept is an idea or a mental representation that subjects deploy when they think about categories. Categories are *metaphysical* (they're claims about what is in the world); concepts are *psychological* (they're claims about what is in our heads). When this distinction is elided, as it very often is in the case of social categories and concepts such as that of gender, proponents of family resemblance accounts undermine their ability to defend their views against certain kinds of potentially damning objections. A major objection to family resemblance accounts of womanhood is that such views inevitably invite the creation of prototypes, and in so doing inevitably center the experiences of traditionally privileged-femme, non-disabled, straight cis white-women. We argue that because prototypes have to do with psychological concepts, not metaphysical categories, whether family resemblance accounts necessarily collapse into prototypes is an open (empirical) question. It might turn out that we do have a psychological tendency (attributable, say, to the essentialist bias) to think in terms of prototypes when we think about gender *concepts*, but this, alone, does not mean that our gender *categories* must necessarily center privileged expressions of femininity over more marginalized ones. Recognizing our psychological tendency to fall prey to certain biases that might be at odds with our fully considered political goals or moral values provides an important opportunity for critical reflection. One of the central commitments of conceptual engineering is that any family resemblance view worth

defending must recognize that decisions about which features are taken to make up prototypical cases of womanhood are fundamentally political. When the psychological concepts we tend to unreflectively form do not map on to the metaphysical categories we reflectively endorse, we can (and should) encourage the creation of new prototypes that are actually in line with our goals and values. This makes possible a concept and category of womanhood that does not continue to center the experiences of traditionally privileged women, while simultaneously making sense of actual historical failures in this regard.

Adriana Pérez Cortés

Pontifical Catholic University of Chile

Primary research interests

Wittgenstein, Philosophy of language,
Philosophical anthropology, Love

Basic Certainties and Fluency:

Wittgenstein and Performativity

This talk wishes to relate feminism's critique of determinism regarding the concept of woman with two aspects about Wittgenstein's philosophy. The first one is the therapeutic approach like an alternative to the "craving of generality" that leads us to essentialist and foundationalist positions about the concept of woman denying the plurality of our language games and forms of life. The second one is an idea derived from *On Certainty* about the nature of the "hinge propositions" or "basic certainties". These certainties cannot be described

through a correspondence theory of truth. Our relationship with the basic certainties is not epistemic or empirical but vital and depends more on our attitudes and practices than a foundational perspective based only in rational or scientific aspects. Adriana Pérez Cortés wants to consider that this reading of the certainties can be fruitful for the non-essentialist perspectives of feminism because it points to a broad anthropological approach to understanding how a woman experiences her identity. Is it possible to apply Wittgenstein's therapeutic approach based in description to the feminist reflections on hegemonic definitions of the concept of woman? Can we understand the concept of woman as a basic certainty due to the vital connection we have with it? Can this connection be identified with Butler's concept of performativity? This talk would like to connect Wittgenstein's critique to essentialism with the idea that the concept of "woman" does not have an ontological status outside of the practices that constitutes it. Also, the therapeutic approach agrees with elimination of universal and binary definitions and assumes the plurality of identity experiences (nomadic identities) and the difference from the description. Also, the critique of Wittgenstein's epistemic relationship with our certainties can be related to the unveiling of the relationships of power/knowledge that feminism resists.

Maria Victoria Pérez Monterroso

Complutense University

Primary research interests

Feminist epistemology, Epistemic injustice

Epistemological Foundations of the Inclusive Language Project(s)

This talk would like to rely on Wittgenstein's late work, *Philosophical Investigations*, more specifically on the interpretation provided by the authors Miranda Fricker and José Medina. The aim of the talk is to defend and argue in favor of gender-inclusive language, from a feminist point of view. The key point to achieve that aim is to develop the idea that a language game is inevitably performative, socially and historically situated. Is gender-inclusive language a legitimate project? What kind of normativity is at stake in this kind of language game? Could gender-inclusive language accomplish an actual transformative social change? This talk shares a key point with feminist-wittgensteinian philosophies of language: i.e., the understanding that gender plays a crucial role in how language changes and how it is used; the understanding that not only "what" is said, but also "how" it is said or "who" says something, always matters.

Ellie Robson

Birkbeck, University of London

Primary research interests

Moral philosophy, Neo-Aristotelian naturalism, 20th century women philosophers

Perspectives on Forms of Life: Is Mary Midgley an Wittgensteinian?

Mary Midgley was an undergraduate at Oxford University when her friend Elizabeth Anscombe first met Ludwig Wittgenstein. When Anscombe persuaded Wittgenstein to come and speak at Magdalen College in the late 1940s, Midgley attended. She found Wittgenstein's words "important and illuminating" (Mac Cumhaill and Wiseman, 2022: 172). An Anscombe-Wittgensteinian influence is clear and highly informative on Midgley's moral and meta-philosophy, but it has been scarcely explored in the literature. My short talk will introduce some of Midgley's Wittgensteinian perspectives on *life forms*. Drawing connections between Midgley and another woman heavily influenced by Anscombe, Philippa Foot, this talk would like to reveal a clear Wittgensteinian incitement of the need for a connection between our evaluative language and the background, context or pattern of the *human life form*, against which they make sense. Midgley explicitly endorses Wittgenstein's point that "language cannot possibly be a self-contained system, that it is seamlessly woven into the way of life to which it belongs": "To imagine a language

is to imagine a form of life" Mary Midgley tells us (1987).

Maunela Teles

University of Porto

Primary research interests

Philosophy of perception, Philosophy of language, Philosophy of mind

The W Rule: a New Wittgensteinian Approach to the Concept of 'Woman'

One important discussion within feminist debates is how to improve our concepts to "promote greater justice" (Haslanger 2020a; also, Haslanger 2020b, 2000; Díaz-León 2020, 2016; Jenkins 2016). The concept *woman* is central in these debates (Antony 2012; Saul 2012; Heyes 2002; Cray 2002; Lindemann Nelson 2002). As Gottlob Frege (1997) remarked, a concept is well-defined when it distinguishes among all objects, those which fall under it and those which do not. Applying this simple idea to the feminist debates, the relevant point is to have a clear answer to the question, *who is a woman?* But this question raises many others. What is *a concept?* How can it *be improved?* Can *we* improve a concept? What is specific to the concept of *woman?* How does it divide among all people who *is* and who *is not* "a woman"? More importantly: why is it in need of improvement and how should we do that to promote greater justice? After briefly considering the current debates on the concept of *woman*, Maunela Teles addresses these questions exploring recent readings of Wittgenstein's (1991, 1958)

later writings on concepts and following rules, those by Sonia Sedivy (2016) and Hannah Ginsborg (2020, 2018). She wants to show that *the subtle realist framework* Sedivy finds in Wittgenstein to account for the concept *art*, and Ginsborg's notion of *primitive normativity* developed from Wittgenstein to approach the concept *rule* can be combined to provide new light on the concept of *woman*. She would like to argue that this combination is compatible with the contemporary semantic and political ameliorative project of improving the concept of *woman* to promote greater justice. To make her point, she would like to end with an attempt to answer the initial questions from this new Wittgensteinian approach to the concept of *woman*.

Marie Wegener

Bielefeld University

Primary research interests

Conceptual engineering, Metaphilosophy, Ethics, Feminist theory, Philosophy of emotions, Wittgenstein

Why Dogs Can't Pretend And Women Are Bad Philosophers – (Gender) Stereotypes And Grammatische Sätze

In *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (PU) §247-252, Wittgenstein addresses the question of why dogs cannot pretend. These paragraphs are helpful for understanding the relationship between Erfahrungssätzen (ES) and Grammatischen Sätzen (GS). Wegener provides that her findings could have important implications for the debate on (gender-) stereotypes and

their relation to conceptually manifested discrimination. From her analysis of the passage, the following three thesis on GS emerge: 1. GS inform or remind us of the meaning or common usage of a word. What is conveyed is definitional knowledge. When we use a word, we have to accept "as given" what a Grammatischer Satz teaches us. For questioning these, we would be accused of incorrect linguistic practice (§247). 2. GS not only teach us linguistic customs, but also contain demands for action that are linked to the terms (§248). 3. GS are not ES; former manifest conceptual assumptions shared by the linguistic community which, because they are definitional, cannot be questioned in the normal use of words, whilst latter are falsifiable (§249, § 250). If we understand "dogs cannot pretend" as GS, it follows that dogs cannot pretend because of how "dog" is used in our language. It depends more on the environment in which "dogs cannot pretend" is a grammatical sentence or emerges from one, than on the dog's cognitive ability. Therefore, a closer look on language games about living beings (here: dogs) tends to reveal more about enablement by the language community rather than ability of the subject. GS might be grounded on scientific findings but they do not necessarily do and since they function definitional, they cannot be refuted (outside the possibility of language change) by ES. Wegener argues for this: there are plenty of GS about "woman" and "man" that are discriminatory precisely because they manifest (historically, not scientifically grounded) stereotypes that make it impossible for people to develop

and behave outside those boxes without breaking conceptually established rules, which is blameworthy in a linguistic community. Therefore, concepts have to change with respect to personal freedom.