

## On the Convergence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Investigations and Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction

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**Abstract:** In this article, I argue that, although Jacques Derrida is “unwelcomed” to “most” philosophical traditions, his “*différance*” may have some similarities with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “language-games.” A number of scholars have looked into the connection between Wittgenstein and Derrida in various perspectives. This paper aims to contribute to this body of work by analyzing Wittgenstein’s “language-games” in his *Philosophical Investigations* in relation to Derrida’s “*différance*” in his *Margins of Philosophy*. Assessing some similarities between these philosophers requires a charitable consideration of the differences as foundation for a convergence between these philosophers’ viewpoints, specifically their 1) views on “differences” in meaning, 2) the “text” and the “context” as the field of analyzing and/or deconstructing language, and 3) the refusal to commit their philosophical work as methods, concepts, and/or theories. Eventually, this attempt to establish a convergence between Wittgenstein and Derrida can stand as a bridge or, in the Wittgensteinian word, a “language-game” towards a more comprehensive understanding not only of philosophy and language, but of life itself. My aim is to show that such convergence, though is not so much focused on the “deconstructive-ness” of the *Investigations*, can introduce a new way of analyzing the “text” without separating it from the “context.”

**Keywords:** deconstruction, *différance*, language-games, meaning

The “Linguistic Turn” is essentially the birth of the analytic tradition in the history of philosophy. G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell realized that there is the need to investigate the nature of language since they recognized that the real problems within philosophy are borne out of language. Going back to the period where philosophers saw the need to return to the problems of language, analytic philosophers, soon to be called philosophers of language, asserted that language required a philosophical analysis, i.e., a process of reconstructing propositions which correspond to

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reality.<sup>1</sup> This kind of analysis aims to reveal misleading propositions within language.<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein asserts that such scrutiny of language determines “that which is”<sup>3</sup> and since human persons are parts of the state of affairs, they, therefore, use language to capture a picture of what is.<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein together with Austin claims that language itself is not the main cause of philosophical puzzlement but the philosopher’s misunderstanding and utilization of language.<sup>5</sup>

Accentuating problems in language must be prioritized as an engagement with the text—a “dialogical” encounter—where propositions are reformulated as corresponding statements to reality.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, seeking *being* or reality in the configuration of terms as representations of the experienced world should not be relegated as a mere result of a better elucidation of language. Instead, embracing the necessity to expose misleading statements must be of greater importance.<sup>7</sup>

### The Analytic Tradition: Logical Atomism

According to J.O. Urmson, “logical atomism was a reaction against an extreme realism which had replaced the philosophy of Bradley for both Moore and Russell.”<sup>8</sup> Arguing for precision and exactness of logic and mathematics, Russell and later together with (the early) Wittgenstein crafted an ideal or perfect language that ascertains clarity of language. This ideal language utilizes the variables found in logic and mathematics. It consists of indeterminately vast amalgamation of exact statements<sup>9</sup> that stood against the metaphysical language of Francis Herbert Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet.<sup>10</sup> Russell based the prescription of language on formal logic and employed ordinary lower-case letters as names of particulars, Greek letters as names of characteristics, and the capital *R* as names of relations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. O. Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis: Its Development between the Two World Wars* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1956), 165.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (1921; repr., London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 3.41.

<sup>4</sup> George Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein: An Aid to the Understanding and Interpretation of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and the Philosophical Investigations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 79.

<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Fogelin and Princeton University Press, *Taking Wittgenstein at His Word: A Textual Study* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis*, 165.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas H. Green, S.J., *Philosophy of Language* (Ateneo De Manila University, 1989), 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis*, 18–19.

## Russell and Wittgenstein

Bertrand Russell wrote the introduction in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus* (*Tractatus*). However, Wittgenstein himself expressed in some of his letters that Russell misinterpreted the aim of the *Tractatus*. Even several scholars have studied this "misinterpretation." Russell misinterpreted Wittgenstein's theoretical position in the *Tractatus*. By remaining invested in the view that language is inevitably vague (this may be due to his resolute position as a logical atomist), Russell thought that Wittgenstein was in the same position of proposing a perfect or an ideal language.<sup>12</sup> Both thinkers agree with the vagueness of the ordinary language. However, the point of difference between these philosophers of language is that Russell, on the one hand, claims consistently that language cannot be saved from vagueness.<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, on the other hand, maintained that the ordinary language can be liberated from such vagueness.

## The Early Wittgenstein

Ludwig Wittgenstein, before becoming known as the author of the *Investigations*, was a student of and a logical atomist like Bertrand Russell.<sup>14</sup> Wittgenstein, in the preface of his *Tractatus*, states:

On the other hand, the truth of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems. And if I am mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved.<sup>15</sup>

However, his *Tractatus* was not exempted from criticisms and arguments. Despite the rigor in writing his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had to address the questions concerning his work. This led to a transition from his earlier position to a more novel approach found in the late Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. Furthermore, Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Meaning (PTM), found in his *Tractatus*, has three conditions: the fundamentals of the

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<sup>12</sup> Nadine Faulkner, "Russell's Misunderstanding of the *Tractatus* on Ordinary Language," in *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, 28:2 (December 2008), 143–62, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/rss.2008.0003:144>>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>14</sup> Urmsom, *Philosophical Analysis*, 45–46.

<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.

propositions must correspond with the facts of reality; the fact is what is contained in the statement and should be arranged in the picture the way it is in reality; and, the propositional sign should convey the relation of the statement to the state of affairs.<sup>16</sup>

However, as known to most, Wittgenstein had to abandon his previous philosophical position, including PTM. By looking for a method that would dissolve the misleading language, Wittgenstein somehow remained captive of such metaphysical confusion. Thus, he eventually aims to destroy such temptation.<sup>17</sup> This radical change of Wittgenstein's philosophy is comprehensively presented in the *Investigations*.

Consequently, Wittgenstein is clearly not free from criticisms himself and as an answer to these, his philosophy shifts from a mere description—theoretical project—to focusing on what is there, in front of one's existence, and just be there.<sup>18</sup> The early Wittgenstein established a metaphysical dualism that truth value is determined by facts whereas objects, as substance of the world, determine the meaning of signs. Then, the late Wittgenstein shifted from dualism to naturalism that sees the world as is, nothing transcendental and that in the natural world can one find truth value of a proposition as well as its meaning.<sup>19</sup>

### **“Deconstruction”**

Derrida suggests that “deconstruction” is really not the destruction but the “de-sedimentation,” the “de-construction,” of every connotation that originates from the *logos*. Here, what is focused most especially is the “signification of truth.”<sup>20</sup> Garver and Lee describe how “deconstruction” comes about in the “text.” They state, “... deconstruction thrives as a parasite working from within to break down the system of thought or concepts to which it attaches itself.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, “deconstruction” is defined by Niall Lucy as:

Deconstruction begins, as it were, from a refusal of the  
authority or determining power of every ‘is’, or simply

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<sup>16</sup> See William Donald Hudson, *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 13.

<sup>17</sup> John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (1957; repr., Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1978), 429–430.

<sup>18</sup> Newton Garver and Seung-Chong Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1967; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, 204.

from a refusal of authority in general. While such refusal may indeed count as a position, it is not the case that deconstruction holds this as a sort of 'preference'. It's not that deconstruction prefers or chooses to deconstruct the presence of a thing, as though it could choose to prefer to see things as being undeconstructible. Deconstruction is not a 'method' that can be 'applied' to something with a view to deconstructing it. If things are deconstructible, they are deconstructible already—as things.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, Philip Higgs mentions a specific metaphor in relation to “deconstruction” through a concept of a nutshell. He claims that in the event of “deconstruction,” there “exists” a challenging core where “unity, a presence, a logocentrism” are combined. “Deconstruction” then is the continuous constant struggle to break and open the “nut” to transcend the current limitations—destroying “presence” and permitting another as the differing component to contribute.<sup>23</sup>

### **Establishing a Connection between Derrida and Wittgenstein**

There are a number of research papers discussing connections between Wittgenstein and Derrida. Ralph Shain, for example, is one of these researchers who highlights connections or parallelism between these philosophers. Some researchers would still claim that these philosophers may have agreed with several factors while remaining critical on other things.<sup>24</sup> Shain, asserts:

Whereas Wittgenstein aims to dissolve philosophical questions by finding their mistaken presuppositions, Derrida aims to complicate philosophical questions by finding essential obscurities which govern the rest of the discourse, mark limits to it and point beyond philosophy in a vertiginous manner.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary* (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2004), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Higgs, “Deconstruction and Re-Thinking Education,” in *South African Journal of Education* (2002), 170, <<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/saje/article/view/24866/20582>>.

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Shain, “Derrida’s References to Wittgenstein,” in *International Studies in Philosophy*, 37:4 (2005), 97, <<https://doi.org/10.5840/intstudphil200537415>>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

Shain also suggests several factors which researchers can use to establish a comparison between Wittgenstein and Derrida. These are “words,” “interiority,” “context,” and “time.” He reviewed works of scholars on Wittgenstein and Derrida and states that the approach is meta-philosophical.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, Derrida was driven by the limitations in philosophy, resulting in his attempt to outstretch language itself. His bold movement resonates the ladder in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. However, unlike the early Wittgenstein, Derrida does not only let go of the ladder. Instead, he simultaneously moves away from his words toward different “methods.”<sup>27</sup> Based on Shain’s perspective on Derrida’s philosophical movement vis-à-vis Wittgenstein’s ladder, it would be apt to review the latter’s ladder. Wittgenstein states:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them — as steps — to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world alright.<sup>28</sup>

On the one hand, the late Wittgenstein solves philosophical problems through an analysis of the ordinary language. Derrida, on the other hand, moves around and within the “text” and meticulously observes the structural non-conformities or paradoxes.<sup>29</sup> Also, it seems that Wittgenstein did Derrida’s method in his own original way. His *Investigations* is like a “reconstruction” of the *Tractatus* as he approached the philosophical notions through an extensive, direct journey through life instead of the detached tradition in his *Tractatus*.<sup>30</sup> However, it should be noted as well that just as the late Wittgenstein did this, Derrida clearly have focused less on life and more on the text.

Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, views the use of language as an action, a form of life. He, like Derrida, reacted against the traditional perspective that language “mirrors” reality or that there is a foundation of

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<sup>26</sup> Ralph Shain, “Derrida and Wittgenstein: Points of Opposition,” in *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 17:2 (26 January 2007), 149, <<https://doi.org/10.5195/jffp.2007.217>>.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>28</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.54.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Ami H. Naff, “Specters of Meaning: Deconstructing Wittgenstein and Reconstructing Ethics,” in *Philosophy Honors Projects* (2017), 55.

meaning. He (the late Wittgenstein) eradicated this discussion concerning language “picturing” reality and emancipated grammar from the “shackles of reality.”<sup>31</sup> Derrida’s “similarities” to the late Wittgenstein is his similar disgust towards metaphysics which establishes a demarcation in language: the emergence of binary oppositions.<sup>32</sup> Thus, both undoubtedly contributed in philosophy in their own right. Their philosophies veered away from metaphysics, logic that favors rhetoric, necessity in favor of independence, truth toward meaning, and knowledge embracing certitude.<sup>33</sup>

Another intersection between Derrida and the early Wittgenstein is in their constant omission to provide examples.<sup>34</sup> The *Investigations* is clearly a critique of the *Tractatus*’ ontology and methodology since the late Wittgenstein provided examples unlike the early Wittgenstein. Henry Staten himself even claims that the *Investigations* is a form of deconstruction.<sup>35</sup> Garver and Lee even argues that the reason Derrida may not have deconstructed Wittgenstein’s work like the other philosophers is because Wittgenstein’s work contains some passages that “deconstruct”—that he arrived at that which Derrida agrees with.<sup>36</sup>

According to Vernon Cisney, the limits established in the *Tractatus* are not altogether dissolved but only extended in the *Investigations*.<sup>37</sup> To solve this problem on limitation, Cisney proposes to consider Derrida’s “différance” which could possibly be used to get out of such limitations or traps in language. However, it should still be considered that the late Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* moves away from this isolated world towards meaning shared through its use, in the experience of life.

Furthermore, Wittgenstein, though uses a different web of words and comes from a very different philosophical tradition compared to Derrida, invested much of his scholarly work in the analysis of his previous notions. His *Investigations* is precisely a “re-construction” of the *Tractatus*, to the extent that it approaches the similar philosophical notions through an extensive, direct journey through life instead of the stricter, detached, superficially upward drive of (the logical atomist) tradition.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Mireille M. Truong Rootham, “Wittgenstein’s Metaphysical Use and Derrida’s Metaphysical Appurtenance,” in *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 22:2 (March 1996), 32, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/019145379602200202>>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, x.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>37</sup> Vernon W. Cisney, “The Poststructuralist Broom of Wallace’s System: A Conversation the Poststructuralist Broom of Wallace’s System: A Conversation between Wittgenstein and Derrida,” in *Kritikos*, 15, (2018).

<sup>38</sup> Ami H. Naff, *Specters of Meaning*, 55.

Also, the disappointments within philosophy are not necessarily failures but breaches which cast permanent marks to the boundaries of “what can be spoken.” Thus, when Derrida approached these limitations, he acted, through his works, to go beyond the “reach” of philosophy. This philosophical activity reminisces the ladder of the *Tractatus*, with a more conspicuous distinction: Derrida does not simply let go of the ladder; instead, he does simultaneously let go of it by moving away from his words towards different “methods.”<sup>39</sup>

For Derrida, the problems in philosophy are found in the inconsistencies within specific philosophical texts. While Wittgenstein’s manner of “re-construction” exterminates these problems from philosophy’s connection to and dependence upon, the ordinary language, Derrida locates this necessity for “deconstruction” in the observation of structures, i.e., the non-conformities in the “text” itself which are caused by the “metaphysics of presence.”

Michael Fischer agrees with Staten who discusses the overlapping critique of Derrida and the late Wittgenstein on metaphysics.<sup>40</sup> Both philosophers are critical of the effect of dogmatism in philosophy.<sup>41</sup> In his critique, Fischer sees the humanization of philosophical concepts and that he may have had reservations on Staten’s view that the late Wittgenstein’s philosophy is “deconstructive” in style.

“Wittgenstein need not be seen as totally different from Derrida.”<sup>42</sup> They have much in common from their Jewish background and considered geniuses for regarding the understanding of language as a way to answer problems in philosophy.<sup>43</sup> They both criticize traditional metaphysics as perplexing.<sup>44</sup> However, one of the many criticisms against them is having no adherent to apply the method of their founders in the same way they did.<sup>45</sup> However, I would have to disagree with Garver and Lee on this, since several scholars have studied them, adhered to their philosophical positions, etc.

## Jacques Derrida

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<sup>39</sup> Ralph Shain, “Derrida’s References,” 83.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Fischer, Fischer, Michael, “Wittgenstein and Derrida [Review of the book Wittgenstein and Derrida, by H. Staten],” in *Philosophy and Literature*, 10:1 (April 1986), 95–96, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1986.0019>>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>42</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Jacques Derrida's approach on philosophy is an investigation on writing and the "text" per se. By analyzing the written texts of philosophers, he unravels inconsistencies or contradictions which eventually become his source of analysis through "deconstruction."

Derrida states, "... *différance* is neither a word nor a concept."<sup>46</sup> "Differences, thus, are "produced"—deferred—by *différance*."<sup>47</sup> Derrida resists the idea that the philosophy he is "applying" to the "text" could become a foundation for future philosophical endeavors. He considers "*différance*" not as a concept but something that takes place in the "text" per se. He considers "*différance*" as the reason for differences within the system of language. The "deconstructionist," the person who employs "deconstruction" on the "text," does not impose the "method" for the "text" evokes "deconstruction" upon itself.<sup>48</sup> He discusses "*différance*" as:

Here, therefore, we must let ourselves refer to an order that resists the opposition, one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible. The order which resists this opposition, and resists it because it transports it, is announced in a movement of *différance* (with an *a*) between two differences or two letters, a *différance* which belongs neither to the voice nor to writing in the usual sense, and which is located, as the strange space that will keep us together here for an hour, *between* speech and writing, and beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to one and the other, occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they are two.<sup>49</sup>

Derrida aims to unearth the influence of the "metaphysics of presence" in language, particularly, oppositions where one is "better" than the other. This may be explained with what takes place in a hierarchy. Some of the concepts included in such hierarchy include the "sensible" and the "intelligible" where the latter is considered better due to the capacity of the "intellect" to know truth than what the senses can acquire or experience. With this, Derrida introduces the non-concept of "*différance*" thereby also rejecting

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<sup>46</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Margins of Philosophy," in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 396.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (1982; repr., London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 49.

<sup>49</sup> Derrida, "Margins of Philosophy," 398.

the opposition between “voice” and “writing” since “*différance*” is present in both cases.

Moreover, Derrida shows that every concept is within a chain or a system he calls “*différance*.” It is through this (interwoven of differences) that concepts have meaning, that is, in the differences within language. Derrida claims:

Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general.<sup>50</sup>

Derrida reiterates that “*différance*” is not a concept but, as stated, it is “the possibility of conceptuality.” This constant reference to other concepts allows concepts to have distinctions through what Derrida calls “the systematic play of differences.” He adds:

It differs from, and defers, itself; which doubtless means that it is woven of differences, and also that it sends out delegates, representatives, proxies; but without any chance that the giver of proxies might “exists,” might be present, be “itself” somewhere, and with even less chance it might become conscious.<sup>51</sup>

Here, Derrida clarifies that “*différance*” is not a theoretical structure nor a foundation, but it is simply the movement of *spacing* and *temporization* — allowing the possibility of differences of concepts. He adds:

... *différance* is not. It is not a present being, however, excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Derrida, “Margins of Philosophy,” 404.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 412–413.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

## 122 ON THE CONVERGENCE

What one can constantly encounter in the discussion of Derrida on “*différance*” is his consistent refusal to associate any remnant of the “metaphysics of presence” with “*différance*.” He discusses:

There is no essence of *différance*; it (is) that which not only could never be appropriated in the *as such* in general, of the presence of the thing itself in its essence. That there is not a proper essence of *différance* at this point, implies that there is neither a Being nor truth of the play of writing such as it engages *différance*.<sup>53</sup>

With Derrida’s (non-concept of) “*différance*,” the meaning of a word is both different in a sense when compared to other words (*spacing* as distinction) and which at the same time, its meaning is not instantaneously given, simply deferred (*temporization* as postponement). Derrida writes, “In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*).”<sup>54</sup> A word, therefore, such as the term “dog” may refer to an animal but its meaning is a result of its difference from other words such as the term “cat” and with which, its meaning is not fully determined but can always be changed with its dependence on other terms—*spacing* as distinction or difference and *temporization* as postponement.

Moreover, Derrida states, “... for *différance* can refer simultaneously to the entire configuration of its meaning.”<sup>55</sup> He further discusses “*différance*” as, “... is neither simply active nor simply passive, announcing or rather recalling something like the middle voice, saying an operation that is not an operation ....”<sup>56</sup> Derrida even considers “*différance*” as the “movement” where language or any kind of system of reference or code is constituted as an intersection of differences.<sup>57</sup> Derrida claims that in committing oneself in the system of difference, *différance*, the “subject” becomes a signifying subject.<sup>58</sup>

Derrida further explains why “*différance*” is neither a word nor a concept. It sustains nothing, leads nothing, and has no authority over anything. “*Différance*” has no kingdom whatsoever. Instead, it subverts a “kingdom” if ever there is such.<sup>59</sup> He states:

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 408.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself. It erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating, like the *a* writing itself, inscribing its pyramid in *différance*.<sup>60</sup>

## The Late Wittgenstein

In the analysis of language, the late Wittgenstein developed a different philosophical view compared to the early Wittgenstein. He introduced “language-games” that are utterly different from the prescribed language of the logical atomists. Here, language is considered to be best understood in relation to resemblances, contexts, and numerous examples. The focus is not prescribing any perfect or ideal language but an analysis of the ordinary language per se.

Language-games is profoundly dependent on the context where words are uttered and used.<sup>61</sup> With language-games, human persons can encounter a social group’s culture which influences how words are expressed and how these acquire meaning through their use.<sup>62</sup> Language-games are discussed by Wittgenstein as follows:

We can also think of the whole process of using words in ... as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games “*language-games*” and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, Wittgenstein states, “The word “*language-game*” is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life.”<sup>64</sup> With this concept of “*language-games*” as a part of an activity (as something one does and encounters in life), meaning, therefore, is not absolute in all cases. Instead, it is found in every “form of life” that one encounters every single day.

Wittgenstein also states, “For a *large* class of cases of the employment of the word “*meaning*” —though not for *all*—this word can be explained in

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>61</sup> Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, 432.

<sup>62</sup> T. Z. Lavine, *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophical Quest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 406.

<sup>63</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Revised 4th edition by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (1953; repr., USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 8<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 15<sup>e</sup>.

this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.”<sup>65</sup> He asserts that the meaning of a word or a concept is not transcendental or based on a foundation. Instead, the meaning of a word is how it is used in a given situation. This perspective abolishes the idea that a word has an “unaffected” meaning even when a human person misinterprets it. Or in this cause, the meaning of a word is misappropriated.

Furthermore, Wittgenstein states, “A *picture* held us captive. And we couldn’t get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably.”<sup>66</sup> He reminds his readers to be conscious of the “grammar” of language since within this “grammar,” human persons are influenced by pictures that continuously mislead them concerning how language is used in a given context. This distortion takes place when a particular concept is taken out of its specific context thereby leading to conceptual confusion. Here comes the famous statement of Wittgenstein, “For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*.”<sup>67</sup> This statement somehow encapsulates Wittgenstein’s profound analysis of the ordinary language, that is, it is in the misunderstanding and misuse of language that problems in philosophy come into being.

Additionally, Wittgenstein avoids the general idealization that his “language-games” can replace the ordinary language. Instead, with language-games, human persons can become more aware of the differences and similarities within the language they use. “Language-games” do not offer exactness nor stand as a theory but a means for comparison through resemblances. Wittgenstein states:

Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language—as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance. Rather, the language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language.<sup>68</sup>

Herein, Wittgenstein reiterates his position that philosophy is not about offering a system or a theory that could be used in almost all cases specifically in the use of language. He likely aims to show that philosophy is about seeing the problems within language caused by conceptual confusion

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 53<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 23<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 56<sup>e</sup>.

within how language is used and understood. Hence, the problems in philosophy can be addressed by becoming more conscious of these “language-games” — critically analyzing the distinctions of meaning in every situation one deals with. He asserts:

The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.—Instead, a method is now demonstrated by examples, and the series of examples can be broken off.—Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem.<sup>69</sup>

Wittgenstein states, “Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.”<sup>70</sup> Wittgenstein reminds his readers of the vastness of the realm of language through various “language-games.” With these paths, human persons must be mindful of the particular use of a concept in a given context since most problems are found within distortions in the use of the ordinary language.

### **Garver and Lee: Derrida & Wittgenstein**

In revisiting the *Tractatus*, the late Wittgenstein scrutinized his primordial work and due to this “re-construction” came the development of his *Investigations*, which some claim to be a “deconstructive” masterpiece. Among these scholars is Henry Staten who is criticized by Shain, Fischer, and Garver and Lee, among others for having missed the point of a connection. However, Garver and Lee argue that more than “deconstructive,” the late Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* is more of “constructive.”<sup>71</sup>

Garver and Lee makes use of “structuralism” as one of their bases in establishing similarities and differences in the works of Derrida and Wittgenstein.<sup>72</sup> Adhering to the British-American Tradition, they are quite critical of the philosophical position of Derrida.<sup>73</sup> By associating these philosophers and unpacking their cultural upbringing, they were able to

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 57e.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 88e.

<sup>71</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, 196.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

unearth some of the reasons for these philosophers' way of doing philosophy, their style, approach on language, etc.

In the second chapter of *Derrida & Wittgenstein*, Garver and Lee looked into the similarities and differences in the philosophical rigors of these philosophers specifically through the lenses of structuralism.<sup>74</sup> They saw the continuation of Wittgenstein's view on language as closely connected to reality through his *Tractatus* towards his *Investigations* whereas Derrida, as a structuralist, claims that language, the "text" itself does not refer to the world but simply is "self-referential."<sup>75</sup>

Derrida is among those philosophers who founded his work on rhetoric. Wittgenstein, along with Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Edmund Husserl, and Alfred Whitehead, among others grounded their philosophical work on the philosophy of language—logic.<sup>76</sup> Garver and Lee also provides a critique on Derrida's focus on Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. But the focus is mostly on the idea that Derrida could have had a better "deconstruction" of Husserl's work if the former included the earlier works of the latter. Apparently, "deconstruction" is directed towards the dichotomies which are present in Husserl's work. "Deconstruction" is neither a word nor a concept and it operates parasitically in a sense since it focuses on the "text" being deconstructed.<sup>77</sup> Garver and Lee also discusses *différance* as:

a complex essential characteristic of signs, being composed of (a) an actual difference that makes the sign possible but that can be instituted and understood only in terms of (b) other times and circumstances in which the instituted difference *systematically* appears. Such a characteristic...is no doubt essential at each level of language. It is what makes possible both meaning in the strict sense and linguistic significance in general.<sup>78</sup>

It is undeniable that Derrida's influence is far-reaching and his work is grounded on philosophy since most of the "texts" he "deconstructed" are from the realm of philosophy. However, as seen in most papers or reactions on Derrida, not all philosophers have put much attention or attribution to his works as "philosophical."

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

Garver and Lee enumerated some characteristics in the works of Derrida that clearly differentiate him from Wittgenstein. These characteristics are: “the focus of his essays, the style of his writing, the lack of examples in his writing, and the lack of self-referentiality of his critical comments.”<sup>79</sup> Among the differences between Derrida and Wittgenstein is the former’s decision of isolating the “text” from its “context.”<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, Derrida is famously known for his statement, “*There is nothing outside of the text ...*”<sup>81</sup> Therefore, Wittgenstein would disagree with Derrida since meaning is how it is used in a specific “language-game.” Without the context, it would be impossible to know what a term or a concept would mean. Garver and Lee state, “The strict implication of Wittgenstein’s remark is that words have no meaning when isolated from some context ‘in the stream of life’.”<sup>82</sup> However, Garver and Lee also provides a fair critique on Derrida’s reason for focusing on the “text.” They state:

By isolating a text from its context, Derrida thwarts this sort of understanding. Such separation of text from context is itself one possible human activity, or part of an activity, and cannot be condemned as fallacious or illegitimate one. It seems indeed to be an indispensable part of focusing on the text, just because it eliminates any independent consideration of the meaning or the message.<sup>83</sup>

Derrida’s style, when carefully studied, would provide some reasons why a great number of philosophers would rather not consider him a “philosopher” or even invest much time to read him. More than the investment on the “text,” his style tends to obscure what he intends to express, specifically, in such wordy texts or works.

Moreover, there might really be a problem in completely isolating the text from its context. For one, Wittgenstein would state that this isolation would lead to the meaninglessness of the text since the meaning of the word is in its use—in the context itself. Interestingly, though admitting that in “deconstruction” the isolation of the text from its context is indispensable, Garver and Lee claims, “It is possible that there are other ways of focusing on the text that do not require isolating it from its context.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>81</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

<sup>82</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, 184.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

Ultimately, Derrida's style of writing makes his listeners mere observers rather than participants. Therefore, some still doubt the kind of "dialogue" created in his writing.<sup>85</sup> Wittgenstein, however, sees human persons as participants or "co-creators" of meaning in their shared generation of use of words in various "language-games."

### Analyzing Derrida's *Différance* and Wittgenstein's Language-Games

More than any parallelism provided by Garver and Lee, what they reiterated in the end of the sixth chapter of their book is an overwhelming distinction not just between Derrida and Wittgenstein but between Derrida and the realm of philosophy in general.<sup>86</sup> However, these distinctions in style, Derrida's (non-method of) "deconstruction," etc. remain relevant in looking into some similarities with how Derrida and Wittgenstein discussed their concepts of (excluding Derrida's *différance* and "deconstruction") "*différance*" and "language-games," the "text" and the "context" (meaning as use), and "deconstruction" not as a method nor a concept and philosophy not as a theory but as an activity, respectively.

This undertaking may somehow serve as a "language-game" (an avenue for analysis) between Derrida and Wittgenstein. First, Wittgenstein, specifically, in his *Investigations*, aims to show that the aim of philosophizing is to arrive at clarity and only through one's careful and faithful understanding and use of language can this take place. Derrida, however, more than the search for clarity, through "deconstruction," aims to unearth contradictions borne out of oppositions caused by "logocentrism" or the "presence" of binary oppositions. By revealing these contradictions within the "texts" subject to "deconstruction," Derrida claims that one can have a better understanding of the "text"—revealing inconsistencies and the "presence" of the "metaphysics of presence."

Secondly, Wittgenstein's concept of "language-games" contradicts a kind of stable ground or foundation of meaning. He claims that through "language-games" meaning is significantly based on how it is used in a particular context, in the very "form of life." What one encounters here is the possibility of a term having various meanings depending on the context where it is used. Derrida on the other hand, has (the non-concept of) "*différance*" which states that the meaning of a word is always deferred and never contained in a single sign or concept. In both cases, we see that meaning is "unfixable" and that meaning is dependent, for Wittgenstein, on the

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

context, whereas for Derrida, it is based on other concepts—through trace. On the former, it is through “language-games,” while on the latter, it is through “*différance*.”

Thirdly, both philosophers seem to refuse to establish or consider their philosophical approaches on language as foundational. For Wittgenstein, philosophy is not a theory while for Derrida, “deconstruction” and “*différance*” are not methods nor concepts.

What, then, can we get from this analysis between Wittgenstein and Derrida? Both philosophers invested much of their scholarly work in the analysis and/or deconstruction of language. Although they differ in their approach, in their philosophical traditions, while some advocate for similarities, one can learn a thing or two from their philosophical “genius.” Wittgenstein gives much importance on the “context” whereas Derrida focuses on the significance of the “text.” Apparently, with this alone, I would like to assert that an analysis of language should be a balance of “context” and “text.” Without the other, the meaning of a word is more susceptible to misinterpretation. As claimed previously, this research attempted to enrich the body of research which investigated a possible connection or analysis of distinctions between Derrida and Wittgenstein and clearly, understanding Wittgenstein’s “language-games” and Derrida’s “*différance*” could be a context for future research papers. Cisney suggested the use of “*différance*” in addressing the problems encountered by Wittgenstein in language while Garver and Lee proposed a possibility of focusing on the “text” without isolating it from its “context” and vice versa.

Therefore, it is not a question of which is more important. Instead, it is an invitation to study their concepts and see how these can enrich one’s understanding of language as embedded in the “context” and the “text.”

## Conclusion

Both philosophers agree that there are differences within language. Derrida and Wittgenstein somehow used words to express a “weave” or “woven of differences” to make sense of their own concepts: “*différance*” and “language-games,” respectively. Derrida, focused solely on the “text,” states that “*différance*” is the distinction or difference of a term with other terms and that such is at the same time deferred. Wittgenstein’s “language-games” is focused on the “use” more than the difference from other concepts or that such difference is based on how these concepts are interpreted in various contexts.

Moreover, the difference between their views on the differences within language is affected by how such differences come about. For Derrida, these are found within the “text” since concepts are, by “*différance*,” distinct

due to *spacing* and *temporization* (trace) whereas for Wittgenstein, the difference in meaning is based on a concept's use in various contexts—"language-games." In both these perspectives on differences, we see the "unfixability" of language—seemingly implying an anti-essentialist position for both philosophers. In language, we always find a weave of differences, either in the "text" or within the "context" based on its "use."

Beyond such similarities, we also encounter another similarity in the idea that for Wittgenstein, philosophy is not a theory but an activity, that when well understood, it becomes therapeutic, for it would unearth or make visible the grammatical confusions which really are the sources of problems in philosophy. Derrida also does not consider "deconstruction" and "*différance*" as methods or as concepts. Both philosophers veer away from the idea of considering their viewpoints as theories or as foundations of general idealizations. However, for Wittgenstein, philosophy would still focus on the cases within contexts whereas for Derrida, it is with "*différance*" that differences within the system of language come about—the possibility of conceptuality in the system of language.

Hence, the late Wittgenstein's *Investigations* may be considered as a "re-construction" of his *Tractatus*, but this proposition remains disputed mostly by Garver and Lee, Fischer, and Shain. The similarities found are somehow grounded on their views on the differences in language through "*différance*" and "language-games" and their refusal to consider their works as theories or methodologies. Nevertheless, philosophy can be better understood through these perspectives, discussing such a weave of differences in language, be it in the "text" or in the "context." Whether the aim is clarity or contradictions, a therapeutic philosophy or a critical philosophy, Wittgenstein and Derrida have, in one way or another, introduced new viewpoints on studying language. In considering the "text" and the "context" of a concept or language, one may acquire a more comprehensive weave of differences, a better understanding of philosophy, and in the end, maybe Wittgenstein is right, in emancipating ourselves from the need to philosophize. With this, we may have a better understanding of life, i.e., through a convergence and not a separation between the "text" and the "context" of language.

Garver and Lee conclude that Wittgenstein begins in life itself. For them, this is where philosophy must develop and flourish. However, our means of engaging with philosophers involve the "text" they have written. Thus, be it the "text" or the "context," both fundamentally enrich each other, thereby enriching not just "philosophy as a language-game"<sup>87</sup> but the very language-game this philosophical endeavor created—between Derrida and

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

Wittgenstein. I would like to conclude by quoting Garver and Lee, "So our only hope for salvation lies, paradoxically, in respecting our limits rather than attempting to transcend them."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

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