Wittgensteinian Method of Language-games and the Bystander Effect

Abstract The paper is a conceptual inquiry on the later Wittgenstein's approach to ethics through an account of how the method of language-games applies to research on the bystander effect. Using the Kitty Genovese murder and the Wang Yue hit-and-run as sample cases, I cite findings on how the bystander effect involves confusion on action due to the ambiguity of the situation. I argue that the presence of this ambiguity is consistent with Wittgenstein's view on the indeterminacy of language and that the method of language-games offers a solution via an approach of engaged reflection rather than abstract deliberation. The method of language-games deters the bystander effect by establishing a sensitivity that puts us in a better position to clarify and take the perspective of others. Emphasis on acquiring this sensitivity is significantly similar to how closeness and social learning facilitate social courage. I conclude by explaining how the method of language-games leads to a critical conception of agency that is fundamentally connected to a sense of the other and how closeness and social learning serve as concrete illustrations of how Wittgenstein's method of language-games becomes applicable in practical ethics.

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There is much disagreement on how to construe Wittgenstein ethics in the context of his call for silence. In *Tractatus* (1922) and *Lecture on Ethics* (1929), he says that ethics cannot be expressed. Only propositions can be expressed. Since ethics does not make claims about the world, ethical claims are not propositions and talk about ethics is talk about nonsense. In *Philosophical Investigations* (1958), he says that ethical claims are family resemblance concepts. Their meanings are naturally indeterminate but they can be learned by playing relevant language-games. Language-games, however, belong to grammar and grammar is inarticulate.[1] **(Endnotes)**

The paper aims to defend Wittgensteinian quietism in ethics against criticisms of conservatism and obscurity by clarifying how Wittgenstein's language-game method applies to research findings on the bystander effect. More specifically, it aims to show that: (1) the bystander effect involves a problem of ambiguity that results from an uncritical attitude towards the natural indeterminacy of language; (2) Wittgenstein's method of language-games addresses this ambiguity via a reflective approach that engages others in understanding different examples, conventions, and modes of judgment; and (3) Meyer's (2002, 2010) emphasis on the importance of closeness and social learning can be viewed as clarificatory examples of Wittgenstein's language-games approach.

In coming up with my account of the ethical implications of Wittgenstein's method of language-games, I cite relevant passages from *Philosophical Investigations* (1958), along with Crary's views on Wittgensteinian ethics (2000, 2007). *Philosophical Investigations* is widely considered to represent Wittgenstein's mature philosophy, while Crary's work is currently one among the more reputable articulation of Wittgensteinian ethics. These two will be the bases for my conceptual framework as I articulate what is distinctly Wittgensteinian in the way the bystander effect is understood and resolved. For the literature on the bystander effect, I focus on Meyer's (2002, 2010) findings on social courage and on Latané and Darley's (1968, 1970) research as well as other seminal researches on the subject (e.g. Latané and Nida, 1981).

The Bystander Effect: The Case of Wang Yue and Kitty Genovese

In October 2011, there was public outcry on a news video showing how a two-year-old girl was run over by a vehicle while wandering around the streets of Foshan in Guangdong, China. Upon seeing the child lying under the vehicle, the driver continued to run over the child, leaving her badly injured at the middle of the street. There were about 18 people who passed by, and the child was run over again by another vehicle before a garbage collector stopped and carried the child out of the street to ask for more help. The name of the child is Wang Yue. Wang Yue died from the injuries that she sustained from the incident (O'Dwyer, 2011). These injuries, however, could have been immediately treated if previous bystanders only decided to help.

While Wang Yue's death sparked international criticism about the growing apathy in Chinese society, the circumstances which led to her death are not unique to China. A similar event happened in New York.

In 1964, Kitty Genovese was returning to her apartment in a quiet, middle-class neighborhood in Queens after closing the Manhattan bar that she managed. As she left her car and walked toward her building, she was viciously attacked by a man with a knife. As the man stabbed her several times, she screamed for help. One neighbor yelled out his window for the man to 'leave that girl alone,' at which time the attacker began to walk away. But then he turned, knocked Genovese to the ground, and began stabbing her again. She continued to scream until finally someone telephoned the police. The police arrived two minutes after they were called, but Genovese was already dead and her attacker had disappeared. The attack had lasted 35 minutes. During police investigations, it was found that 38 people in the surrounding apartments had witnessed the attack, but only one had eventually called the police (McGill, 2014, p. 1).[2]

The two cases illustrate the phenomenon social psychologists call the "bystander effect". This phenomenon is not unique to China or to New York, but these cases deserve mention because they are the most discussed examples of the bystander effect. The case of Wang Yue serves to remind us of what happened to Kitty Genovese in March 1964, and in the many other cases where people become indifferent to others' cry for help.

The Problem of Ambiguity in the Bystander Effect

Latané and Darley (1968, 1970) investigated the complex psychological processes that lead to the bystander effect. Contrary to the commonsensical view that the presence of others gives us more confidence and security in helping, their findings show that the presence of others creates more ambiguity and confusion on the dilemma of helping. This dilemma is often resolved by some form of deference to others which results to a failure to help.

Latané and Darley (1968, 1970) named three mechanisms operative in the bystander effect: (1) social inhibition; (2) plurality of ignorance; and (3) and diffusion of responsibility.[3] Social inhibition refers to bystanders' fear of getting negative attention from others for responding inappropriately to the situation

because help might be interpreted as unwelcome or inappropriate (McGill, 2014). In the Kitty Genovese murder, for example, some bystanders did not help because they thought that it was a lover's quarrel that they should not interfere with it (Barkin, 2002). While in the case of Wang Yue, news about how a fellow Chinese got blamed and prosecuted for helping an injured woman became a deterrent. Even as some passersby saw Wang Yue and wanted to help, they were afraid of being similarly blamed by others present or even by the victim herself. [4]

Plurality of ignorance, on the other hand, refers to how we look to each other for cues on how to interpret and respond to a situation even as all of us are equally ignorant or confused. In the Kitty Genovese murder, for example, many people did not help because many bystanders were also not helping. Many were also uncertain of how to interpret the situation, and each thought that indifference was the appropriate action (McGill, 2014). This plurality of ignorance is more evidently shown in the news video of the Wang Yue incident. The video showed passersby showing signs of distress upon noticing Wang Yue, but they continued on their way after observing that others were also not helping (O'Dwyer, 2011). The fact that many were not minding Wang Yue made other passersby think that they should also be indifferent.[5]

Diffusion of responsibility refers to how perception of individual obligation to help becomes minimized as it becomes divided among others who are present. Amidst a call for help, an implicit division of responsibility takes place among those who are present which creates confusion on individual obligation to help (Williams and Ty Law, 2007). In the Kitty Genovese murder, some assumed that other witnesses already initiated help. One couple said they just watched the murder from their window because they thought that somebody already called the police (Barkin, 2002). The same mode of thinking

applies to Wang Yue's case. Each bystander passed on to their fellow bystanders the primary obligation to help such that they all ended up not helping.

Social inhibition, plurality of ignorance, and diffusion of responsibility involve an element of uncertainty in action brought about by the presence of others and the ambiguity of the situation. Social inhibition involves ambiguity on whether others would approve of helping in the situation, plurality of ignorance involves ambiguity in determining how to act in the presence of others who are similarly confused, and diffusion of responsibility involves ambiguity on who has the primary obligation to help. Ambiguity is naturally connected with uncertainty. When a situation is ambiguous, we are uncertain how to understand the situation and we are uncertain how to act. Hence, the failure to help during cases of the bystander effect is not always due to apathy or deficiency in character. In a lot of cases, it is due to confusion on how to interpret an ambiguous situation along with a corresponding uncertainty on how to act. The later Wittgenstein offers a lot of insights on how we can deal with ambiguity. In this regard, we can also look to his work for a better understanding of why and how the bystander effect occurs.[6]

Indeterminacy: A Wittgensteinian Diagnosis of the Problem of Ambiguity in the Bystander Effect

Wittgenstein construes ambiguity in terms of the natural indeterminacy in language. There will always be indeterminacy in language and in all the human activities that involve language because meaning evolves and is constantly created. Hence, Wittgenstein coined the term language-game not only to emphasize the connection of language to actions, but also to note the fluidity by which meaning is renewed and created in each linguistic act. In clarifying meaning, Wittgenstein's language-game approach acknowledges the flux that comes with this

indeterminacy by being comfortable with a set of examples that illustrate the different conditions for the meaningful application of a concept (*PI* 133). One knows the meaning of an expression not by being able to cite rules for every instance of its use, but by showing that one has acquired the receptivity (*PI* 232) for applying the expression correctly in the relevant range of cases.

To learn the meaning of an expression is to learn a linguistic system whose boundaries are not fixed and is always in flux (*PI* 99). Hence, linguistic competence involves mastery of a technique (*PI* 199) for applying the relevant linguistic rule with certainty in a particular situation (*PI* 211-213). The method of language-games involves a drill in the different examples and actions associated with a concept, but this training is not meant to result to a mechanical application of rules. It aims to enable the learner to instinctively apply the rule with flexibility while not viewing this flexibility as something contrary to the objective application of rules (*PI* 232). So, when Wittgenstein talks about dispelling confusion by means of playing language-games and acquiring knowledge of grammar, he is talking about acquiring a 'reflective mastery' shown by the competent user of language who is able to apply linguistic rules as a matter of course (*PI* 238) and personal judgment (*PI* 228). Language is characterized by a natural and inescapable indeterminacy, and it is important to recognize the agent's judgment as constitutive of objectivity so as not to make impractical demands on clarifying what counts as the appropriate reason or action in a given situation (Crary, 2007).

Research on the bystander effect shows consistency with Wittgenstein's insights on the natural indeterminacy of language because situations associated with the bystander effect also involve forms of language that we understand or fail to understand. They also point to the need to recognize the different ways by which we also constitute what we claim to understand. Wittgenstein illustrates this in terms of the many ways one can

understand the *same* expression, rule, or picture. For example, he shows that even the act of extension can be misunderstood (*PI* 26), shows how the series +2 can be construed differently (*PI* 85), and that the same figure can both be viewed as a duck or a rabbit (*PI*, part II section II). Language is characterized by a natural indeterminacy that makes it useful for communication. Awareness and recognition of this natural indeterminacy means that we are also entitled to some autonomy in our judgment on how to describe a situation.

This autonomy in judgment, however, does not imply absolute subjectivity in our descriptions. It means that we can strive for more inclusivity by being critical about the extent to which we have excluded relevant judgments in our appraisal of the situation. For example, studies related to the bystander effect show that ambiguities on what counts as public or private deter helping (Meyer and Herman, 2002). Violence heightens this ambiguity because it associated with domestic conflicts where helping amounts to the intrusion of privacy (Meyer and Herman, 2002). The fact that there was violence in Kitty Genovese incident induced bystanders to perceive it as a lover's quarrel that should be left to the lovers themselves (Cherry, 2012). Yet, the bystanders own interests and experiences may have also been influential in judging that the conflict in Kitty Genovese murder as something that is private. Being critical, in this case, means being aware of how the bystander's own conceptions also play a part in defining a situation. This critical attitude, however, is numbed by how we simply rely on the majority for our decision on how to think and act.

Wittgenstein believes that extreme forms of subjectivity and objectivity are solipsistic and uncritical. Such extremes reduce the concept of right judgment either to the perceptions of the individual or to the perceptions of the community in a way that is inconsistent with the dynamic nature of language. Hence, even as Wittgenstein emphasizes the importance of personal judgment,

he also says the use of language and the judgments we make through it cannot be so private that it becomes a solipsistic act (*PI* 202, PI 269). If solipsism were the case, all that exist are ones' own needs and interests and helping during cases of the bystander effect would never make sense. Hence, the insensitivity that passersby show during cases of the bystander effect can be viewed as an expression of solipsism that Wittgenstein rejects. Solipsism denies the inherent normativity involved in all uses of language because it makes no distinction between thinking that one is following a rule and actually following a rule (*PI* 202). Yet, language presupposes a regular custom or practice that has its own normativity (*PI* 198-199). It is also a social act. It always makes room for the criteria of correctness outside the individual himself (*PI* 258). Solipsism should be rejected because it emphasizes individual judgment in a way that it fails to acknowledge the public nature of language.[7]

This solipsism, however, is also expressed by overemphasis on the public nature of language which takes the other extreme of reducing right judgment to the perception of the community. This is also expressed via the majoritarian view of rule which is often wrongly attributed to Wittgenstein (Holtzman and Leich, 1981). The majoritarian view of language is also a form of private language because it makes no room for criteria of correctness outside the views of the majority (*PI* 258). As far as the majority is concerned, thinking that one is following a rule is no different from actually following a rule (*PI* 202). The normativity of judgment is unduly limited in this case because there are also forms of life we share with those outside the majority (*PI* 206). This, in turn, leads to a tyrannical conception of convention that makes no room for desirable, at times necessary, differences in judgment.

In the face of ambiguity, conformity to majority gives more security to judgment. But this is false security because all uses of

language come with the burden of judgment (O'Neill, 1996). Social inhibition, plurality of ignorance, and diffusion of responsibility all involve forms of deference to majority when what is necessary is acknowledgement of how one exercises judgment. Diffusion of responsibility, for example, involves passing on to others the obligations one actually has, while social inhibition and plurality of ignorance involves relying on the majority for a definition of appropriate behavior that one still makes on his own. All these mechanisms show self-deceptive attempts to escape the burden of judgment. We attribute to others, what we ourselves are responsible for because we do not want to take responsibility for judgment. Yet, the natural indeterminacy of language shows that judgment is an inescapable and ever-present fact (O'Neill, 1996).[8]

Thus, from the perspective of the later Wittgenstein, the bystander effect can be viewed as an uncritical way of responding to the inherent determinacy of language. Being critical means being sensitive to the dynamic interplay between our views and those of others as we determine how to understand a situation and come up with a decision on what counts as the appropriate action. Social inhibition, plurality of ignorance, and diffusion of responsibility are ways of fleeing from the task of facing the burden of judgment by deference to the majority where the method of language-games calls for more participation and engagement. This engagement solves the problem of ambiguity involved in the bystander effect via a form of reflection that enables us to consider the other also as part of ourselves.

Solutions to the Bystander Effect: Social Courage and the Method of Language-games

Since the bystander effect involves a problem of ambiguity among the people involved, solutions include suggestions on how to resolve this ambiguity by improving clarity in communication. To deal with social inhibition and plurality of ignorance, victims are

advised to be more explicit in their call for help and in telling bystanders that their aggressors are strangers (Blair, 2007). To deal with diffusion of responsibility, victims are advised to pinpoint the person whom they are asking for help (Williams and Ty Law, 2007). Instead of just crying for help, the victim should say "You, the man with a backpack. Please help!" These pieces of advice, however, put the burden of clarification on the victim who may not even be in a condition to request for help. This is the case, for example, for Wang Yue who was so badly injured that all she could do was cringe in pain. The obligation to help during situations associated with the bystander effect is an obligation that can only be evoked from people with a prior inclination and sensitivity (O'Neill, 1996). Wittgenstein explains this sensitivity through the sense of judgment acquired via the method of language games. This method, in turn, finds expression in Meyer's (2002, 2010) emphasis on the role of closeness and social learning in facilitating social courage.

Social courage is the opposite of the bystander effect. Where people show social courage, there is no bystander effect. Hence, understanding the factors that facilitate social courage means understanding the factors that prevent the bystander effect. In contrast to the bystander effect, social courage is a phenomenon where people help others despite significant risks (Meyer, 2010). These risks include ostracism, loss of job, and, in worst cases, the loss of life. Social courage is usually associated with situations of conflict characterized by inequality of power. The powerful uses superiority to cause physical or psychological harm to the weaker party, and agents who witness this injustice feel pressured to take non-conformist action against the stronger party in behalf of the aggrieved. As a result, the helper takes on the risk of also being harmed by the stronger party (Meyer and Herman, 2002). Social courage ranges from acts such as helping a classmate being bullied, to speaking for a colleague being

harassed by a superior, to defending a stranger from a violent aggressor or going against a tyrant.[9]

Research shows that closeness is a major factor that facilitates social courage (Meyer and Herman, 2002). When we are socially close to the person's involved, social courage is natural and 'goes as a matter of course' (Meyer and Herman, 2002). The gravity of danger and violence generally deters helping, but they become irrelevant when the people in need are people we consider family or friends. Females regularly stand up against the harassment of their female friends, and males help their friends as part of a code of honor. When the people involved are socially close with each other, the obligation to help is so evident that it needs no justification despite the risks involved (Meyer and Herman, 2010).

Closeness, however, is not always conceived in terms of actual social closeness. People were also willing to help strangers: (1) when agents have similar experiences and think of themselves in the position of the victim in need of help; (2) when the situation involves a conflict which an agent felt 'emotionally close' with; and (3) when agents think of the victim in terms of people they are actually close with (Meyer and Herman, 2010).

There is also closeness not just in relation to the bystander and the victim or to the situation involved, but also closeness among the bystanders themselves. This is the case when the bystanders involved are friends. In such a situation, social inhibition, plurality of ignorance, and diffusion of responsibility are less likely to develop. Citing Latané and Rodin (1969), Latané and Nida (1981) explain that, "Friends often tended to discuss the incident and often arrived at a mutual plan of action. Hence, friends are less likely to misinterpret each other's lack of action and less likely to feel embarrassed about acting in front of each other, making it less likely that 'pluralistic ignorance' will develop" (pp.

318-319). Friends also know that they will see each other again. They protect their esteem by being quick to act and help. Responsibility does not become diffused since there is one unit that shoulders the responsibility compared to the individuation that exists when the bystanders are strangers. There is "a 'we' shouldering the responsibility rather than an 'I' and a stranger who divide it" (Latané and Nida, p. 319).[1010] There are also findings on how friendship can be a deterrent in helping in cases where the friends involved are clear about their decision not to help (Latané and Nida, 1981). Such cases are beyond the scope of my paper since the Wittgensteinian approach to ethics focuses primarily on the significance of how a shared practice or form of life can be a basis for better understanding objective moral judgments.

Closeness is a way of resolving the problem of communication involved in the bystander effect because it puts us in a better condition to deal with the task of clarifying action. The closer we are with people or the situations they are in, the better we understand the person and the clearer we are on how to act. Closeness enables us to be clear about our role in a situation and gives us a sense of confidence and conviction on the legitimacy of helping (Meyer and Herman, 2002). This is essential during emergencies where the need for response is immediate. In these cases, productive action has to be fast, intuitive, and instinctive, otherwise doubt will paralyze action and people end up as bystanders. Closeness enables us to help more spontaneously regardless of the risks involved because the recipient of help is no longer viewed as an 'other' whose being is independent and separate from our own.[11]

Hence, recognition of the importance of closeness in facilitating social courage also amounts to a corresponding emphasis on socially reflective learning (Meyer and Herman, 2002). Socially reflective learning facilitates closeness and aids in

the task of judgment via the practice of perspective taking, articulation of different interests, and development of skills and competencies that lead to a feeling of strength and confidence in action. This is usually done in role playing and simulations, dialogues, and training in conflict mediation. These activities emphasize not just the cognitive but also the emotive, i.e. 'that we feel what the excluded and threatened person feels' (Meyer and Herman, 2002). We are often unconscious of the various factors and structures that prevent social courage (i.e. our fears and interests, the structure of power and authority in groups). Socially reflective learning enables us to become more conscious of these factors so we can be more pro-active in our interaction with others (Meyer and Herman, 2002). It employs concrete guides and models for clarifying our role in different social processes and puts us in a better position to address the indeterminacy in meaning involved in the bystander effect.

In this regard, it is worth noting how Meyer and Herman (2002) intentionally broaden the scope of social courage to include courage to help others in everyday and ordinary contexts. They claim that everyday behavior in responding to conflicts on the job, school, or at home are equally, if not more, important than violent conflicts in the public realm. This emphasis on the ordinary is consistent with the importance given to social learning in clarifying ambiguous definitions of the private. Social learning involves greater awareness of the various continuities between the private and the public. This, in turn, broadens the scope of moral obligation. Hence, though social courage occurs in the public, what moves us to intervene even in violent conflicts is our perception that they also belong to our concern or area of life. If, for example, violence occurs in places we consider our home or our bus stop, a shared sense of injustice is experienced with the victim and we feel that action or helping is within our right (Meyer and Herman, 2002).

This implies that social courage requires a broadening of the private. Wittgenstein's method of language-games is a reflective mode of social learning which enables us to challenge conventional definitions of the private so we can be sensitive to the needs and interests of the excluded. Strangers and distant agents also belong to the scope of moral consideration, but they are often neglected because of the unfamiliarity and discomfort of going out from established norms. Engaging in relevant language-games enables us to understand the unfamiliar so we can better acknowledge the unique needs and interests of different others. Hence, Wittgenstein emphasizes the importance of understanding differences by comparing and contrasting various contexts in the use of language. The familiar is put under the context of the unfamiliar (*PI* 1, *PI* 185), while the unfamiliar is viewed under the familiar (*PI* 89, *PI* 107-8). The same concept is viewed anew from different directions (*PI* vii), existing modes of understanding are constantly challenged, and we are forced to use imagination rather than appeal to plain rationality or convention. This process enables us to stretch our concepts and ways of looking at things so we develop sensitivity to the similarities and differences that constitute a shared form of life (*PI* 67, *PI* 130, Crary, 2007).

The playing of language-games leads to a shared form of life and sense of community in cases where agents are characterized by different experiences and ways of life. Hence, one of the factors blamed for the bystander effect is the lack of sense of community. The bystander effect that occurred in Wang Yue's accident and Kitty Genovese' murder both happened in urban areas where there is little or no sense of community (Moore, 2011). There are very few or no cases of bystander effect in rural areas compared to urban areas because rural areas have a strong sense of community (Latané and Nida, 1981). The idea of helping strangers in urban areas becomes out of place because the norm is to mind your own business. A sense of community is a form of closeness

that broadens the scope of our moral concern by enabling us to recognize the various continuities between the private and the public.[12]

Similarly, Wittgenstein's method of language-game may be viewed as a form of socially reflective learning that emphasizes the importance of closeness in bridging the gap between the private and the public in a critical manner. Wittgenstein's language game approach bridges the gap between the private and the public by emphasizing the interdependence between an agent and the linguistic practices of his community. The agent influences a practice in as much as a practice partially constitutes the agent's identity. Here, Wittgenstein uses the word 'practice' in two difference senses. On the one hand, it refers to the established agreements in behavior that we simply need to follow and acknowledge to learn and use a language (*PI* 198-9, *PI* 202, *PI* 206). On the other hand, it also refers to the agreements in action we develop and constitute as we master the practices associated with the relevant uses of language (*PI* 228, *PI 232*). The first one refers to the customs and practices of our community or even mankind (*PI* 202), which provide the regularity for making sense of an expression or the conventions necessary for the possibility of making judgment. The other one refers to the practice of making judgment itself which the individual can only learn on his own (*PI* 232). The creative tension that exists between these two senses of 'practice' is where language-games do its work. Within this framework, it becomes possible to have a conception of agency that avoids the reductionist tendencies of foundationalist thinking (Mendoza, 2012).

Hence, the method of language-games is not to be understood as a communitarian thesis on objectivity. Understanding by means of language-games involves participation in the various practices and forms of life of our community. But part of this form of life is the development of techniques in judgment unique to every

person. Indeterminacy and difference in judgment is still present when we use the language-games of our community. This indeterminacy means freedom. It provides the space for innovation and creativity through which we are able to define and make sense of our identity. At some point in the learning of language, rules are absent. So, we act without guidance and simply make a judgment (*PI* 228). But that very situation is a condition of agency. It is interesting to note how Wittgenstein describes these both as a condition of 'blindness' (*PI* 219, *PI* 228) and 'certainty' (*PI* 211-212*)*. There is no rule or standard to appeal to, but one is at the same time certain of what one has to do. One becomes skillful and competent as a result of training in the practices of the community. But when the moment of action comes, it is the individual who decides and it is in this decision that he is able to constitute his agency.

Yet, the method of language-games is also not meant to be a thesis on the primacy of individual judgment. Wittgenstein's method of language-games is not meant to be a substantive thesis at all. Like Kant's critical approach to philosophizing, the value of language-games anti-systematic approach is in the awareness of the limits of our claims as we acknowledge how language becomes a combination of both flux and some form of constancy (Mosser, 2009). Not that we cannot generalize or make any conclusions at all, but that we should acknowledge the limits of those claims if we are to make sense of them as meaningful uses of language. Wittgenstein does not say we cannot make moral judgments, for example on whether social courage is important or not. The fact is we already make such judgments and we are able to do so competently by acquainting ourselves with the relevant information and modes of action that come with the different uses of the concept. To understand a language as part of a form of life means to internalize the various practices that naturally come with the use an expression and to acknowledge that those

practices constantly evolve as we engage in them. Thus, Crary (2000) is right in emphasizing that the ethical point of the *Philosophical Investigations* can be understood in terms of the exercise of 'rational responsibility' and decision in all that we say and do. Language is an existential condition and clarification is an ever-present task we simply have to live with through an attitude of openness, sensitivity, and self-criticism.

In this regard, Meyer's (2002, 2010) emphasis on closeness and social learning is comparable to Wittgenstein's method of language-games. The method of language-games is often contrasted with the abstract mode of reflection expressed by overreliance on rules and insistence on *a priori* definitions. Depending on fixed strategies for clarifying human action and putting the burden of communication on the victim alone, amounts to the overreliance on rules and definitions that Wittgenstein rejects. On the other hand, clarifying communication by means of engaging others in shared experiences that link us together and make us reflect on our identity is something that Wittgenstein's method of language-games endorses. Like the method of language-games, closeness and social learning give bystanders the necessary sensitivities for clarifying and understanding others' plea for help even in the absence of explicit verbal language and even in the presence of ambiguity in the situation. Understanding is not achieved by means of the separation from others and thinking in isolation. It is achieved by means of closeness and reflective participation in practices shared with unique others.

Conclusion: Wittgenstein Ethics and the Language-games Therapy

If we are to follow Wittgensteinians who claim that any coherent insight from Wittgenstein's later work must be based from the therapeutic nature of his method, then we are not meant to associate with any particular voice in Investigations with finality (Crary, 2000). The language-game approach is not meant to be a

doctrine but a method, and the message is the method. Every time we go through the passages of *Investigations*, we are meant to patiently take the various positions of the interlocutor and the initiate as a way of criticizing the ambivalent and conflicting positions we also have. What emerges in a sincere involvement in this dialectic is not any particular conclusion that we can claim to be true *a priori*, but a sense of agency characterized by an openness and sensitivity to reasons and forms of thought we would have not otherwise acknowledged. This is the type of seeing anew, the ability to see connections (*PI* 122), and the ability to understand differences that Wittgenstein consistently emphasizes.

Hence, I think that Wittgenstein ethics is oriented towards the Socratic demand of self-knowledge. Virtue is achieved by means of seeking clarity in one's fundamental desires, feelings, and beliefs. The process of seeking this clarity involves being self-critical about delusions and ideas that move us to act and reason. This may be shown by his perpetual distrust on fixed rules, meanings, and ways of looking at things. But Wittgenstein is also optimistic. This distrust of codification and fixity forces us to be on our toes, pay attention all the time, and become critical. This critical process of self-examination leads to a knowledge of how caring for ourselves is connected with caring for others, and vice versa. The method of language-games is an effective tool for undertaking this task because it enables us to develop a sensitivity for acknowledging the unique agency of others, of how similar we are and how different. Hence, though Wittgenstein did not advance any substantive ethical view, the critical nature of his method supports the sensitivity involved in acts of social courage (Mendoza, 2012).

The later Wittgenstein contributes to understanding the problem of the bystander effect through insights which show that the bystander effect involves a problem of ambiguity in

communication. The method of language-games deals with this problem of ambiguity by acknowledging the natural indeterminacy of language. This leads to an approach of engagement and participation that builds on moves and actions towards the creation of more experiences that improve our sense of connection and shared sense of self. This approach is similar to how Meyer (2002, 2010) emphasizes the importance of closeness in facilitating social courage and deterring the bystander effect. Closeness via friendships and modes of social learning are effective solutions we can cultivate to deal with the linguistic confusion involved in the bystander effect. They are also concrete illustrations of how Wittgenstein's method of language-games becomes applicable in practical ethics.[13]

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End Notes

[1] There is a debate, for example, on whether it is correct to claim grammatical remarks as grammatical propositions. If there are grammatical propositions, then there are also ethical propositions since ethical propositions are a subset of grammatical remarks. While some claim that there are grammatical and ethical propositions, others claim that there is no such thing because grammatical remarks are rules that enable us to determine what constitutes a meaningful use of a word in contrast with a nonsensical one. They do not tell us if our claim is true or false. This elusiveness of grammar and the ethical probably has something to do with their metacognitive status (see Kiesselbach 2009; Garver 1994).

[2] There are now emerging claims on the inaccuracy of accounts about the Kitty Genovese murder. For example, Manning (2007) cites lawyer Joseph De May Jr. (2006) in explaining how legal documents associated with the Kitty Genovese murder show that, "Not all of the 38 witnesses were eye witnesses (some only heard the attack); ... the police were called immediately after the ûrst attack; none of the eye witnesses could have watched Kitty or her attacker for the full 30 min because they were visible to the witnesses for only a few moments... Kitty was still alive when the police arrived at the scene" (p. 557). These claims put doubt on whether the Kitty Genovese murder is indeed a case for the bystander effect, but they do not undermine the bystander effect itself or the processes that lead to this phenomena. Latané and Darley (1968) have simulated experiments, i.e., the epileptic seizure and smoke-filled room experiment, which confirmed the bystander effect even if accounts about the Kitty Genovese murder were inaccurate. The paper focuses not on the cases but the on the general mechanisms behind the bystander effect and how it involves a problem of ambiguity which Wittgenstein's method of language-game can address.

[3] Studies on the bystander effect avoid the fundamental attribution error by examining the situational factors on why people do not help (Harman, 1999). While the failure to help can be attributed to the bystanders' deficient character, there are many other factors that influence our character in a particular situation. These mechanisms illustrate some of those situational factors.

[4] The news I am referring to is about the Chinese named Peng Yu. Peng Yu helped an elderly woman who got injured while getting off the bus. Instead of getting the woman's gratitude, the woman blamed Peng Yu for being responsible for the injury and filed a legal complaint. The court sided with the old woman and reasoned that Peng Yu would not have helped the woman if he did not push her from the bus. News about Peng Yu's misfortune was widely discussed in China prior to the case of Wang Yue and many commentators claim that knowledge of the Peng-Yu case has become a major deterrent for helping in the case of Wang Yue (O'Dwyer, 2011).

[5] Latané and Darley (1968) validated this phenomenon in their "smoke –filled room experiment." When placed in a room where smoke suddenly comes, the subject immediately reacts when he is alone as compared to when he is in the presence of others. When there are other people in the room, each of the participants looked to others' reactions first as opposed to deciding for themselves whether the smoke is a sign of fire or danger.

[6] There are many researches that support this view on how ambiguity results to the bystander effect (see Latané and Nida 1981, Hart and Miethe 2008, Meyer 2010). The paper extends this notion of ambiguity and relates it to Wittgenstein's view about the natural indeterminacy of language.

[7] Wittgenstein rejects solipsism not because it is false. Because solipsism does not make sense, he is careful not to reject it in a way that asserts its denial. One cannot meaningfully assert the denial of nonsense without assuming that the object of denial has sense. Here, I take solipsism as Wittgenstein's representative of what counts as an uncritical way of dealing with the indeterminacy of language, i.e. one that fails to become sensitive to how the dynamic interplay between individual judgment and those of others constitutes the appropriate use of language and the notion of right judgment. Hence, some articulations of cultural relativism or conventionalism are also solipsistic in so far as it does not acknowledge this interplay.

[8] Among the three, plurality of ignorance seems to be the paradigm case of what I refer to as the inauthentic and uncritical way of dealing with the indeterminacy of language. When we are confused in interpreting a novel situation, we look to others' behavior on how to act and respond. As a result, we simply conform to the behavior of the majority even as they are also ignorant about the situation and are also looking at us for cues on how to act. Yet, that conformity is also a decision that individuals make for themselves. Existentialists call this inauthenticity because they are not being true or consistent to the freedom that comes with all human action.

[9] Ordinary cases of social courage seem to be underreported compared to cases of the bystander effect. The next day after the Wang Yue incident occurred, an American saved a Chinese from drowning in the lake of Hangzhou China. While everyone was just looking by, the American stranger swam and saved the drowning girl. The Wang Yue incident received more attention on the news and internet blogs (Wines, 2011). Revolts against tyrants seem to be an exception but they have also gone through phases of suppressed media attention.

[10] There are also findings on how friendship can be a deterrent in helping in cases where the friends involved are clear about their decision not to help (Latané and Nida, 1981). Such cases are beyond the scope of my paper since the Wittgensteinian approach to ethics focuses primarily on the significance of how a shared practice or form of life can be a basis for better understanding objective moral judgments.

[11] In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Irwin, 1985), Aristotle considers a friend as an 'other self'. Helping a friend despite the presence of danger does not become problematic because one is actually helping oneself. This view, however, does not consider the most altruistic forms of helping as something completely selfless. While the paper does not discuss the notion of friendship in depth in the framework of Aristotle, the notion of friendship is presented as an instance or condition of closeness that helps dissolve the linguistic confusion involved in the bystander effect.

[12] This explains why the bystander effect does not seem to be prevalent in the Philippine case given Filipinos' strong sense of community or sense of *kapwa*. This strong sense of community, however, can also go overboard when it comes to helping by becoming a form of intrusion to others' privacy. Yet, defining what counts as intrusion of privacy may vary given that Filipinos conception of privacy is different when compared to the highly individualized conception of privacy in the west. The method of language-games allows us to have a delicate

balance of judgment that does not reduce the public to the private and vice versa. The boundary between the private and the public is indeterminate and there are situations where we ought to help others because of a shared sense of injustice. But there are also situations where we ought to refrain from helping because it is the very act needed to respect privacy and autonomy. The method of language-games assumes that these things cannot be set beforehand prior to our engagement with experiences and practices relevant to the situation.

[13] This paper is based on my previous paper "Wittgenstein and Social Courage," which was published in the *Papers of the 35th International Wittgenstein Symposium in 2012* (Mendoza, 2012). Whereas the former paper focused solely on Wittgenstein's method of language-game and Social Courage, this paper is more comprehensive, and it focuses more on the literature on the bystander effect. I thank the PSSR editor and the anonymous reviewers for helping me clarify the context of my thoughts for the PSSR readership.