Erik Reid Lindstrom. *Jane Austen and Other Minds: Ordinary Language Philosophy in Literary Fiction*. Cambridge University Press 2023. 288 pp. $106.00 USD (Hardcover 9781009206990); $29.99 USD (Paperback 9781009206952).

Erik Reid Lindstrom identifies the "central proposition" of his study as a claim that "Jane Austen's novels are not conduct books sharing preset values but philosophical studies of conduct more in the J. L. Aust*i*nian sense." Besides Austin, Lindstrom's philosophical touchstones are "Wittgenstein, and Cavell (most of all)." In Austen's novels, Lindstrom sees an affinity to ordinary language philosophy's rejection of "perception itself as a philosophical problem of major interest." Consequently, he dissents from "the widespread view that Austen's fiction reflects the mitigated skepticism of eighteenth-century empiricists and anticipates modernist literary impressionism" (17). Austen's novels do not share the standard eighteenth-century philosophical preoccupation with the sources, nature, and limits of knowledge, Lindstrom claims: "Instead of problematizing and solving mysteries of sensation, Austen's philosophical energies address problems of (mis)recognition and acknowledgment–the threat to and hopeful securing of a linguistic sensible community" (26). Austen's novels, then, are not primarily explorations of the philosophical problems of her era, but instead forward-looking in how their technique and themes anticipate twentieth-century ordinary language philosophy.

After an Introduction and a lively chapter on "Austen and Austin," Lindstrom devotes a chapter to each of Austen's six published novels, offering readings of them in relation to topics in ordinary language philosophy. Importantly, Lindstrom does not simply apply the concepts of ordinary language philosophy *to* Austen's novels. Rather, he approaches Austen's work as "a repertoire, in its acts and potentials, for a mode of doing ordinary language philosophy in its own right" (17). For example, the chapter on *Northanger Abbey* focuses on John Thorpe's use and abuse of language as a vehicle for Catherine Norland's "entry . . . into the linguistic public" (17). Lindstrom usefully reframes Catherine's *Bildung*, showing that it is less about correcting her mistaken belief that Gothic novels can explain life in 1790s England than about her recognition that language can function as a weapon. In other chapters, Lindstrom explores how *Sense and Sensibility* is at its core about Marianne Dashwood's inability/refusal to understand her older sister Eleanor's private experience (95). With *Pride and Prejudice*, Lindstrom approaches the novel as a critique of William Godwin's views on human perfectibility, arguing that Austen's contribution is to see perfectibility as occurring through "conversing" and "mutual education," not solely through the protagonist's development of their own reason that we find in a typical philosophical novel of the era (117). This focus on conversation, Lindstrom suggests, is consistent with Austen's "stylistic rejection of all prior 'philosophical' novels' rigid political and rhetorical address. She recognizes style as language in action" (103).

Lindstrom also characterizes his approach as an "anachronistic conversation in philosophy" between Austen and ordinary language philosophers (41). In this, his study succeeds admirably. While the traffic between Cavell and Austen is a bit one-way in favor of Cavell's ideas, Lindstrom does view Austen as offering a corrective to Cavell's views on perfectability, as well his

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misinterpretation, in Lindstrom's view, of the role form plays in Austen's novels. "While *Jane Austen and Other Minds*," he explains, "works from Cavell, some of its interventions are positioned against Cavell's premises and their uses" (32). Lindstrom generally avoids the bane of so many uses of literary fiction in philosophy, in which the literary work is merely used to provide concrete examples of abstract philosophical concepts. While Lindstrom is more deferential to (some) philosophers than Martha Nussbaum in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (1998), in which she argues that fictional narratives are superior to philosophy for engaging in ethical inquiry precisely because they are less abstract, Lindstrom and Nussbaum share a respect for fictional works as more than handmaidens to "real" philosophy.

Lindstrom justifies the "traditional format" of his study–a chapter devoted to each of Austen's major novels–as a means to "help orient the reader who comes to the book for case studies in Austen, and to license philosophical departures" (16). However, the philosophical content often is prioritized at the expense of orienting readers: *Jane Austen and Other Minds* is most likely to appeal to readers who are already convinced of the value of ordinary language philosophy rather than skeptics or those who are new to these debates. Often, Lindstrom provides insufficient discussion of alternative interpretations. Peter Knox-Shaw's *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (2004), as its title suggests, contextualizes Austen's novels within eighteenth century debates about skepticism and morality. Know-Shaw's work offers a significant counterpoint to Lindstrom's shift of our attention from Adam Smith and David Hume to recent ordinary language philosophy, but he merits only four mentions. It is not always easy to get a sense of the stakes involved without more sustained discussion and refutation of alternative interpretations. The chapter on *Persuasion* is the strongest in the book, in my view, because Lindstrom offers a detailed response to D.A. Miller's pessimistic approach to Anne Eliot's character.

This absence is most problematic in Lindstrom's chapter on *Emma*. "The gap between what words say and what words do," Lindstrom argues, "has seldom been so richly explored as in *Emma*" (20). Lindstrom posits that "the traditional epistemological question of Emma's fallible judgment and lack of omniscience serves as a diversion to the serious unending work of linguistic phenomenology, the investigation of language relations in social conduct" (197). Lindstrom correctly observes that the critical consensus is that *Emma* is preoccupied with the problem of establishing true and certain knowledge–but this is not surprising for a novel that uses the words "fancy," "imagination," and "imagine" over one hundred times. It would be useful, too, to see a discussion of why Austen, through her use of free-indirect style, has readers share Emma's errors about what is going on in her world for much of the novel. Why not simply have us take up an ironic stance towards Emma right away, as in the typical female Quixote novels of the era, so that our attention is properly devoted to linguistic phenomenology in *Emma*? If Austen is not concerned about errors of perception, why does she lead us as readers to share Emma's at such length?

It is also not apparent that the focus on epistemology in *Emma* has always been a "diversion" from an interest in the role that language plays in the society of the novel. Norman Page's *The Language of Jane Austen* (1972) devotes considerable attention to language and social relations in *Emma*, though not from an ordinary language philosophy perspective. While it feels churlish to

point to research gaps in a book with a fifteen-page Bibliography, Lindstrom does not refer to any of the classic studies on Austen and language, such as Page's or Stuart Tave's *Some Words of Jane Austen* (1973). Lindstrom no doubt would find much to disagree with in these works, but it would be useful to hear how ordinary language philosophy offers a more compelling approach to Austen's novels.

Lindstrom's occasionally dramatic style may especially resonate with readers already sympathetic to ordinary language philosophy, as it echoes the characteristic voice of its founding figures. Lindstrom opens by describing his approach as finding "in Austen's fiction a kind of 'linguistic phenomenology' available to the everyday world of the novelist, but not *permitted* in intellectual history" (1; emphasis added). The use of "permitted" here feels stronger than necessary, as it raises conspiratorial questions about who could have been restricting certain approaches to Austen. Similarly, claims by Cavell and others are described as "stunning" or "breathtaking," which reflects Lindstrom's admiration for Cavell's "arrestingly melodramatic Romanticism" (6). To be clear, these flourishes are not flaws so much as stylistic choices that align with the thinkers he engages. Still, readers less familiar with these philosophical conversations may find the intensity somewhat disorienting unless accompanied by more explicit discussion of the interpretive stakes.

Readers seeking to understand what ordinary language philosophy can illuminate about Jane Austen's fiction will find Lindstrom's study both subtle and rewarding. His readings certainly succeed in shifting our attention in Austen to seemingly minor moments, showing how Austen's novels open onto topics central in ordinary language philosophy, such as community and conversation, rather than to epistemological puzzles alone. At the same time, the book's appeal is likely to rest most strongly with readers already conversant with Cavell, Wittgenstein, and Austin, since Lindstrom does not always frame his interventions with detailed discussion of rival interpretations or contextual traditions. For those already interested in thinking about Austen through the lens of ordinary language philosophy, *Jane Austen and Other Minds* is indispensable. For newcomers, however, some prior grounding in the philosophical debates will make Lindstrom's claims more accessible and their significance clearer.

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