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José María Ariso ^a

^a International University of La Rioja

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Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Inexplicably Losing Certainties

José María Ariso

Abstract: Though Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* has been influential in analytic epistemology, its interpretation has been enormously controversial. It is true that exegesis has been mainly concerned with the proper characterization of Wittgenstein's very notion of 'certainty'; however, some important questions remain unanswered regarding this notion. On the one hand, I am above all referring to the study of the possibilities we have of retaining a certainty when it has seemingly been placed into question and, on the other hand, of regaining a certainty once it has been lost. In this paper, I attempt to provide a detailed answer to both questions. In so doing, some important features of the picture of ourselves which emerges from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* are also revealed.

Introduction

Several scholars have warmly praised Ludwig Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* over the last few years. For instance, Danièle Moyal-Sharrock described it as the 'most fascinating and challenging' of Wittgenstein's works (2004, p. 2), whereas Avrum Stroll remarked that it constitutes 'the most important contribution to the theory of knowledge since *The Critique of Pure Reason*' (2005, p. 33). However, some important questions regarding Wittgenstein's notion of 'certainty' were not explicitly tackled in *On Certainty*. A clear example of this lies in the following question: is there any *guarantee* that nobody will suddenly and inexplicably lose a certainty as fundamental as that person being alive, having a body, etc.? If so, knowing about that guarantee in detail would deepen our knowledge of Wittgenstein's notion of 'certainty'. Yet such a guarantee does not exist. In fact, those passages from *On Certainty* in which Wittgenstein refers to *madmen* to illustrate sceptical doubts can also be viewed as sharp descriptions of the main consequences arising from the

sudden loss of a certainty. In this paper, I analyze some of those passages to shed light on three related questions which remain to be clarified. Firstly, the requirements for holding fast to a certainty which seems to have been called into question; secondly, the possibility of regaining a lost certainty; and last but not least, the deflationary picture of ourselves which underlies *On Certainty*.

In Section 1, I briefly describe Wittgenstein's categorial distinction between knowledge and certainty, underlining the role played by mistakes in this distinction. After shedding light on the relationship between mistakes and madness established by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*, I then clarify his peculiar conception of madness and set out its main consequences. Section 2 then addresses the possibility of holding on to a certainty which seems to have been previously called into question. I first analyze whether it makes sense to *decide* to hold on to a certainty and then explain the difference between using rules of caution in the face of an extraordinary event and holding fast to a certainty. Lastly, I show which requirements have to be met to hold on to a certainty. Section 3 deals with the difference between retaining a certainty seemingly called into question and regaining one which has been lost. After demonstrating that a certainty which has been lost cannot be regained by either holding on to it or by using rules of caution, I look into three further methods which might help to regain it. In the last section, I hold that the conclusions reached in the previous sections should lead us to take note of the deflationary picture of ourselves as primitive beings which emerges from *On Certainty*.

1. Madness as Grammatical Gap

In the face of a long-standing philosophical tradition which regarded knowledge as the highest attainable point on the continuum of certainty, Wittgenstein stated that “[k]nowledge” and “certainty” belong to

different *categories*' (OC 308).¹ This categorial distinction is based on the possibility of justification. As Wittgenstein remarked, one can only say 'I know' when one is ready to give grounds that are surer than the assertion of what one believes (cf. OC 243). Since knowledge is necessarily grounded, it is conceptually linked to doubt—and by extension, to the possibility of a mistake. Certainty, on the other hand, is ungrounded, as many grounds could be given for it, 'but none as certain as the very thing they were supposed to be grounds for' (OC 307). Hence, something is objectively certain when the possibility of a mistake is 'logically excluded' (OC 194). In the context of Wittgenstein's later work, this expression means, 'excluded from our *grammar*', so that the possibility of making a mistake about a certainty is not included in our language-games. Indeed, a mistake can only be made within a language-game whose rules indicate what can be deemed as a mistake and how it could be discovered (cf. OC 32, 301). What we call 'mistake' therefore plays a very special role in our language-games (cf. OC 196). However, there are irregularities which cannot be regarded as mistakes, because no place is prepared for them in the game (cf. OC 647). When we encounter comments or reactions for which no place is prepared in our language-games, we no longer have a framework within which to discover and correct a mistake. In this case we come up against an anomaly. Yet should such an anomaly be regarded as a sign of madness? Although Wittgenstein pointed out that there are anomalous comments and reactions which should necessarily be regarded as a sign of madness (cf. OC 155, 281, 674; MS 169, p. 51), this does not mean that the boundary between madness and mistake is always clear and precise. Let us imagine that there are only 36 students in a classroom, though someone might have counted them and said there were 13,594. In no way whatsoever could such a result be viewed as being merely a mistake. But can we say what the precise boundary is between a mistake and

1 As Moyal-Sharrock pointed out, Wittgenstein described in *On Certainty* not only 'certainty', but also those 'certainties'—or *hinges*—which constitute its objects or occurrences, e.g., '2+2=4', 'Physical objects exist', etc., (2004, pp. 51-52).

madness in this case? In saying there are 200 students? Or 100? And why not, for example, 88 or 72? If someone affirmed there were 72 students, would there be enough room to decide that such a result is anomalous or just wrong? As regards this question, there could be marked discrepancies not only between the verdicts of different people, but also between the judgments made by the same person at diverse moments in time. Nevertheless, this is not a dilemma between ‘either an anomaly or a mistake’, as it would also be possible for an observer to know his way about by seeking an explanation to justify such an odd result, so that it no longer appears as an anomaly (cf. *OC* 467, 469).² To give some examples, it would be possible to consider that the result in question was due to a misunderstanding, a pretence, a mere joke, etc.

It goes without saying that Wittgenstein does not consider madness from a clinical point of view. In his opinion, madness does not consist of a mental state or disorder, but of ‘an inability to *do* something’ (*RFM* III 80) because one ‘cannot react in agreement’ with other people when they talk (*RFM* III 70). As Wittgenstein remarked, the man we consider as mad reacts differently: we are sure, yet he is not (cf. *OC* 217). In other words, we do not even consider—under normal circumstances—the possibility of making a mistake with regard to our certainties, so that we do not show any hint of doubt as to whether we have a body, are alive, etc. Nevertheless, this security or certainty can be lost.³ According to Wittgenstein, the consequence of departing from some elemental

2 Ángeles J. Perona showed how dictatorial regimes may take advantage of the margin of ambiguity or indefiniteness between madness and mistake to find some people ‘mad’ or ‘heretical’ (2010).

3 In the context of Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*, the madman appears as someone who had always shared a certain world-picture with his community of origin, even though he has unintentionally *moved away* or *deviated* from such community by being suddenly unable to carry on sharing their common world-picture. This touch of *deviation* is reflected in the etymology of the adjective ‘delirious’ and the terms in some Romance languages which stand for ‘delusion’—i.e., ‘*délire*’ in French and ‘*delirio*’ in Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. All these terms come from the Latin expression ‘*delirare*’, which is made up of ‘*de*’ (out of) and ‘*lirare*’ (to plough)—by the way, ‘*lirare*’ shares its lexeme with ‘*lira*’ (furrow). So, ‘*delirare*’ means ‘to go out of the furrow, not to plough straight’.

judgments is that all other judgments would be toppled with them, so that there would be no judgment at all one could be certain of (cf. *OC* 308, 419, 490, 494, 614). If a certainty were to be placed into doubt, it would also call into question the whole system of reference made up of all our certainties, as this system is not more certain than a certainty within it (cf. *OC* 144, 185). This system of reference can also be considered as a world-picture, which Wittgenstein describes as ‘the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false’ (*OC* 94).⁴ Yet the madman has departed from some elemental judgments, so that he cannot ‘rely on what is meant by “true” and “false”’ (*OC* 515). In fact, we should not consider the madman’s doubt as a *genuine* doubt—by this I mean, a doubt based on grounds and raised within specific language-games in suitable circumstances (cf. *OC* 4, 115, 123, 154, 196, 255, 247, 334, 458). For example, if someone doubted as to whether the earth had existed a hundred years ago, we would not understand, because we ‘would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not’ (*OC* 231). The grammatical gap which would open up between the madman and his community of origin can be noticed in the following passage:

If someone said to me that he doubted whether he had a body I should take him to be a half-wit. But I shouldn’t know what it would mean to try to convince him that he had one. And if I had said something, and that had removed his doubt, I should not know how or why. (*OC* 257)

Wittgenstein refers here to what might be called the *way back* from madness, that is, the cure or return to the furrow from which the madman has deviated. If someone doubted whether he had a body, we could not convince him that he had one, as there would not be any grounds more certain than him having a body. That is why it is also impossible to account for a rational deviation from the furrow. After all, we cannot *convince* anyone that he lacks a body. Of course, we could try

⁴ Óscar González-Castán argues that the picture of the human belief system contained in the nest metaphor (cf. *OC* 225) might have problems of consistency (2013).

to persuade someone that he lacks a body not by providing him with grounds, but with a different world-picture (see below). Yet it would also be possible for someone to suddenly and inexplicably lose his certainty or security of having a body. Just like the sudden loss of a certainty is beyond our control, the indiscriminate generalization of our certainty is likewise uncontrollable:

For mightn't I be crazy and not doubting what I absolutely ought to doubt?
(OC 223)

There are psychiatric cases which illustrate the possibility of such loss, as well as of the indiscriminate generalization of certainty. As Louis A. Sass said, schizophrenic delusions often 'involve not belief in the unreal but disbelief in something that most people take to be true' (1994, p. 24). In any case, many of these examples can be seen as a sudden loss or as an indiscriminate generalization of certainty, e.g., the Cotard delusion consists of not believing that one is alive, that is, being sure one is dead. Hence, the question quoted above could also be expressed in the following terms: 'For mightn't I be crazy and doubting what I absolutely ought to be certain of?' And the answer is yes.

2. Holding Fast to Our Certainties

In order to test our certainties, Wittgenstein undertakes to explore how they would stand up to what seem to be two different kinds of evidence to the contrary, that is, unheard-of statements and events. According to Wittgenstein, we might hold fast to our certainties in such cases by *deciding* not to take anything seriously as evidence against any of them. If anything happened, says Wittgenstein, calculated to make him doubt his own name, 'there would certainly also be something that made the grounds of these doubts themselves seem doubtful', so that he could 'decide to retain' his old belief (OC 516). We do not have to change our opinion on these most fundamental things, because '[t]hat is just what their being "fundamental" is' (OC 512). If something should appear to speak against a certainty, one will 'stick to it' (OC 636). Moreover,

Wittgenstein insists that one may *decide* to ‘recognize no experience as proof of the opposite’ (*OC* 368). However, Richard K. Scheer thinks that we cannot *decide* to hold on to a certainty because refusing evidence to the contrary is just part of the language-game (1990, p. 161). Let us look into this argument to shed some light on Scheer’s confusion. If we refer to *normal* circumstances, Scheer is right: I cannot decide to be a human being because my being human is a certainty or presupposition of my world-picture as well as of our current language-games. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that Wittgenstein tests our certainties by devising *unheard-of* cases that might even make the most certain thing unacceptable to us (cf. *OC* 513, 517). In these cases, we might decide to hold fast to our certainties, while the alternative would be, as Wittgenstein pointed out, to suffer doubts about what *seemed* to stand fast for us up to that moment, so that our judgment would completely go to pieces:

Even a proposition like this one, that I am now living in England, has these two sides: it is not a *mistake*—but on the other hand, what do I know of England? Can’t my judgment go all to pieces?

Would it not be possible that people came into my room and all declared the opposite?—even gave me ‘proofs’ of it, so that I suddenly stood there like a madman alone among people who were all normal, or a normal person alone among madmen? Might I not then suffer doubts about what at present seems at the furthest remove from doubt? (*OC* 420)

It goes without saying that Wittgenstein might *decide* to hold on to his certainty that he lived in England. After all, he would find it quite correct for someone to brush aside the attempt to confuse him with doubts about his own certainties (cf. *OC* 498). The decision of refusing to revise his judgment—that is, the decision to hold fast to a certainty—is easily understood if we bear in mind that ‘such a “revision” would amount to annihilation of all yardsticks’ (*OC* 492).⁵ The seriousness of this

⁵ When Wittgenstein says that he does not hold fast to *one* proposition but to a ‘nest of propositions’ (cf. *OC* 225), he means that we cannot hold on to *one* certainty—as if it could stand in isolation from other certainties—but to a whole system of reference or world-picture. By the way, the ‘nest of propositions’ Wittgenstein refers to is made up of what he calls ‘hinges’ (*OC* 341, 343, 655), i.e., artificial formulations of certainties. In other words,

consequence leads Wittgenstein to saying that he would '(have to) refuse to revise' the judgment in question (*OC* 492). So, here Wittgenstein not only recognizes the possibility of reaching a decision in the face of an unheard-of statement or event, but also advises us to make a specific decision. That Wittgenstein should approve of the possibility of holding on to a certainty is closely related to the fact that, from his point of view, our certainties are not grounded in experience (cf. *OC* 240). If our certainties reflected reality, we would be able to confirm whether a certainty is true or false by checking it against experience. But Wittgenstein gives to understand in *On Certainty* that a certainty constitutes an 'attitude' (*Einstellung*) we take (*OC* 381, 404). As Moyal-Sharrock points out: 'Our certainty is conditioned, not justified, by the facts' (2004, p. 83). For example, were we to put a book in a drawer and it failed to turn up again, we would never seriously think that it had vanished away (cf. *OC* 134). If we were to see quite new surroundings instead of the long familiar ones, that could not *force* us to alter our certainties and, by extension, our world-picture.⁶ However, such an event might predispose us towards changing it. Even though chaotic surroundings would not *invalidate* our world-picture, they might make it *unsuitable* for us to adapt to them. In this case, a progressive change of our world-picture would therefore not be surprising.

In spite of appearances, holding fast to a certainty and taking into account what Wittgenstein called 'rules of caution' (*OC* 625) are not exactly the same. To clarify this matter, I would like to bring up some

hinges constitute 'propositions' that operate as grammatical rules, though they masquerade as empirical propositions. However, these hinges cannot be meaningfully articulated within the stream of the language-game because '[t]hey make sense possible, and do not therefore themselves *make sense*' (Moyal-Sharrock 2004, pp. 87, 94-95). See Stella Villarnea's comparison between the role of these hinges in *On Certainty* and the role of characteristically senseless propositions in the *Tractatus* (2010).

⁶ That is why in this paper I refer to certainties which *seem* to have been questioned, and not to certainties which *are* called into question. As Norman Malcolm pointed out, Wittgenstein spoke of 'apparent proofs' and 'seeming contradictions' because he was trying to test his certainties. Therefore, if he had spoken of the possibility of future events refuting or disproving our certainties, that would have settled the matter straight off (1990, p. 167).

passages from Wittgenstein regarding the possibility of taking rules of caution into account, and after that I shall mention which requirements have to be met to hold on to a certainty.

Regarding abnormal statements made by other people, Wittgenstein admits it would be too large a blunder for someone to add and then state '2 plus 21 equals 13', etc. In such a case it would be possible to seek different explanations: for example, one could think this man was joking or had gone mad (*LC*, p. 62; cf. *OC* 463, 468). It is also important to remember that Wittgenstein frequently used the adverb 'perhaps' (*vielleicht*) to refer to the possibility of knowing one's way about in the face of abnormal statements made by other people. If someone thought that we could not rely on any calculation—and justified himself by saying that mistakes are always possible—'perhaps we would say he was crazy.' (*OC* 217; see also *MS* 129 p. 137; *MS* 164 p. 102). We should not forget that even though we were to call one of these cases a mental disturbance, it might be 'a transient one' (*OC* 71) or even a mere misunderstanding. For a sentence which remains nonsensical—because it seems to have been expressed out of all context—will make sense as soon as we find a context which can clarify its use or function (cf. *OC* 469). In these cases there would be enough room to know one's way about, as it would then be possible to find a justification to help us understand such unusual statements. Yet it would also be possible to find an explanation to account for an unheard-of event. In fact, we might account for our own condition for perceiving the event—e.g., by thinking someone had drugged us or that we were suffering from some kind of perception disorder—or we might contemplate the event in such a way so that it no longer appears abnormal—for we might have grounds to think it was a sophisticated joke, etc. One can therefore use rules of caution or get to know one's way about by accepting an explanation because experience offers grounds for *thinking* it is true. This, however, does not entail that such explanation must necessarily turn out to be true.

We would thus have several possibilities in the face of abnormal events and statements. If an unheard-of event took place, we might

choose to hold on to our certainties, but might also decide not to hold fast to them—for the evidence could seem to us so convincing that we would find it hard to reject. Regarding abnormal statements made by other people, two different kinds of cases can be differentiated. If the abnormal statement does not concern us explicitly—let us assume someone told us very seriously he was Napoleon Bonaparte—inasmuch as it does not place *our* capacity for judgment into question, we might attempt to account for that statement. But if we failed to find any convincing justification for it, we might reach the conclusion that the person who said such a thing had gone mad. Nevertheless, if the statement concerned us explicitly—let us imagine that some people gave me ‘proofs’ that I am no longer living in Europe—there would be enough room to decide whose judgment had gone completely awry.

We might know our way about in the face of an extraordinary statement or event if we were finally able to account for it by finding reasonable explanations. The explanation in question would make it possible for us to see the issue not as an anomaly, but rather as an understandable statement or event. As regards the possibility of holding fast to a certainty, Wittgenstein described it as a mere *decision*, without it being necessary to look for an account which would help us to adopt a new perspective on the issue in such cases. Someone might of course decide to hold fast to a certainty and, *moreover*, to adopt a new perspective on the issue by finding a way to account for it. But I would like to stress the importance of realizing that both possibilities are mutually independent. After all, Wittgenstein insisted that one might *simply* decide to recognize no experience as proof of the opposite (cf. *OC* 368) because what he wished to emphasize regarding our certainties is ‘their being “fundamental”’ (*OC* 512), by this I mean the fact that they do not have to stop standing fast for us even though experience may contradict them.

As we have seen above, Wittgenstein maintained that the decision of holding on to a certainty consists of refusing to take anything seriously as evidence against it. Yet in my opinion, the decision of refusing to take

anything seriously as evidence against a certainty is only the first requirement which should be met in order to stick to it. The way I see it, a second requirement, which at first sight may seem trivial, is also necessary. According to this requirement, the certainty which seemed to have been called into question should still be shared by the person who has taken the decision to hold on to it. Hence, holding fast to a certainty does not consist of recovering a certainty which has *already* been lost, but rather in deciding to be faithful to a certainty which is *still* shared although it seemed to have been called into question—as Wittgenstein pointed out, in such cases ‘I could (...) decide to *retain* my old belief’ (*OC* 516; my emphasis). In other words, we would be holding on to a certainty in order to avoid its loss and, by extension, to keep the entire system of reference intact.

3. The Inexplicable Loss of Certainty

In the previous sections I referred to unheard-of statements that illustrate not only sceptical doubts, but also that there is *no guarantee* one will always have every one of the fundamental certainties belonging to the world-picture shared with one’s community of origin. Wittgenstein wrote: ‘My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things’ (*OC* 344). Yet can one decide to be content to accept those things? The answer is no. This way of being content is beyond our control, so that we have no guarantee that we will still have even the most elemental certainties in the next minutes. This possibility is illustrated in many passages in which Wittgenstein provides us with examples of unheard-of statements (cf. *OC* 67, 71, 89, 155, 157, 231, 247, 257, 282, 490, 674-675) and particularly in the following passage:

It is easy to imagine and work out in full detail events which, if they actually came about, would throw us out in all our judgments.

If I were sometime to see quite new surroundings from my window instead of the long familiar ones, if things, humans and animals were to behave as they never did before, then I should say something like ‘I have gone mad’; but that would merely be an expression of giving up the attempt to know my way about. And the same thing might befall me in mathematics.

It might e.g., *seem* as if I kept on making mistakes in calculating, so that no answer seemed reliable to me. (Z 393)

If an unheard-of event—e.g., that trees gradually changed into men and vice-versa—actually came about and I did not stick to my certainties, I could not even rely on what is meant by ‘true’ and ‘false’. But if I witnessed such an event, would I automatically take it for granted that it had actually happened? Just because it would be an event so odd that it would seem to contradict my very certainties, I would make an effort to know my way about by looking for an explanation for it—perhaps it was a joke, I had been drugged, etc. Thus, it could be possible that I failed to find any more rules of caution or that I gave up the attempt to look for them. Wittgenstein uses the expression ‘I have gone mad’ to illustrate this possibility. Hence, ‘I have gone mad’ expresses here the acknowledgement of one’s—maybe temporary—incapacity to judge. In this sense, Thomas Morawetz pointed out that to regard oneself as crazy describes the nature and depth of one’s conviction. For in this way one defers to those people who are held ‘to be sane and whose judgments can be trusted’ (1978, p. 136). Yet in the passage quoted above there is also reference to a different case. Wittgenstein suggests that it might *seem* as if he kept on making mistakes in calculating, so that no calculation *seemed* reliable to him. In such a case we should say that Wittgenstein would have *actually lost*—temporarily perhaps—the certainty of being able to reach correct arithmetic results. It goes without saying that we often make mistakes when calculating. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, Wittgenstein warned us that we would perhaps say someone was crazy if he supposed that we could not rely on any calculation—and justified himself by saying that mistakes are always possible (cf. *OC* 217). This argument would make an effort to question the theoretical possibility of reaching correct and reliable results, whereas in Z 393 emphasis is placed on the fact that one’s own capacity to judge would have all gone to pieces.

A crucial difference between the two cases described in Z 393 concerns the possibility of holding on to the relevant certainty. As I mentioned above, two conditions are required to hold fast to a certainty.

On the one hand, a certainty must seem to have been called into question by evidence which should be refused. On the other hand, one can hold on to a certainty only if it has not been already lost. Let us now apply these requirements to the cases described in *Z* 393. If someone were sometime to see trees gradually turned into men and vice-versa from his window, such circumstance would not entail the immediate loss of the certainty that *neither* trees change into men *nor* men into trees. That person could then decide to hold fast to this certainty by refusing to accept the abnormal evidence. But what evidence could be refused by the individual for whom no arithmetic results seem reliable? At first sight, the evidence refused should simply be those results on which he does not rely. However, such a refusal would not avoid arithmetic results from seeming unreliable to him. For this is not a security he *still has*, but a certainty he—perhaps temporarily—*has already lost*. Thus, he could not hold on to a lost certainty. At most, he could make an effort to know his way about, but that would in no way help him to regain the lost certainty. He might feel relieved by putting his loss of security down to a temporary disorder, but such a justification would not restore his lost certainty. Do we have to conclude from this then that we cannot do anything at all to regain a lost certainty, so that its recovery would be—from a grammatical point of view—as inexplicable as its previous loss? In order to answer this question, I shall analyze whether the three options set out below might help one to regain a lost certainty.

The first option would consist of *convincing* the individual who has lost a certainty by providing him with suitable grounds. Let us go back to the case of the man who doubted whether he had a body. We might tell him that he could find evidence for having a body if he touched his limbs, weighed himself, looked at himself in a mirror, observed his own shadow, asked other people if he really had a body, etc. But as we have seen above, none of these ‘proofs’ or grounds would be more certain than having a body *per se*, as the existence of his body would already be presupposed in all the grounds put forward. Hence, even though this man regained the certainty that he had a body and, moreover, confessed

that he had been convinced by one of the grounds we provided him with, strictly speaking it could not be accepted that we had actually convinced him.

Since we would not have any grounds to convince this man that he has a body, we might try to *persuade* him. Someone can be convinced if the grounds offered to him are coherent within his language-games and, by extension, in his world-picture. Yet if two people or two groups of people turned out to have very distinct conceptions on any question due to their differing world-pictures, none of them could ever be convinced by the other. Nonetheless, both of them could attempt to persuade the other by offering him the own world-picture. Wittgenstein provides us with two examples of persuasion. On the one hand, we might try to give our world-picture to a man who, after growing up under very special circumstances, had been taught that the Earth came into being 50 years ago, and hence believed it (cf. *OC* 262). On the other, Wittgenstein invites us to think about the way natives are converted by missionaries (cf. *OC* 612). We should not find it strange that these natives as well as the man who believed that the Earth came into being only half a century ago showed strong *resistances* to accept a *different* world-picture. Yet the case of the man who has lost the certainty of having a body would have nothing to do with these cases. Indeed, we should offer him the same world-picture he had previously shared with us for a long time. In so doing, we should emphasize the fact that people within this world-picture are certain of having a body. However, his problem does not consist of overcoming some *resistances* to accept a *different* world-picture, but of his *incapability* of being certain of the very *same* thing we would try to persuade him of, so that Wittgenstein's notion of 'persuasion' would not be a suitable option here.

Regarding the third option, the man who had lost the certainty of having a body might try to regain such certainty by behaving *as if* he actually did indeed have it. Yet this *simply* would be a tragic and grotesque simulation that would have absolutely nothing to do with the ungrounded ways of acting which lie at the bottom of our language-games (cf. *OC* 110,

204). For, to behave *as if* one were certain of a lost certainty is very different from having it. If someone wished to regain the certainty that he has a body by behaving *as if* he were certain of it, he would find himself involved in situations as incompatible with our certainty of having a body as exerting himself to *remember* that he must constantly simulate having a body. Moreover, the possibility exists that he would not feel like *simulating* at a certain moment, etc. However, our certainties do not have to be remembered, in addition, they do not require an act of will from us either. We simply act without the slightest hint of doubt.

Having analyzed these three options, I conclude—*from a strictly grammatical standpoint*—that we can do nothing at all to regain a lost certainty, so that its recovery—if it were to take place—would be inexplicable.

4. Conclusion: On Man as a Primitive Being

The madman's role can easily go unnoticed because Wittgenstein seems to have used the madman as merely a tool to illustrate sceptical doubts. The madman's role, however, is highly important inasmuch as it helps us notice that anybody may lose his certainty or security at any time and begin to doubt *just* at that point at which we must begin 'with not-doubting' (*OC* 150). The role of the madman therefore consists of showing us something of great importance which is very difficult to notice in other circumstances. The fact that we show no hint of doubt at that very moment at which we must 'begin to trust' is something so usual and, above all, so close to us, that we do not realize it and, hence, do not *appreciate* it either (cf. *CV*, p. 4e). Yet the role of the madman consists of simply helping us to notice—and by extension, to appreciate—that security. Paradoxically enough, this security or certainty is noticed best not when it is shown, but when it is *missed*.

According to Allan Janik, Wittgenstein admired some of the assumptions Freud made on the practice of psychoanalysis, especially the assumptions concerning how we are tempted to deceive ourselves in our efforts to attain self-understanding and, 'above all, the way Freud would

have us resolve our problems by accepting a deflationary—and therefore only painfully attained—picture of ourselves’ (1989, p. 191). As a matter of fact, Wittgenstein also tries to get us to accept a deflationary picture of ourselves. As he writes in *On Certainty*, he wished to ‘regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state’ (OC 475). But what exactly does the adjective ‘primitive’ mean here? In *Zettel*, Wittgenstein remarks that he uses this word to refer to a ‘pre-linguistic’ sort of behaviour, so that ‘a language-game is based on it’, that is, ‘it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought’ (Z 541). It is just at this pre-linguistic level that the very moment of beginning to trust or not-doubting takes place. At this level there is no room for reasoning, one simply acts without a hint of the slightest doubt, yet this beginning with not-doubting ‘is not (...) hasty but excusable: it is part of judging’ (OC 150). Wittgenstein attempts to make us focus on that moment, at that level, to make us realize that our behaviour is in many essential aspects as spontaneous and irrational as animal behaviour. To accept this deflationary picture of ourselves requires resignation, but, as Wittgenstein says, one of feeling or will, not of intellect (BT 406; CV, p. 17e). After all, the consequences of accepting this picture go far beyond. For we can also regard man as a primitive being not only to note that man cannot even avoid—from a strictly grammatical standpoint—the possibility of losing any certainty at any moment and under any circumstance, but also to realize that it is not up to him to regain a lost certainty.⁷

International University of La Rioja
 josemaria.ariso@unir.net

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