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## **“The frightening thing is the uncertainty”**

### **Wittgenstein on love and the desire for certainty**

Camilla Kronqvist

The discussion on certainty and moral certainty bears many marks of a successful research program. The discussion has followed the discovery of Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* as containing a unique rebuttal of skepticism, and providing substantial insights into the basic certainty at the bottom or background of our language use. (See Moyal-Sharrock 2004, who considers *On Certainty* a distinct third stage in Wittgenstein’s philosophical writing.) With the suggestion that Wittgenstein’s discussion can be applied to solve present philosophical problems, scholars have increasingly used these insights to intervene in present debates in epistemology (see e.g. Coliva 2016), moral and political philosophy (Pleasants 2009, Hermann 2015, O’Hara 2018, Boncompagni 2021). Out of these interventions a technical vocabulary stressing “certainties”, “hinge propositions” or “hinges” have emerged, giving the uninitiated reader the impression that Wittgenstein had indeed discovered that there are not only regular propositions, but fundamental propositions very different in kind, not just beliefs, but “basic beliefs” (see Moyal-Sharrock 2004, 6-11, for a more initiated reading of them).

Turning specifically to the way in which Wittgenstein’s remarks on “certainty” have been introduced into moral philosophy, it has been asked whether there are certainties related to our moral life that are close enough to other “basic certainties” to count as “moral certainties”. These have been found in rule-like sentences such as “murder is wrong”, which appear indubitable but cannot be assessed as true in the same way as “the couch is yellow”. (Try, however, to substitute it with “yellow is a color.”) However, since the language used to address matters of moral concern, or to express value also take other form than rule-like statements or principles aimed at prohibiting wrongdoing, I will take a different route. I ask how Wittgenstein’s explicit considerations of “certainty” in the context of love and religious faith may contribute to our understanding of the kinds of certainty at play in what we perceive as good and virtuous in our attitudes to others and to life.

The matter I pursue is the significance of a form of existential uncertainty in connection with the doubts one may entertain about one’s own or another’s love. As an example of this I

consider a couple of diary entries by Wittgenstein, available in his *Nachlass*. The entries concern the character of love, and Wittgenstein's own struggle with his relationship with Ben Richards, his final love. They offer reminders of the role talk about knowledge and certainty may have in the context of love, a way of bringing words back "to their everyday use" (Wittgenstein 2009, §116), as well as more personal explorations and sometimes confessions as to what a person may come to see as central to love and his relationships with others.

In the first part of the paper I consider Wittgenstein's own difficulties of confronting the facts of his life and love. I discuss how his uncertainty relates to what Lars Hertzberg (1983) calls "the indeterminacy of the mental", and specific difficulties of gaining knowledge of oneself and of one's motives in love related to courage, trust and faith. In the second part, I connect these ways of despairing about the meaning of one's own or another's words in love to some of Wittgenstein's remarks on religious faith. I consider how they stand in relation to the certainties discussed in *On Certainty* and to some extent in discussions of moral certainty, and point out central similarities but also an important difference. Where *On Certainty* brings out unquestioned features of life at the background of our common action, the certainty sought in religion and love more often concerns the individual's ability to seize upon conceptual possibilities that lie at the forefront of thought.

"I must know"

"Joyous hope and fear are close cousins. I can't have the one without its bordering on the other" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,9r[1]).<sup>1</sup> On Saturday October 26, 1946, Wittgenstein ends a both personal and philosophical reflection on the joys and pains of love with these words. They are directly preceded by the remark containing part of my title. "The frightening thing is the uncertainty. And in this uncertainty my mind occupies itself with painting out possibilities, and almost always bad ones. This is sometimes aright, but mostly vile." (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,9r[1]). This is followed by a real or imagined injunction to "'Trust in God.'" He answers with a retort. "From where I am to a trust in God is a long way." (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,9r[1]).

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<sup>1</sup> The translations from the Nachlass English are mostly taken from Monk (1991, 505-506), with some amendments and additions by myself and Lars Hertzberg.

The entry reads as a personal conversation that Wittgenstein, the philosopher, is having with himself. He moves from topic to topic with considerable speed, constantly shifting perspectives and gear. The reflection that ends in these self-abasing observations begins with the slightly more confident statement: "Love is a joy. Perhaps a joy mixed with pain, but a joy nevertheless." (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]). This remark is followed by a demand which Wittgenstein seems to place on himself in love, "In love I have to be able to rest secure" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]). The entry ends in a reflection on the relation of love to perceiving value that cut out of context appears much more philosophical in nature than many of his preceding remarks.

The diary entry, written in Wittgenstein's code, is one of the most extensive and interesting treatments that Wittgenstein, as a philosopher, gives of the nature or character of love. But read together with the entry from the previous day, the notes in his diary also attest to a personal struggle, a difficulty of coming to grips with his present situation and relationship with Richards, which makes it difficult to assess their philosophical value. He explicitly addresses this difficulty the previous day, on Friday 25.10.1946, when he writes, "I do not have the courage or the strength and clarity to look the facts of my life straight in the face" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,7r[3]). The kind of understanding of love a consideration of these remarks can offer is therefore not a straightforward analysis of the language of love (cf. Rhees 1969, 121). Rather, the entries themselves exemplify features of that language that invite a consideration of what is significant to and characteristic of these modes of speech.

In particular I want to show how they themselves illustrate Wittgenstein's suggestion in *Philosophical Investigations* that certainty or confidence is expressed in the tonality of one's thoughts, although the pervading impression of his writing here is that it expresses uncertainty rather than certainty. He writes,

One would sometimes like to say of certainty and conviction that they are tonalities of thought; and it is true that they receive expression in the tone of voice. But do not think of them as 'feelings' which we have in speaking or thinking.

Don't ask: "What goes on in us when we are certain that ....?" – but: How is 'the certainty that this is so' manifested in people's action? (Wittgenstein 2009, ii §339.)

To read his writing in the diary entries, which of course is also a kind of action, in this manner is to recognize how his struggle with seeing the facts of his life clearly is a struggle to see what attitude is made manifest in his writing. Is the leading note one of joyful anticipation, fearful anxiety, hopeful conviction or pained realization of his own limitations? Part of the problem in following him is also that he seems to be asking himself exactly those questions. He is, as it were, simultaneously writing and listening, attempting to discern the tonality of his thought and the attitude it expresses. The reference to what may be aright and vile in his thinking points to the ethical dimension of the practice of this discernment.

The facts he needs to stare in the face are therefore not facts in any simple sense. They are not statements that could be deemed true or false based on observation. Therefore, they, as other forms of certainty, do not serve as objects of knowledge. If certainty or love were to be found in a feeling accompanying one's actions, it would appear possible to establish whether he was indeed having the requisite feeling and rightfully conclude that he was certain or in love. But as Wittgenstein says regarding both love and certainty, they do not consist in a feeling attached to one's actions. Love, as Wittgenstein says, "is not a feeling". "Love" unlike pain "is put to the test" (Wittgenstein 1967, §504; 1980, §959). We may ask not only whether it is *true that* someone feels love (as we may ask whether they feel pain). We may also whether their love *is true*. "It makes sense to ask", as Wittgenstein repeatedly does, whether I really love, or am "only fooling myself" (2009, §587, cf. Kronqvist 2015).

These remarks point in two directions. First, they point to the need to consider feelings of love in their context. A short lived feeling that changes in a flicker is not recognizable as ardent love (Wittgenstein 2009, §583, Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133 57v[3]et58r[1]). Second, they point to the sense in which we can ask whether something truly is love, not only in the sense that it extends beyond a momentary feeling, but as a matter of its inner character (Wittgenstein 1980, §115). All these remarks tell us something about how we use the word "love". They speak to the sense talk about love makes, by contrast to talk about feelings of pain.

In the diary entries these themes are recounted, but they also receive a more thorough treatment. Wittgenstein's continuation of the remark about love and joy, "If there is no joy, or if it shrinks after briefly flaring up, then there is no love" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]), suggests that the test to which love is put, involves judging whether (it is true that) *something is love* by attending to the presence of a central criterion. Others continue to suggest that determining

whether *someone* (truly) *loves*, also involves the ability to distinguish love from other, similar but false, attachments. A version of this surfaces in Wittgenstein's suspicion that Richards only nurtures a preference for him that will not stand the test of time or circumstances. He writes.

B. has a preference [Vorliebe] for me. Something that can't last. How it will wither, of course I don't know. How some of it could be preserved, alive, not pressed in a book as a memento, I don't know either. It's infinitely improbable that this love, if under pressure from another, or from other circumstances, will have enough toughness not to be torn apart. (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,7r[3])

The possible illusions and errors in love that Wittgenstein want to ward off here do not simply concern the possibility of Richards pretending to love, or fooling himself into thinking this is love as in *PI* §583. Wittgenstein considers not just a case of straight dishonesty or pretentious insincerity as if Richards would tell him 'I love you' although he did not mean it. It is also no clear-cut case of self-deception, of Richards simply wanting to believe it, of telling himself it must be love, but secretly being open to the possibility it was not. Richards may have been sincere, even felt certain, in thinking he was in love. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein questions Richards' handling and understanding of the concept. Perhaps he is too young, too inexperienced, too immature to be a good judge of what love asks of him? Is it not possible, as Wittgenstein asks in an earlier entry (12.8.1946). that "B. completely outgrows his love" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-131,26[2]), in the way an older man no longer remembers what he felt as a small boy, and forgets his "childish affection without being unfaithful." (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-131,26[2]).

The difficulty of seeing clearly here—Is it love or just a feeling? Does he love or only desire?—is related to the indeterminacy of psychological concepts, a theme that Wittgenstein returns to in several places (see e.g. Wittgenstein 2009, ii §330, §339, §355). The indeterminacy involved in judging what someone feels, what their intentions or motives are for saying something, or their character as revealed in what they say, feel and do, certainly does not exclude us being certain at distinct moments. The standards invoked for judgement here (focusing on genuineness, sincerity or integrity), however, differ from our standards for judging empirical facts (truth) or mathematical proofs (validity). They may even invite an indeterminacy in judging according to a given standard, since "[e]very critic", as Wittgenstein writes, "criticizes with his own I, and his measure shows in his criticism" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-131,26[3]). A good judge of character, with an experienced eye (Wittgenstein 2009, ii §355, §357) might

have recognized a “genuine loving look” (Wittgenstein 2009, ii §355, §360) in Richards’ glance at Wittgenstein, but conceded Wittgenstein’s worry that his love at this stage was but an immature idealization. Another judge might, with as much certainty, have raised doubts about Wittgenstein’s judgement of his own attachment, without our having to question either his eye or his experience.

But Wittgenstein’s doubt, the uncertainty that tears at him, does not just register the indeterminacy inherent to these language games (Wittgenstein 2009, ii §332). We can accept this indefiniteness in our ways of speaking without succumbing to uncertainty about whether we love. (Indeed, at times, in other relationships, a person’s love may be felt to be the only aspect of their life that is certain.) Wittgenstein’s uncertainty rather speaks of misgivings he is having about himself, whether he himself is acting out of love, and whether he can trust his own judgement.

It is hard to understand yourself properly since something that you *might* be doing out of generosity & goodness is the same as you may be doing out of cowardice or indifference. To be sure, one may act in such & such a way from true love, but also from deceitfulness & from cold heart too. (s. 54e MS 131 38; 14.8.1946)

On this note, one of Wittgenstein’s fears is that his own attachment to Richards, may reveal a questionable motive. On 27.11.1946, he asks himself “Can you not be cheerful even without his love? Do you have to sink into despondency without this love? Can you not live without this prop? For that is the question: can you not walk upright without leaning on this staff?” (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,43r[4]et43v[1].) Wittgenstein’s quest for clarity, thereby, raises a question of conscience. He seems to ask himself whether he has what it takes to view his own actions and attachments under an unfavourable description? Does he have the courage to admit that he is hanging on to someone out of fear and not love? Does he have the strength to accept that he is not leaning on another for support because of love but because his legs are failing? (Cf. Kronqvist 2017, 44f.)

What makes the problem or difficulty Wittgenstein is facing here *ethical*, a question of character and his relationship to Richards, and not just *intellectual*, is that it seems to be his own strongly felt motivations, his fear, his need for support, which lead him to think of their relationship as love. His weakness, he fears, may prevent him from seeing clearly. This is the reason he needs

both courage and strength to get a clear view of his situation, as well as of the person he reveals himself to be in his fair assessment of the situation. The question is if even this ethical perspective is enough to rid himself of uncertainty?

In one of the most touching exchanges in the diary entries, after his Saturday remark that love is happiness mixed with pain, Wittgenstein raises the questions. "But can you reject a warm heart? Is it a heart that beats warmly for me?" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]). He then records what seems to be a quote by Richards, either in conversation or in a letter, "I would not do anything to hurt the soul of friendship" in scare quotes. After that he adds in English, and it is difficult not to read this as the most urgent personal response, "I must know—he won't hurt our friendship" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]). The desire for certainty recorded here, "I must know", augments the frightfulness of Wittgenstein's uncertainty; when the need is dire, the possibility that nothing will answer one's need, may indeed be terrifying. But it also raises questions about what a desire for certainty may mean in love, and whether the desire for certainty with regard to love can itself be expressive of love – or the lack of it?

Now, as disclosed in the remarks about indeterminacy, it is possible to take the exchange between Wittgenstein and Richards, real or imagined, in different ways. There are, as Wittgenstein says in another context "a multitude of familiar paths" that lead "off from these words in all directions." (Wittgenstein 2009, §525). For lack of a larger context, there is also nothing determinate for us to say about the specific roles Richards' words had in their relationship. It certainly "makes a difference whether someone says to me "I love her" because the words of a poem are going through his head or because he is saying it to make a confession to me of his love" (Wittgenstein 1980, §1135). It makes even more of a difference if the person were to say "I love you". Here, however, we do not know whether Richards' words were part of a declaration of love, or meant as a way of ending a relationship.

A specific cause of concern is Richards' use of 'friendship'. Are we to take the "friendship" offered here as a form of "love"? Or does he speak of friendship as a contrast to love, in the way we could imagine someone saying, "I cannot give you love but you can always rely on my friendship". This concern is amplified when considering the possible shifts in cultural and historical context surrounding the amorous relationship between two men in Cambridge in the 1940's and today. It is possible that more knowledge about those previous contexts could help us resolve whether Richards' offer of "friendship" would be most familiar to that context also



have been understood as an offer of “love”. This could help us ascertain whether this was a usual way to express oneself in a somewhat unusual relationship. However, set in the context of Wittgenstein’s other remarks about their relationship, it becomes clear that the indeterminacy concerning the kind of relationship they were in was not what plagued Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein is not asking “What did he mean? “Love” or “friendship?” His question is rather “Did he really mean what he said? And can I trust him not to hurt our friendship.”

What is left for us to examine, therefore, are the different paths we may go down in placing these words, and Wittgenstein’s reaction to it, in different imagined contexts, and of course by placing them in the limited contexts that the diary entries present. We may speculate whether the words, taken as a reassurance of Richards’ love, occasioned the kind of emotional shift that can be seen between Wittgenstein’s last remark on October 25, and his first remark on October 26. He ends his remarks on Friday with “This bond was woven by demons that keep it in their [hand.]hands]. They can tear it or let it [continue to] live.” (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[1]) He begins his remark on Saturday<sup>2</sup> with exclaiming “Love is a joy” (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]). Yet, we can also imagine that this shift in mood, so usual to new lovers, testifies to a form of aspect change in Wittgenstein’s way of looking at his life and love. We may, however, in both of these imagined contexts do well to consider how Wittgenstein seizes on the words we attribute to Richards like at straws. The words appear to haunt him, to fill him with the need to revisit them, to consider what they meant, and what his lover meant by saying them. This itself may tell us something about the certainty he seeks.

Now, one of the more heart-wrenching aspects of this exchange, appears when reading it in relation to Wittgenstein’s doubt that Richards only has a preference, in German a “Vorliebe”, for him that will not last. His quick turn from “a warm heart” to “a heart that beats warmly for me” seems to nurture his suspicion that Richards is too reliant on lofty and idealizing language to express his love. Why succumb to such general wordings as the “soul of friendship” if the matter at hand is whether he will not hurt *this* love or friendship? Wittgenstein’s drawing attention back to “*our* friendship” (*my italics*), rather than “the soul of friendship”, can here be perceived as a call to seriously consider what it is one is committed to in vowing not to hurt the soul of friendship. Being friends, or lovers, requires more than just speaking highly of

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<sup>2</sup> The point about it being a Saturday, and the knowledge that they would meet on weekends (Schmidt 2021), may tell us that what we have had between these two diary entries is a real meeting between them. A meeting that the entry on Friday foresees, and the entry on Saturday records. But of course, for lack of other historical records, we do not know.

friendship. It requires, as we have seen, a willingness to allow one's love to be put to the test. To see whether it meets even one's own standard of what is to count as love. It is as if Wittgenstein were to say: "Do not just speak. Act! And then we will see whether your actions speak of love."

This seems to be the notion of courage that transpires in Wittgenstein's suggestion that not daring to allow one's love to be tested is a form of cowardice:

Don't be too cowardly to put a person's friendship to the test. If a prop does not stand one's leaning on it, it is not worth anything, however sad that may be. The walking-stick that looks pretty so long as one carries it, but bends as soon as you rest your weight on it, is worth nothing. (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,36r[3]et36v[1], 15.11.1946.)

"You should confidently lean on him and if he cannot bear it, he is not your friend." (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-132,205[1], 21.10.1946.)

The courage that Wittgenstein thinks is needed "for real love" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-132,205[1]), here appears in the resolve to recognize that what one considered to be love was not. It is the courage to act notwithstanding the realization that one will suffer from one's actions. "But this means one must also have the courage to make the break and renounce [one's love], in other words to endure a mortal wound" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-132,205[1]).

But where this reading of courage centres on action, Richards could have issued a different call to Wittgenstein: "Believe!" Or simply, "Listen!" If Richards' words were meant as an attempt to offer reassurance of his love, Wittgenstein's obsessing over his exact words, meticulously analysing them to see if they hold up to scrutiny, shows itself to be an unfitting response, in so far as it involves a failure to accept their intended meaning. Clearly "love is put to the test" in the ordinary course of our life. However, Wittgenstein's desire to put Richards' love to the test, can also show itself to be a form of cowardice, in so far as it reveals his inability to "rest secure" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]) in Richards's love. Rather than involving a sound questioning of Richard's attachments in love, Wittgenstein's insecurity even serves to undermine his own love. His inability to confidently trust Richards' love makes him overly cautious and even suspicious, unable to receive Richards' love. In this respect, we also see how Wittgenstein's own love is being tested, and not just for his *courage to love* but for his *faith in being loved*.

## The certainty of this “taking-for-true”

Wittgenstein struggles to see clearly, but he is not closed to the possibility that what is lacking is faith rather than courage. Recall his drawing on “Trust in God” and his admission of being far from it (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,9r[1]). Now, one could of course object that what Wittgenstein is lacking is not trust in God, but trust in Richards. Yet, it seems clear that to Wittgenstein the step towards God, although difficult, perhaps inconceivable, is no superfluous detour. His remark about the difficulty of understanding oneself properly, cited in the first section, is followed by: ‘And only if I could be submerged in religion might these doubts be silenced. For only religion could destroy vanity and penetrate every nook and cranny.’<sup>3</sup> (Wittgenstein 1998, 54.) His “Lecture on Ethics” also connects a specific form of ethical language to religious experience, and provides as an example the feeling of being absolutely safe (Wittgenstein 1965, 9, cf. Kronqvist 2011, 662-664). This experience seems closely akin to the ability to “rest secure” in love. Even more his remark in a notebook from 1947 directly links a loving attitude to religious faith: “To love with hope, & not despairing if those hopes are not fulfilled is the hardest feat. The belief in a benevolent father is actually the expression of just this life.” (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-134,101[3]et102[1].)

Attending to the crucial role Wittgenstein assigns to religion in silencing some of his doubts and worries, then appears vital if one is to gain a deeper understanding of the particular kind of certainty at stake here; the “certainty of this ‘taking-for-true’” as he puts it in a discussion of religious belief written in 1937 (Wittgenstein 1998, 37e).<sup>4</sup> This early way of framing the relation between what is true and what is certain touches on issues that recur in *On Certainty*. Whenever we take something for true there is some other thing we take for granted. Whenever we question one thing, there are other features of our life left unquestioned. His later elucidation that this certainty is a matter of seizing on a message “believingly, i.e. lovingly” (Wittgenstein 1998, 37e), however, brings the discussion in a different direction than the present discussions of moral certainty. Rather than pointing to features of our life on which our thought and action *hinges*, it points to features of our life to which we *cling* to be able to regard life as meaningful. Thus, it presents an interesting case for considering the faith we have in someone we love, and

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting here that Wittgenstein here shifts person. From speaking about the difficulty of understanding ‘oneself’ in the preceding sentences, Wittgenstein turns to speaking about himself in the first person, “Only if I”. The problem, as it were is not only his own, but the solution is. (Cf. Wittgenstein 1979, 117 on the need to step forth and speak in the first person in ethics.)

<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein here speaks of “die Sicherheit dieses Für-Wahr-Haltens” (Wittgenstein Nachlass, Ms-120,42v[1]) and not of “die Gewissheit” that he later adopts.

the kind of certainty Wittgenstein seeks in saying that he “must know he [Richards] won’t hurt our friendship” (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]).

Surfacing in a discussion of the believer’s relation to the Gospels, Wittgenstein remarks that the “certainty of this ‘taking-for-true’” is “*neither* a relation to historical truth (probability) *nor yet* that to a doctrine consisting of ‘truths of reason’” (Wittgenstein 1998, 37e). Wittgenstein’s denial that we are dealing with something resembling a historical truth, here points to the need to disregard any attempt to verify a statement such as “Jesus rose from the dead”, “Jesus is the son of God”, or “By his death and resurrection I am redeemed” by looking for empirical evidence. (The sentences I imagine relate to the examples of the resurrection and believing in redemption (Wittgenstein 1998, 38e) that Wittgenstein provides in this context.) This would include looking to their authors as witnesses of an event and asking whether their testimonies concur enough to produce something resembling a historical proof of the resurrection. Wittgenstein’s consequent suggestion that it is also not a matter of a truth or reason, dismisses the notion that belief in redemption (“By his death, I am redeemed”) could be a logical conclusion from an established fact (“He rose from the dead”).<sup>5</sup> (Cf. Wittgenstein 1965, 10-11, on how treating a miracle as a fact is a failure to see the miraculous.)

The two contrasts he forms to the certainty of religious belief or faith mirror contrasts drawn to the Moorean certainty of having two hands in *On Certainty*. Yet, the religious certainty also offers a contrast to Moore’s case. An oddity with the Moorean sentences is that it is difficult to find, off the top of one’s head, a situation in which they appear as meaningful, including the context of producing proof of the external world which Moore provides. Nevertheless, they do not appear untrue. Thus, they appear undeniably true but irrelevant, at least in cases where securing both my hands are still intact is not in question. The religious beliefs mentioned above rather appear deniably true but (subjectively) relevant. In this way they also both mirror and mark a contrast to sentences discussed in the context of moral certainty. A sentence such as “Murder is wrong” appears as if it cannot be anything but true (cf. Diamond 2019, especially in relation to Anscombe’s discussion of what can only be true, 171f). Yet, we can easily think of situations in which we need to assert the significance of this truth, we know what it means to act against this edict. It even seems highly central to public morality, perhaps (objectively)

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<sup>5</sup> Why so readily accept that the Gospels give evidence of his death and subsequent resurrection? Would not an immediate response to hearing that Apostles had met him and talked to him after he “died” be that he did not “die”? Not that he “rose from the dead” and therefore must be the “son of God”.

relevant, that *we* affirm the truth of this sentence, sometimes by stating it, but more importantly by reacting and acting in accordance with it. Its truth is in such ways made manifest in our actions.<sup>6</sup> In the religious case, however, what matters is rather connected with what I am capable of believing.

To distinguish statements concerning the resurrection and my possible redemption from the making of historical claims, Wittgenstein suggests that the events recounted in the Gospels could be “demonstrably false” in a historical sense without altering the truth they supposedly convey. He adds that it might be “important that this narrative should not have more than quite middling historical plausibility, just so that this should not be taken as the essential, decisive thing.” (Wittgenstein 1998, 36e.) His remarks here are aimed at making sense of some remarks by Kierkegaard on direct and indirect speech. He points out that “The Spirit puts what is essential, essential for your life, into these words. The point is precisely that you are SUPPOSED to see clearly only what even this representation clearly shows.” (Wittgenstein 1998, 37e.) To consider the message of the Gospels as the recounting of a historical event, albeit a miraculous one, thus disregards that for the religious person its message is essentially one of love. What the religious believer is supposed to take to heart is not only “Through his death and resurrection I am redeemed” but “Through his love I am redeemed”. In other words, belief in redemption could be articulated as the belief that “God loved me so much that he gave us his son to die for our, and my, sins.”

Believing *in* redemption, taking the thought “Through his love, I am redeemed” as true in the sense that I put my faith in it, therefore, is distinct from believing *that* the stories of resurrection give evidence of a historical event; “Because he died and then rose from the dead I am redeemed” (cf. Moyal-Sharrock 2004, 188-191). The former does not presuppose that I disregard the contradictions between different forms of testimony. Rather, I see that the ultimate truth of the Gospels, its spiritual truth, is something that the testimonies *show*. This again alerts

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<sup>6</sup> Any attempt to substantiate a claim like “Murder is wrong” easily ends up affirming what seems to be its positive equivalence “Life is inherently valuable” or simply “Life is good”. The Parliament of the World Religions provides an example of this in their attempts to articulate a global ethics, when they suggest that the directive “You shall not kill” can be stated in positive terms as “Have respect for life” (2020, 9). This description is initially intuitive, but it is important to recognize the asymmetries in the negative and the positive command (cf. Barabas 2001, 368 fn 22). In a sense fitting to the present volume one could say that a commitment to viewing life as good is the certainty at work in the background of taking “Murder is wrong” as telling us something true. If I had the space to argue for it, I would suggest that the certainty that “Life is good” is expressive of a more religious or spiritual attitude to life, which could also be characterised as a love of life.

us to the distinction between *saying* and *showing*, which from the *Tractatus* onwards was important for Wittgenstein when discussing questions of value (Wittgenstein 1993, see §§6.4-6.5, especially 6.41-6.42 and 6.522 for the beginning of this thinking. It still lives on in Wittgenstein 1965, and resurges in more modest ways in Wittgenstein 2009, e.g. §325, §573, §590). The spiritual truth I seek to “hold fast to” (Wittgenstein 1998, 39e), however, needs in no way strike me as indubitable, as in the case of Moorean certainty, or as something I should not doubt, as in the case of the moral certainty that murder is wrong. It is rather the kind of truth that inherently seems subject to doubt. It is not contingent on the empirical facts, and it is not logically necessary. But it is also not an aspect of a shared life with others that I can simply accept as certain, as the discussions of moral certainty indicate. I cannot rest assured that “This is what we do” or “This is how we react.” If I feel the need for certainty in these cases, that is, if I cling to these words as the truth, I need it precisely because *I* cannot take it as something *we* take for granted.

But if I am to be REALLY redeemed; - I need *certainty* – not wisdom, dreams, speculation – and this certainty is faith. And faith is faith in what my *heart*, my *soul*, needs, not my speculative intellect. For my soul, with its passions, as it were with its flesh & blood, must be redeemed, not my abstract mind. (Wittgenstein 1998, 39e.)

Wittgenstein here draws a distinction between the needs of his “heart” and “soul” and the needs of his “speculative intellect”. This offers one view into the different remedies philosophy and religion offer to distinct maladies of thought. Philosophy conceived as a cure against the “bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language” (Wittgenstein 2009, §109) targets problems of the intellect. Wittgenstein’s examples in *On Certainty* thus aim at a form of intellectual skepticism. They point to the surroundings of speech of which the skeptic had been forgetful. They remind us of problems involved in imagining speech not spoken by a speaker. In so far as the discussion of moral certainty targets a similar form of intellectual skepticism it also serves to rectify philosophical thought about morality that appears to be muddled. Instead of asking whether certain moral statements are true or false, we are asked to acknowledge the lived contexts in which we take them as true, and how these contexts and practices alters the meaning of “true” and “false” in this form of language. What serves as a release to the skeptical intellect, or the “abstract mind”, however, Wittgenstein suggests in his remarks on religion as a form of love, is no release for the suspicious mind, nor the dwindling heart.

The suggestion that faith is manifest in the ability to seize lovingly on a message here offers a different way of thinking of the certainty of faith, in distinction from considering the lived backgrounds that make the Moorean sentences appear odd, and the moral certainty of “Murder is wrong” a relevant thing to stress. It also offers a way of reading the diary entries under discussion, since they too exemplify a lover seizing on different thoughts in his search for certainty, in a case in which uncertainty, both in the sense of indeterminacy and doubt, is constitutive of the kind of certainty sought.

As seen, the thoughts Wittgenstein seize on are both related to personal memories of what a lover said, as in the case of, “I would not do anything to hurt the soul of friendship” (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]) and to more philosophical remarks, such as “In love I have to be able to rest secure” (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]). It is also typical of love that Wittgenstein should return to such sentences, when he is alone, writing in his diary. The suffering and fear enter, as it were, not when the lovers are close, and are able to feel the other’s love,<sup>7</sup> but when they are forced to be apart. For then what remains is the memory of what Richards had said and how Wittgenstein had felt when he said it, as well as a reflection on whether Richards really meant what he said, realized what he was saying or was taking the words seriously, raising a query about what the words mean to Wittgenstein, how he should take them, and go on after they had been spoken.

Considering the sense in which our certainty and confidence is manifest in different tonalities of thought, we may now say that depending on the emotional state we are in, *how* we seize upon such thoughts differ. When feeling down, uncertain and unloved, we are struck by thoughts such as “He doesn’t really love me”. They seem to speak to us with an impenetrable truth. When we are more hopeful it is easier to brush such thoughts aside, perhaps they do not occur to us at all. Seizing on the words of a lover in his absence can thus be done joyously, in a way that confirms the meaning of our words; “he loves me”. It can, however, also be done ever more frantically, when the other’s words do not seem to carry the hoped for meaning or show up differently when we revisit them; “his love is unsuspectingly naive and childish, a blind affection.”

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<sup>7</sup> On March 3 1949, Wittgenstein records, “Spent ten days with Ben. It was a wonderful time. Always loving...” It seems clear here that the following notes on being unwell and lacking sleep are not a consequence of them being together, and that his wondering how it will continue raises no further question about their relationship. (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-138,30a[7])

What is interesting, however, is not just *how* we seize upon a thought. Wittgenstein's observation that his "mind occupies itself with painting out possibilities, and almost always bad ones", provides a case where the failure to seize upon *any* thought itself appears as a sickness of the soul, and we might add a specific form of unhappiness.<sup>8</sup> (Cf Wittgenstein 1993, 6.43.) The realisation that an irreducible indeterminacy is part of the games we play when talking about psychological concepts, the conceptual distinction between different forms of love, or love and its semblances, is a helpful distinction to relieve oneself of certain problematic philosophical pictures (see Hertzberg 1989, Cockburn 2021). The preoccupation with indefinite possibilities, however, can come to torment a haunted soul and push them into doubt. It can consume a person's thoughts and express a failure to trust their own judgement (cf Hertzberg 1989, 93-94).

Wittgenstein's struggle to see clearly, thus, does not concern the philosophical acceptance of love as a genuine and authoritative (conceptual) possibility in his life. The certainty Wittgenstein is lacking is not that "There is love" or that "Love is good" (cf. "God is love").<sup>9</sup> As odd as such phrases may sound, they seem to sit firmly in his thinking, even if they are not firmly manifest in his life. It is the certainty that *this* is really love that stands in question. It is this uncertainty, and even more, feeling forced to recognize that it is not love, which consumes Wittgenstein. His attempts at *seizing* on different conceptual possibilities such as "For real love one needs courage" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-132,205[1]), or "In love I need to be able to rest secure" (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133,8r[2]) seek a way out of his desolation. They inform his aspirations and can in themselves be seen as words of motivation; a way of telling himself "Stay calm. Don't let your fears get the better of you. Be brave." But they also come back to judge his experience, in the way of; "Now, just when I should be fearless, I'm afraid." "I torment myself with all sorts of fearful thoughts." (Wittgenstein 2009 ii, §74) And does not this behavior, we see him thinking, reveal his failure to love? His lack of courage when he should be courageous? His lack of confidence when he should rest secure? As long as his thought circles around these possibilities, there also seems to be no end to them.

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<sup>8</sup> As the remarks about the happy and unhappy man in the *Tractatus* indicates, happiness and unhappiness for Wittgenstein describe the state of one's world, rather than a state within one's mind (Wittgenstein 1993, 6.43). The happy and unhappy lover, as Wittgenstein says, both have their particular pathos (Wittgenstein 1998, 83e).

<sup>9</sup> Or as a similar conceptual possibility at the back of the moral certainty of "Murder is wrong", consider "Human life is infinitely precious" (cf. Gaita 2004, xxvi for an initiated discussion of such locutions, and why they also may sound precious).



At the end of his second remark, however, he finally elaborates on a possibility that seems to interlink aspects of love that he first considered as distinct. He writes that love (and notice the emphasis)

*shows* – if one has it- what great value is. One learns what it means to single out a precious metal from all other. The tremendous preference leads us to see that it is our duty to defend it. The preference leads us to seriousness. The passion to seriousness. - If one does not have [or “do”, “Tut man die Vorliebe nicht” ] a preference, it is not love. (Wittgenstein Nachlass Ms-133, 8v[1]et9r[1].)

Here, preference or “Vorliebe“ no longer appears as a contrast to love. It is rather a necessary feature of our initiation in love. This way of looking at the relation between “Vorliebe”, what Monks dubs a pre-love (1991, 504), and “Liebe” does not question Richards’ attachment in the way Wittgenstein’s earlier description did, regarding the preference as distinct from love, and even as a false semblance. It may be true that Richards had a preference for him, but this does not mean that it was a *mere* preference. He may not only *grow out of* his affection, his preference may also *grow into* love. This way of looking at Richards’ love registers an important element of love; the possibility of it growing and maturing over time. As well as the recognition that in love, the judgement whether something is love or not, is not as important as actually attempting to love. Which is to say, at times, what matters is not the quality of one’s love, but one’s willingness to give it. And also, what matters is not the risk of failing, but the other who makes that risk seem no risk in the first place.

We do not know what clarity these considerations brought to Wittgenstein’s own thought. With reference to his diaries we can only tell that his more outspoken doubts with concern to Richards end here. Yet, this appears as if this would have been a good possibility for Wittgenstein to seize upon with his thoughts. Above all because it would allow him to recognize not only that *he is asked to love*, but also that *he is loved*. To spell it out: If Richards says “I love you” and Wittgenstein takes his words as true, then “the certainty of this taking-for-true” is the realization that “He loves me”, and thereby that “I am loved”, just as belief in the resurrection and redemption ultimately is belief in God’s love. This recognition itself is something that can instil faith. It can offer support, sustain a lover and enable him to rest secure. It can enable him to think differently of his life as a whole, because his lover’s presence in it would have meant that he therefore was not alone.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein’s remark that what inclines him to “believe in Christ’s resurrection” is that the alternative would leave us “orphaned & alone” (Wittgenstein 1998, 38e). Religious faith is thus an answer to this loneliness.

It is in this interplay between *loving* and *being loved* that Wittgenstein's remarks on love and religious experience can show how the ethical and religious intermingle in the dialectic of love. The *demand* to *love* is ethical, requiring strength and effort, an exercise of the virtues, where the courage Wittgenstein laments he is lacking is of course only one. It asks for action, for me as lover to get up on my feet. The *experience* and *recognition* of *being loved*, however, mimics or gives meaning to the religious. It provides nourishment for the soul. It raises my spirit and offers me a place to rest my feet. It asks not for action but for belief. This belief is not in factual or rational truth, I cannot ascertain them on my own accord. It is anchored in spiritual truths that I feel the need to take hold of, and hold fast on to, because they speak to experiences that appear to hold me.<sup>11</sup>

### Shifting certainties and good possibilities

It is a sign of a philosophical discussion progressing that things that were once in the background of our thought are brought to the forefront, and that new aspects recede into the background. In that way what appeared as a certainty in one discussion, may start to stand out as a truth in another. This is seen in the discussion on "certainty", where the agreement on what we mean by "certainty" as opposed to a "truth", a "hinge proposition" as opposed to a "proposition", leads us to speak of "certainties" as "truths" and "hinge propositions" as "propositions" only of a specific kind. "Certainty" no longer serves a contrast to "knowledge", but emerges as an object itself. It becomes subject to truth.<sup>12</sup> And as objects of knowledge, we know what epistemic certainties are ("They are 'hinge propositions'") and can ask whether they are similar enough to other utterances that appear to us as "hinges". So, we start picking out some sentences we seem to know, and that seem to resemble other sentences. We compare them. And slowly we feel there are more things that we know. We know "there are moral certainties".

As I read *On Certainty* its central contribution is not an improved ability to separate what is "true" from what is "certain". (To draw lines and count numbers.) It may be tempting to search for "truths" and "certainties", "propositions" and "hinge propositions", the sentences that are

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<sup>11</sup> This is one way of reading Wittgenstein's suggestion that religious belief can only "come about if you no longer support yourself on this earth but suspend yourself from heaven". He goes on to explain that Shifti "someone who is suspended looks like someone who is standing but the interplay of forces within him is nevertheless a quite different one & hence he is able to do quite different things than can one who stands" (Wittgenstein 1998, 38e).

<sup>12</sup> This is perhaps a lesson to draw from *On Certainty*. What at one historical point was a certainty may at another appear as a truth.

“sayable” in distinction from those that can only be “shown”. Wittgenstein too was tempted by this in the *Tractatus*. The recurring feature in these discussions, however, is the attention Wittgenstein pays to a specific form of dynamic. This is the movement between what lies in the background of our thought and action, and what in the foreground.

We can attend to this dynamic, but remain aware that what is held in place, or stands fast, in our different practices and forms of speech, can be largely different. Whereas the examples in *On Certainty* and discussions of moral certainty, for instance, suggest features at the background of our *actions*, my main examples of a *need* for certainty, are better placed in the foreground of our *thought*. Whereas the appeal to certainty in the first case points to features of our life on which our thinking hinges, the second case rather points to thoughts to which we cling when uncertain about the meaning of our life and love.

My original aim was to show that both these cases of what is certain and uncertain may be relevant to a consideration of “moral certainty”. A more unexpected outcome was that it may be equally relevant to attend to what we deem to be “certain” and “possible” in these cases, and how our certainty and lack of certainty encircle what we see as possibilities, and furthermore as good and bad possibilities in our life. What we see as certain and uncertain itself is a way of responding to specific conceptual possibilities as good or bad.

A reason for considering good and bad ways of attending to what appears morally possible to us as individuals, is that some conceptual possibilities articulate what *I* recognize as an *ethical demand*, or a *moral necessity*, rather than drawing attention to aspects of our life that show what *we* judge to be possible. Asking what *I* ought to do to love, can mostly not be answered by considering “what *we* do”, for it is *I*, not *we*, who am asked to love *you*. This suggests that the good possibility is the possibility that puts me in contact with you as, in one way or other, given, or delivered, unto me as someone to love. Turning to religion is here a way of acknowledging the spiritual need that is met by the realization that I can only discover myself as someone to be loved, by being loved by you. This is a form of certainty in love that is not manifest in action but in my ways of experiencing life as both meaningful and good.

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