Unravelling Moral Certainty: Having a Rough Story

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For Lenny and Brian

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text (Ryan Manhire, 11/05/2021).

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Summary

This thesis is a reflection on the fundamental way in which one might attend to the subject of moral certainty. Drawing on a broadly therapeutic/resolute reading of Wittgenstein, I claim that most discussions on the possibility of a Wittgensteinian notion of moral certainty, including the dominant view in the literature, draw on some form of framework reading of Wittgenstein. This leads them to approach the subject in a way that considers various forms of words, taken to have the form of moral propositions because of their content, outside of any particular context to be meaningful. By contrast, I take the meaning of such propositions to be a hallucination, and look instead at what we say and do in the context of our everyday lives for answers. Through the consideration of numerous examples, I sketch a rough picture of a new way to think about moral certainty with Wittgenstein.

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Introduction

Over the past several decades or so, but predominantly in just over the past decade, a small body of literature has been developed concerning the possibility of taking Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1975) remarks in *On Certainty* to bear on ethics. Though early accounts of the idea appeared sporadically (Goodman 1982; Lichtenberg 1994; Kober 1997), Pleasants' (2008; 2009) initial discussions of the topic, seems to have set the discussion on a particular path, which has been developed further, both in his reply to criticisms of his approach (Pleasants 2015), as well as by Hermann's (2015) and O'Hara's (2018) respective monographs on the topic.

A review of the current literature on the topic (Goodman 1982; Lichtenberg 1994; Kober 1997; Pleasants 2008; 2009; 2015; Burley 2010; Harré 2010; Christensen 2011; Brice 2013; Rummens 2013; Hermann 2015; O'Hara 2018) suggests that discussions of moral certainty seem to embrace either explicitly or implicitly what has been referred to as a "framework" reading of certainty. While what I call the dominant view (Pleasants, Hermann, O'Hara) are explicit in their connections to Moyal-Sharrock's (2004; 2005; 2013) reading of certainty, the tendency I focus on is also present in the broader conversation on moral certainty.

What this means, is that philosophers arguing for or against a universal form of moral certainty take it for granted that at the heart of their investigations are various forms of words that are taken, outside of any context, to have the form of ethical propositions. These forms of words then act as the objects of certainties, such that they become philosophical expressions of "rules of grammar" (Moyal-Sharrock 2004, p. 53) or the "*scaffolding* of our thoughts" (Wittgenstein quoted in Moyal-Sharrock 2004, p. 53, original emphasis). They act like a moral form of a Wittgensteinian hinge (OC 341; 343; 655) on which our ethical inquiries into

the permissibility of acts like abortion, euthanasia, and killing and eating animals turn.

This is most clearly seen, I argue, in Pleasant's (2008) Moyal-Sharrock inspired approach to moral certainty, when he says that there exists "propositions about things of ethical concern that take the *form* of ethical propositions but cannot actually be treated as *ethical* propositions nor become propositional knowledge" (p. 255, original emphasis). Pleasants' account of moral certainties like "Death is bad" and "Murder is wrong", takes it that such forms of words, taken outside of any context, are intelligible and philosophically useful.

He takes these forms of words to have such form because he takes ethical discourse to constitute

> … an extended family of language-games with ethical terms *via which* we address matters of moral concern (make judgements about the rightness or permissibility of certain acts, practices, and institutions, and argue about which kinds of thing have moral value and to which extent) (pp. 249-250, original emphasis).

However "Death is bad" and "Murder is wrong" cannot be treated *as* ethical propositions, because, according to Pleasants, they can neither be sensibly affirmed nor doubted (p. 263). That "Death is bad" and that "Murder is wrong" is said to

> … manifest in how we live and conduct ourselves, how we respond to sad events and wrongful acts, and in what we say in the ethical propositions that we produce as expressions of our sadness and condemnation directed at such events and acts (p. 263).

However, according to Conant's (1998) criticism of McGinn's (1989) "standard" account of *On Certainty*, it is a mistake to take Wittgenstein's view of meaning to entail that a form of words like "I know that a sick man is lying here" (OC 10), in

the context in which Wittgenstein considers it, is nonsensical due to a misfit between a form of words that we take to be meaningful, and a context in which it is appropriate to use them. For Conant, rather than taking the form of words as immediately intelligible, Wittgenstein's view, from the *Tractatus* to *On Certainty*, is that words only have meaning in a particular context (TLP 3.3; 3.326). "I know that a sick man is lying here", spoken when sitting next to a sick man that one can see clearly, is nonsense, not because it is an inappropriate time to say *that*, but because it is not quite clear what *that* is meant to mean in that context (Conant 1998, p. 230).

A fundamental disagreement appears at this point, between Conant's reading of Wittgenstein, which is often described as a "therapeutic" or "resolute" reading, and readings such as McGinn's and Moyal-Sharrock's, which are "standard" and "framework"[1] views, respectively. The relevance of this disagreement for my thesis is that it helps to bring out that the current literature on moral certainty approaches the notion of moral certainty in such a way that they take forms of words like "Death is bad", "Murder is wrong", and "Racism is wrong" to be intelligible forms of words without a context in which they make sense to say. As such, they take such words to be philosophical expressions of what our everyday lives show about of each notion, respectively.

My main contention in this thesis is that such an approach ultimately leads to a disconnect between the forms of words philosophers use to express moral certainties, and what everyday life can show us about a particular moral notion, if only we looked. Drawing both on Conant's (1998) criticism of McGinn's (1989) approach to certainty, as well as aspects of what Conant's and Diamond's (2004) therapeutic/resolute reading commits one to, my aim is to both critique what I

[1] As I understand it, there is no "standard" view, such that someone would refer to their own account as such. For many years, this kind of reading of Wittgenstein was simply *the* way to read Wittgenstein. Conant's (1998) and Conant's and Diamond's (2004) reading of Wittgenstein is part of a more recent, and I argue more philosophically useful approach to going on to ethics both with and after Wittgenstein.

call the dominant view of moral certainty (Pleasants 2008; 2009; 2015; Hermann 2015; O'Hara 2018), as well as to begin to sketch an alternative approach to moral certainty, from the ground up.

In Chapter 1, I begin by contextualising Wittgenstein's discussion in *On Certainty*. To this end, I consider Moore's (1959a; 1959b) peculiar knowledge-claims, which Moore claims he can know, though he cannot prove how he knows (p. 150). I then consider Conant's (1998) criticism of McGinn's reading of *On Certainty,* before arguing that Conant's (1998) criticisms can also be used to critique Moyal-Sharrock's (2004; 2005; 2013) reading of *On Certainty*. Crucially, I claim that because the dominant view (Pleasants 2008; 2009; 2015; Hermann 2015; O'Hara 2018) draws heavily on Moyal-Sharrock's (2004; 2005) account to shape their accounts of moral certainty, that Conant's criticism can also be directed at them. At the heart of my argument against such "standard" or "framework" readings of Wittgenstein is my claim that what Wittgenstein is urging us to do at OC 501 is to do away with the strange forms of words that Moore's initial discussion may lead us to focus on, and to look directly at the practice of language, in order to better understand the notion of certainty. It is only then, by *looking* at everyday practices and *seeing* what they show us (PI 66) that one may hope to describe the logic of our language (OC 501). Though the dominant view is right to emphasise the importance of Wittgenstein's claim that is it only in what we say and do – our deeds – that certainty is shown (see for example OC 402), by failing to fully throw away the various forms of words at the heart of their philosophical investigations (OC 501), they are blind to much that what we say and do *does* show us about certainty.

The remainder of my thesis is then dedicated to showing how the dominant view's presupposition of a connection between forms of words used in philosophy to express moral certainties on the one hand, and what our everyday lives show as *about* moral certainty on the other hand, starts to come apart. In Chapter 2, I consider Pleasants' (2008; 2009) purported moral certainty that

“Death is bad”, such that, as I suggest it could be formulated, “There is nothing to think about death but that “Death is bad””. I consider Pleasants’ arguments against the everyday thought “that death in itself may not be bad, or not *all that* bad, if it comes at the end of a reasonably long and satisfactory life and does not involve much suffering” (Pleasants 2008, p. 257, original emphasis), as well as against the Epicurean claims that because death is not an event in our lives, that “[d]eath is nothing to us” (Epicurus 1994b, p. 32). I consider Burley’s (2010) argument against Pleasants that it is possible for the Epicurean to agree that “Death is bad” is a moral certainty (that we may wish to try to alleviate the fear of), before responding to both Pleasants and Burley from a broadly therapeutic/resolute reading of Wittgenstein. This involves reflecting on what I take to be five examples of recognisable ways of thinking about death that appear to be conceptually blocked from Pleasants’ account of “Death is bad” as a moral certainty.

In Chapter 3, I consider Pleasants’ (2008; 2009; 2015) purported moral certainty that “Murder is wrong”. It might be argued that though “Death is bad” may be a bad example of a moral certainty, that surely “Murder is wrong” is a form of words that cannot be doubted. However, I argue that to take “Murder is wrong”, outside of a use, to show us anything about moral certainty, is to again conceptually block much of that what we might say about murder. To support this claim, I consider the context in which hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar (2017) says in his song ‘XXX’ that “[i]f somebody kill my son, that mean somebody gettin’ killed”, which he connects to what one would “do for love”. My claim is that rather than a psychopath, the context in which Lamar uses these words shows the listener a man struggling with a violent, gang related upbringing on the one hand, and the importance of respecting other human beings *as* human beings on the other hand. The complexity of the example is lost to one, however, if one holds that “There is nothing to think but that “Murder is wrong””, such that “Murder is wrong” is a moral certainty – a “hinge” that is never questioned in our moral inquiries. Here, my claim is not that sometimes “Murder is right”, but that there

might be contexts in which we might think the murderer guilty by law, but morally innocent. Philosophers miss this aspect of what we talk about when we talk about murder, if their vision remains shaped by the form of words "Murder is wrong" as a moral certainty. A hallucination of meaning blinds one to the meaning of what Lamar has to say to us.

In Chapter four, I consider Hermann's (2015) discussion of moral justification, and the claim that appears inherent to this, that "Racism is wrong" is a moral certainty (p. 70-73). Here, my focus is on how Hermann's account of moral justification shapes her account of moral certainty, such that the possibility that one might present a potentially successful moral justification for racism is excluded from the grammar of moral justification. Hermann's claim is that if we do request a justification for racist claims like "blacks are inferior to whites", that it "has the function of forcing someone to reflect on his prejudices", the best case scenario being "that the person in question comes to see the falsity of his belief, and abandons it" (p. 72). By contrast, I consider the case of the disagreement between the Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter movements in the United States, and argue that this disagreement does not concern whether "There is nothing to think but that "Racism is wrong"", but what counts *as* racism. Drawing on the lyrics and music video of hip hop artist Joyner Lucas' (2017a; 2017b) song 'I'm Not Racist', Diamond's (1991b) discussion of forms of moral argument, and what I call a Wittgensteinian notion of "invitational moral persuasion", I present a picture of a recognisable context of human beings struggling with racism. Contrary to Hermann's claim that "[o]ur everyday practices reveal that in justifying our moral convictions we sooner or later run out of reasons", (pp. 2-3) such that "[a]t some point we cannot do more than repeat […] a moral conviction the truth of which seems obvious to us"(p. 3), that at such points, we may go on to try to persuade the other (OC 262; 612). Lucas' music video reminds us, I argue, of how one might go about trying to overcome, or at least try to make sense of, issues of racism in the particular contexts in which it shows itself to us.

The general approach I take throughout my thesis draws, as I have mentioned, on a broadly therapeutic/resolute reading of Wittgenstein (Conant 1998; Conant and Diamond 2004), as well as Diamond's (1996) discussion of ethical propositions according to the *Tractatus* and *On Certainty*. However, I have also mentioned thinking about forms of words for which there is nothing else to think, such that "There is nothing to think about murder but that "Murder is wrong"". This way of approaching purported moral certainties draws on Diamond's (2019) discussion of a related discussion concerning David Wiggins' formulation that "There is nothing to think but that slavery is unjust and unsupportable" (Diamond 2019, p. 272). In Chapters 2-4, I consider a particular form of words "Death is bad", "Murder is wrong", "Racism is wrong" in such a way that "There is nothing to think but that …", where what follows "that" is one of the respective moral certainties. This brings out the dominant view's emphasis on thinking of moral certainty in a way that forms of words like "Murder is wrong" are indubitable, and thus act as moral hinges in all our moral thinking. In approaching these formulations, and contrasting them with everyday life, I also draw on an approach inspired by Hertzberg's approach to the importance of taking everyday contexts seriously. In 'On the Factual Dependence of the Language Game', Hertzberg (1994) sees an issue with the idea of one having a basic conviction that one has never thought before (p. 61). Finding one's way out of the difficulty here, is to think of such basic convictions "not as entities in the minds of the persons to whom they are attributed, but as ways of regarding their thought and conduct" (p. 62). In 'Ethics as We Talk It' (2021), Hertzberg considers expressions of what he calls "a diminished or restricted view of meaningful speech" (p. 15), which he claims is present in the *Tractatus* and 'A Lecture on Ethics', as well as a similar view being present "in much twentieth-century analytic philosophy" (p. 16). Against this, he considers a series of everyday conversations, treating these cases not "as empirical evidence, as a way of proving: "This is how we talk"", but as reminders of how we talk, reliant on their recognisability to the reader/listener (p. 21). Chapters 2-4 are taken to

largely follow this approach, in first considering a particular moral certainty, and then presenting reminders of how we do talk about certain notions. My approach to the subject would not have succeeded were the pictures I attempt to give the reader at various points not recognisable. In doing so, I take myself to be unravelling the approach to moral certainty that the current literature (Goodman 1982; Lichtenberg 1994; Kober 1997; Pleasants 2008; 2009; 2015; Burley 2021; Harré 2010; Christensen 2011; Brice 2013; Rummens 2013; Hermann 2015; O'Hara 2018) appears to be wound up in, and offering a rough story of what I argue is a more plausible, and more elucidating way to approach the topic of moral certainty in its place.

1 – On the Difficulty of Reading *On Certainty* and Going On to Ethics

Introduction

To illuminate the foundations or fundamental nature of human morality, a small group of philosophers have recently looked to the remarks of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (1975) – a text that focuses on what in the literature is often referred to as a series of "empirical certainties" – for a way in which to explore the possibility of a moral form of certainty. Such approaches tend to be shaped by questions revolving around whether "moral" propositions such as "Murder is wrong" are just as certain as, after gesturing with one's hand, the "empirical" proposition "Here is one hand" appears to be. Both supporters and critics then focus their attention on the similarities and differences between the various "moral certainties" that are posited, and the "empirical certainties" found throughout *On Certainty*. Approaches based upon this analogy are argued for by Nigel Pleasants (2008, 2009, 2015), Julia Hermann (2015), and Neil O'Hara (2018), who have become the leading authorities on the notion of a Wittgensteinian form of moral certainty. As such, they will collectively be referred to throughout this thesis as proponents of "the dominant view of moral certainty", or "the dominant view", and my discussion throughout this thesis will largely be in response to their general approach to the topic.

Developing moral analogues of the empirical certainties discussed by Wittgenstein, however, is not without its difficulties. This is because, as the editors of *On Certainty* note, the text "is first draft material, which he [Wittgenstein] did not live to excerpt and polish" (OC, Preface). It was written over the course of what the editors believe to be four separate periods during the final eighteen months of Wittgenstein's life. So close to the end of

Wittgenstein's life were these notes written, that "[t]he last entry is two days before his death on April 29th 1951" (OC, Preface).

On Certainty is in large part a response to G. E. Moore's two texts 'A Defence of Common Sense' (1959a) and 'Proof of an External World' (1959b). In each text, Moore claims that he knows with certainty the truth of propositions which he cannot prove, but yet seem to be beyond doubt. While Wittgenstein criticises Moore for claiming to "know" such propositions, he is nevertheless struck by their seemingly indubitable nature. His investigations into the nature of these strange propositions waver between the notions of "knowledge" and what he will come to see as a form of "certainty" (OC 308). However, the unpolished notes that constitute *On Certainty* do not proceed in a linear fashion, and as Danièle Moyal-Sharrock (2004) notes in her monograph *Understanding Wittgenstein's* On Certainty, what we are witnessing is Wittgenstein "philosophizing *live*" (p. 1, original emphasis) in a series of remarks that are very much "a work *in progress*" (p. 3, original emphasis). Moyal-Sharrock goes on to say that

> [u]pon opening *On Certainty*, the reader is abruptly drawn behind the scenes to witness the struggle of a philosopher alone with his subject. We are taken on an intellectual journey, where all is expressed and shared: the questioning, the perplexity, the wavering, the seeming contradictions, the frustration and the near resignation; but also the upward path, the sightings, the apprehensions, the unfolding evidence, the deliberations, the suspense and the solutions. The result, for the reader, of this seemingly chaotic and unsettled development, is double edged. It can make for a disconcerting, or even discouraging reading; but it can also make for one of the most powerfully engaging readings in all of philosophy. Our having to *live the text*, follow Wittgenstein through the delineation of his thought, become tuned to his developing nuances, to the subtleties of his internal allusions, the precise weight of his emphases, the sometimes misleading use of his words, the obscure and

> yet unavoidable interrelatedness of the various strands of thought, is what makes *On Certainty* the most fascinating and challenging of Wittgenstein's works (pp. 1-2, original emphasis).

The nature of *On Certainty* thus leaves it open to a range of different interpretations. This can be seen, for example, in the plethora of different readings found in the collection *Readings of Wittgenstein's* On Certainty (2005), edited by Danièle Moyal-Sharrock and William H. Brenner. Here the readings, though themselves unique, are grouped into the categories of the "framework", "transcendental", "epistemic", and "therapeutic" readings of *On Certainty*, respectively. The editors describe "framework" readings as concerned with expounding or critically examining "foundational and grammatical views of *On Certainty*", "transcendental" readings as concerned with "neo-Kantian and neo-Realist interpretations of the world", "epistemic" readings as an examination of "the epistemic versus nonepistemic nature of the certainty in question", and "therapeutic" readings as concerned with "nudging us *away from* framework and transcendental readings, and *towards* a less theoretical, more dialectical and open-textured interpretation of Wittgenstein's aims" (Moyal-Sharrock and Brenner 2005, p. 3, original emphasis).

For the purposes of my thesis, I will contrast the dominant view of moral certainty, which I take to be a moral analogue of the "framework" reading put forward in Danièle Moyal-Sharrock's *Understanding Wittgenstein's* On Certainty (2004) and 'Unravelling Certainty' (2005), with a "therapeutic" reading I develop from criticisms of aspects of framework readings. The broadly "therapeutic" approach I take is drawn largely from James Conant's (1998) 'Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use', and James Conant's and Cora Diamond's (2004) 'On reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan'. My central concern here is the different philosophical pictures concerning the nature of Moore's propositions that develop from differing understandings of what Wittgenstein means when he claims, at various points throughout *On*

Certainty, that they are "nonsense" (OC 10; 35; 37; 461; 500). On the framework reading, such propositions are taken to be instances of a substantial form of nonsense, such that Wittgenstein's claim that they are nonsensical entails them being understandable sentences that make no sense when put forward as knowledge claims. Rather, such sentences are taken as grammatical propositions that determine what can and cannot be said in a given context. On the therapeutic reading however, such propositions are taken to be instances of mere nonsense, such that Wittgenstein's claim that they are nonsensical entails it not being clear exactly what is being said.

These differing understandings of what Wittgenstein means by "nonsense" stem back to differing interpretations of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (2001), and in particular what Wittgenstein means in his penultimate remark that to understand *him*, his readers should come to see the *propositions* he has put forward as nonsensical. In doing so, propositions that were once used as the metaphorical steps of a ladder to express apparently intelligible thoughts are climbed beyond before the ladder is thrown away. The result, according to Wittgenstein, is that the propositions are transcended, and one will then "see the world aright" (TLP 6.54). In other words, if we understand Wittgenstein in this earlier text, and come to see his propositions, that we might have earlier taken to be meaningful expressions of thought, as nonsense, we are able to see our area of inquiry more clearly for what it really is, without succumbing to what Wittgenstein refers to in the 'Preface' as misunderstandings concerning "the logic of our language".

Throughout my thesis, I will take the therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein, both in relation to the *Tractatus* and *On Certainty*, to be correct. Thus, it will be important for my purposes to be clear about what I take the distinction between the framework and therapeutic readings of the Wittgenstein to be.

My aim here is to provide a clear picture of how the reading of moral certainty I develop throughout this thesis differs at a fundamental level from accounts of

moral certainty in the current literature, in particular the dominant view of moral certainty, and to what extent the current approach in the literature is held back by its reliance on the framework reading of Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense". To this end, along with what Wittgenstein means when he describes a form of words as "nonsense", I will also need to clarify the connected issue of what to make of the so-called saying/showing distinction, which stems from the *Tractarian* remark that "[w]hat *can* be shown, *cannot* be said" (TLP 4.1212). Wittgenstein's point is that we cannot express "the logical form of reality" (TLP 4.121) *as* propositions because propositions already mirror, in whatever they express, this logical form. However, on the framework reading, forms of words that are deemed nonsense can nevertheless, due to their content, show something that cannot be said. The therapeutic reading, by contrast, takes it that it is only what can be meaningfully said that shows us anything – forms of words deemed nonsensical show us nothing. The consequences of these differing readings in relation to the notion of moral certainty is that while a framework reading of moral certainty can develop from an analogue of the sense read into Wittgenstein's empirical certainties in *On Certainty*, a therapeutic reading cannot, and must develop an alternative account of moral certainty directly from what people say and do. On the one hand, a framework reading can develop an analogue between "Murder is wrong" and "Here is one hand", and claim that the former is just as certain as the latter, and is thus an example of a moral certainty. "Murder is wrong" is argued to be a moral certainty because it can neither be doubted, nor proven, and as such makes no sense to say. However that "Murder is wrong" shows itself in what we say and do in our everyday lives. On the other hand, the therapeutic reading I will develop as a response to this kind of framework reading stems from close attention to what we say and do in our everyday lives, and what this shows us about the notion of murder. Unlike framework readings, it does away completely with the propositional form of "Murder is wrong". In doing so however, I argue that we are able to see aspects of our life with the notion of murder that are conceptually blocked by claims like

"There is nothing to think about murder but that "Murder is wrong"", and are thus able to better conceptualise a Wittgensteinian notion of moral certainty.

Challenging the Dominant Reading of Moral Certainty

As one of the leading proponents of a "framework" reading of *On Certainty,* Moyal-Sharrock's (2004) book-length treatment of the topic, *Understanding Wittgenstein's* On Certainty, has arguably become recent mandatory reading for anyone serious about understanding Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. It has been followed up by at least two articles (2005; 2013) that further elaborate on and defend this reading. While my intention is not to delve too deeply into the intricacies of Moyal-Sharrock's account, it is important for my project to highlight certain features that proponents of moral certainty embrace in their respective discussions, either wittingly or unwittingly. This is the case both for the dominant reading of moral certainty (Pleasants 2008; 2009; 2015, Hermann 2015; O'Hara 2018), which is explicit about its links to Moyal-Sharrock's notion of "objective certainty" (discussed below), and for the majority of the current literature on moral certainty in the way that both proponents and critics discuss the possibility of moral certainty. The tendency that appears to me common throughout almost all discussion of Wittgensteinian notions of moral certainty is a focus on the nature of various Moore-type propositions with moral content. For Pleasants, these are the propositions "Death is bad" (2008, p. 263; 2009, p. 677), "Killing is wrong" (2008, p. 263; 2009, p. 679), and "Murder is wrong" (2009, p. 677); for Hermann (2015), these are the propositions "It is wrong to kill this child" (p. 94), "Promises have to be kept" (p. 99), "Slavery is wrong" (p. 100), and "People are free to do otherwise" (p. 101), while her discussion of moral justification suggests "Racism is wrong" (p. 70-72) would also be a moral certainty; and for O'Hara (2018), these are the propositions "This one [person] before me is owed some consideration" (O'Hara 2018, p. vi), "At least some

killings are wrong", and "Some acts are more wrong/right than others" (O'Hara 2018, p. 100).

Though my focus in this thesis is on the dominant view of moral certainty put forward by these three philosophers (Pleasants, Hermann, and O'Hara), it is also the case that the majority of the remaining literature on moral certainty speaks of the notion in relation to a series of propositions with moral content. These include the following propositions: "I know that running down a child on a bicycle is wrong" (Lichtenberg 1994, p. 186), "Killing people is evil", "Helping others is right", "All men and women have equal rights" (Kober 1997, p. 373), "the people who gave themselves out as my parents really were [or are] my parents" (Wittgenstein quoted in Christensen 2011, p. 151), "a human baby cannot look after itself" (Moyal-Sharrock quoted in Christensen 2011, p. 151). In each case, the proposition is taken to be a meaningful form of words that are then reflected upon as a possible candidate for a moral certainty, due to each candidate's inability to be doubted or proven.[2] Thus, the tendency that I see running through the dominant reading, to refer to moral certainty predominantly through a series of intelligible philosophical propositions that one might like to claim as moral certainties, runs through the majority of the literature on the topic as well.

With this in mind, the question could be asked: What would an account of moral certainty look like that draws on a therapeutic, rather than framework reading of Wittgenstein? What would its benefits be over a framework account? To answer these questions, in this chapter, I begin by drawing on a critique of Marie McGinn's reading of *On Certainty* put forward by James Conant. In 'Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use' (1998), Conant presents a critique of a framework reading

[2] It should be noted that though these philosophers are connected in their presentation of various forms of words as candidates of moral certainty, the various forms of words they provide show that there is no homogenous picture of what counts *as* an ethical proposition. For example, Christensen's use of Wittgenstein's remark about one's parents would not be considered by Pleasants an ethical proposition, because it does not have the form of a judgement concerning an action, such that "Doing X is right/wrong".

put forward by Marie McGinn in her monograph *Sense and Certainty* (1989). He emphasises McGinn's claim that for Wittgenstein, Moore's propositions are nonsensical because of a misfit between an assertion to "know" the truth of a proposition on the one hand, and the content of the proposition itself on the other hand. That is, according to Conant (1998), McGinn "takes the charge of unintelligibility to be directed not at what Moore or the skeptic says but at the act of attempting to assert it" (p. 226). By contrast, Conant argues that Wittgenstein's

> … point is rather that it is not clear what Moore and the skeptic are doing with their words – i.e. what the context of use is supposed to be – and hence what it is that they are saying" (p. 242).

In this chapter, my intention is to draw a parallel between Conant's description of Marie McGinn's reading of Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense" in *On Certainty* and the reading of "nonsense" that Moyal-Sharrock (2004) draws on to argue for her account of the nature of "objective certainties" (p. 52). I then couple Conant's critique of McGinn with Conant's and Diamond's (2004) claim that the *Tractarian* Wittgenstein held that only meaningful or senseless[3] propositions show us anything, while nonsensical propositions show us nothing (p. 66), to present a critique of Moyal-Sharrock's (2004) account of objective certainties (p. 52). My claim here is that "objects" of Moyal-Sharrock's objective certainty – the propositions that are taken to be intelligible descriptions of "rules of grammar" (p. 53) or the "*scaffolding* of our thoughts" (Wittgenstein quoted in Moyal-Sharrock 2004, p. 52, original emphasis) – should be understood as hallucinations of senseful propositions that ought to be thrown away.

[3] The term "senseless propositions" here refers to propositions that express tautologies or contradictions. For Wittgenstein, though "[t]autologies and contradictions lack sense" (TLP 4.461), they "are not, however, nonsensical" (TLP 4.4611). Though I remark in Chapters 2 and 3 that Pleasants' account of "Killing is wrong" appears tautological, my arguments against Pleasants el al. concern not whether the objects of moral certainty are tautologies, but whether meaning can be ascribed to them at all. Thus, the focus of my thesis is on Wittgenstein's notion of nonsense, rather than senseless propositions.

The criticism levelled at Moyal-Sharrock's objective certainties can then be applied to the accounts of moral certainty put forward by Pleasants, Hermann, and O'Hara, to the extent that they develop their accounts of moral certainties from Moyal-Sharrock's account of "objective certainties". I argue, further, that most of the literature on moral certainty, whether part of the dominant reading or not, can also be criticised in a similar way, which results in my conclusion that the current literature on moral certainty is problematic and ought to be fundamentally rethought. Why it ought to be rethought and in what way it ought to be rethought will then be the subject of my subsequent chapters, where I focus on the purported moral certainties that "Death is bad" in Chapter 2, "Murder is wrong" in Chapter 3, and "Racism is wrong" in Chapter 4. In each case, I will argue that one is better able to understand aspects of what we might want to call moral certainty if one focuses on what is said about these notions in recognisably human contexts in which they often occur.

Before I do this, however, I will present a reading of the two texts of Moore's that Wittgenstein is responding to, as well the general way in which Wittgenstein responds to them in *On Certainty.*

***On Certainty*: Preliminary Remarks**

On Certainty is generally understood to be a work that focuses on what one means when one claims to "know" the truth of a proposition, as well as the logic or grammar, and the human form of life that shapes this practice. The work is thus commonly, though not exclusively (see Crary 2005; Christensen 2011) understood to be a work that has nothing to say about ethics, focusing instead entirely on questions concerning epistemology.

The text is in large part a response to two papers by G. E. Moore (1959) – 'A Defence of Common Sense' (1959a) and 'Proof of an External World' (1959b) – in which Moore claims to "*know* with certainty" a series of propositions "to be

true" (1959a, p. 33), though he can neither prove that he knows them (1959b, p. 150), nor is able to doubt that he knows them (p. 146).

The editors of *On Certainty* note that "[i]n the middle of 1949, [Wittgenstein] visited the United States at the invitation of Norman Malcolm, staying at Malcolm's house in Ithaca" (OC, Preface). It was there they claim that

> Malcolm acted as a goad to his [Wittgenstein's] interest in Moore's 'defence of common sense', that is to say his claim to *know* a number of propositions for sure, such as "Here is one hand, and here is another", and "The earth existed for a long time before my birth", and "I have never been far from the earth's surface" (OC, Preface).

In *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, Malcolm (1958) describes these discussions "as of the most value that summer" (p. 87), noting a remark of Wittgenstein's that "struck me then, as it does now, as being especially noteworthy and as summing up a good deal of his philosophy" (p. 93). The remark Malcolm refers to is that "[a]n expression has meaning only in the stream of life" (Wittgenstein quoted in Malcolm 1958, p. 93). This remark of Wittgenstein's to Malcolm will act as an important reference point for much that I have to say about how the current literature on moral certainty goes wrong, and how one might reconceptualise the notion with the aim of better illuminating aspects of our fundamental morality. In what follows, I will outline the core arguments in Moore's two papers, before turning to Wittgenstein's response to them in *On Certainty*.

Moore's 'A Defence of Common Sense' and 'Proof of an External World'

Moore's 'A Defence of Common Sense' (1959a) and 'Proof of an External World' (1959b) are in large part a response to the Cartesian scepticism developed by René Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1998). In 'First

Meditation', which bears the subheading 'Things which can be called into Doubt', Descartes famously claims that he cannot be certain that, rather than being "here, sitting by the fire, wearing a dressing gown, [and] holding this page in my hand", that he is not "really undressed and asleep in my bed", as he "can never distinguish, by reliable signs, being awake from being asleep" (p. 19). He claims further that he cannot be certain that "the sky, air, earth, colours, shapes, sounds and everything external to me are nothing more than the creatures of dreams by means of which an evil spirit entraps my credulity", before also casting doubt on the existence of his hands, eyes, flesh, blood, and his senses and beliefs about the existence of these things (p. 22). Thus, it seems that what can be doubted, for Descartes, is everything, or almost everything. What Descartes does not seem to question, or to think to question in the 'First Meditation', are the meanings of the words he uses to attempt to express his doubts. That is, Descartes does not question the meaning of words like "doubt", "existence", or "hands", as he attempts to cast doubt on the existence of his hands.

By contrast, in 'A Defence of Common Sense' (1959), Moore lists a series of propositions "which may seem, at first sight, such obvious truisms as not to be worth stating" (p. 32). The propositions Moore is concerned with here include knowing that he has a body, that this body was one day born, will one day die, has grown since it was born into what is now an adult body, and that this body has lived its life "either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth" (p. 33). During the time in which his body has existed on or near the surface of the earth, Moore notes that various other things have existed, of varying shapes and sizes, from which his body has been at varying distances, and often in contact with (in the sense that his body is closer to his mantelpiece than his bookcase, and in contact with the pen he holds and the clothes he wears as he writes his remarks). Since its birth, Moore continues, his body has been surrounded by other human bodies that were also born, that will one day die, and that too have lived "either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth" (p. 33). Further, Moore claims to know that the earth itself

> …had existed also for many years before my body was born; and for many of these years, also, large numbers of human bodies had, at every moment, been alive upon it; and many of these bodies had died and ceased to exist before it was born (p. 33).

These propositions might be considered members of a class of propositions concerned with an awareness of the existence of oneself, other human beings, and the world in which they live at a particular moment of reflection. Moore then speaks of "a different class of propositions" (p. 33), which concerns a series of experiences he describes his body as having not just at that particular moment, but over the course of his body's life. These include perceptions of his own body, and the bodies of others, the observation of facts about these objects (human and non-human) concerning, for example, their proximity to one another, beliefs and expectations about the future, and the experience of dreaming while asleep.

Moore then asserts that he *knows with certainty* that not only he, but that very many other (but not all) human beings *know with certainty* the truth of corresponding propositions in their own cases (p. 34). What Moore does in 'A Defence of Common Sense', then, is to present an explicit contrast to what Descartes claims he cannot be certain of, by listing a similar series of propositions and claiming that not only he, but very many other human beings *are* certain of them.

The result is a series of propositions that, if I understand Moore, aim to bind us together as human beings, as most of us could be said to know with certainty their truth – it is at least very difficult to know what one would mean by *denying* them. The point is not a moral one (though I think there is merit in borrowing Moore's voice to make it a moral point), but nevertheless emphasises the human world we share with one another. We have a sense of our own bodies, the bodies of others, the way in which they will live and die, and that they share the place (the surface of the earth) on which they live. This is "common sense" in the sense that it is common to most of us, but also "common sense" in the sense that *that*

we share this sense seems "so obvious as to not be worth stating" (Moore 1959a, p. 32). To claim to know the truth of these propositions with certainty is to attempt to answer the sceptic by removing the possibility of doubt from them. In other words, what Descartes suggests can be doubted by a human being (namely, the existence of himself, other human beings, and the world), Moore claims is for very many human beings impossible to doubt, because the existence of these things is known with certainty to be true.

In a similar vein, in 'Proof of an External World' (1959b), Moore takes on the task of proving the existence of the external world (the one that we all know with certainty that our human bodies have lived on or near the surface of, and the one that Descartes suggests might be the result of an evil spirit deceiving his senses), as a way of engaging with and attempting to answer the challenges of the sceptic of the external world. The paper contains Moore's most well-known claim in relation to Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. In order to prove that things outside of human beings exist (that is, things in the external world, and thus the external world itself), Moore asserts, after gesturing with his hand, that "Here is one hand" (p. 146).[4] However, though Moore claims that "I certainly did at the moment *know* that which I expressed by the combination of certain gestures" while saying the words "Here is one hand", he concedes that he cannot *prove* that he knows this (p. 150, original emphasis). Though he sees the strangeness of such a situation (an assertion of knowledge that cannot be proven), this does not lead him to abandon his knowledge claim. Rather, Moore makes the further claim that "I can know things, which I cannot prove" (p. 150).

It is interesting to note at this point, however, a form of alienation in Moore's approach, in that in attempting to bind human beings together in a way that emphasises the obviousness of their humanity to themselves as human beings

[4] Moore (1959) actually asserts "Here is one hand […] and here is another" (p. 146), but I simplify the point to only mention one hand, as nothing philosophically hangs on the longer example that features two hands. Wittgenstein himself refers only to the phrase "*here is one hand*" (OC 1, original emphasis).

and to other human beings as human beings, he speaks not of *people* being born, but of bodies being born, including his own body. That is, Moore speaks of himself and of others as objects about which knowledge claims can be made. Thus, in attempting to overcome the doubt of the Cartesian sceptic, Moore's use of the Cartesian terminology – the use of "bodies" rather than "people" – leads to a conceptual gap between his philosophical approach and the common sensical human form of life he draws on to attempt to overcome the sceptic.

Another issue is that Moore's approach may divide us as philosophers, rather than unite us, as it may lead to a situation in which followers of Descartes may claim that certain things can be doubted, while all that followers of Moore can do is claim that what the sceptic claims can be doubted *cannot* be doubted, and there is nothing that either can do to resolve the deadlock. Followers of Descartes may claim that "I can doubt that this body that is mine exists!" while followers of Moore may claim that "I know with certainty that this body that is mine exists!" A central theme in my thesis, is that one cannot silence an opposing view by simply shouting that one is certain of one's own view, no matter how loudly one may shout. Rather, one is better off inviting an opponent to see things from one's own perspective, and to consider what is at stake, what the cost is, in denying one's world picture, rather than simply insisting a particular form of words is indubitable.

On Certainty: The Inability to Prove or to Doubt What Moore Claims to Know

These issues aside, Wittgenstein also sees the strangeness of Moore's claims to know with certainty the truth of a series of propositions he can neither prove nor doubt, and thus *On Certainty* begins with the quip, directed at Moore, that "[i]f you do know that *here is one hand*, we'll grant you all the rest" (OC 1, original emphasis). But Wittgenstein will not grant that Moore knows that "Here is one

hand". For he sees Moore's use of "know" as a kind of "misuse" (OC 6) or "wrong use" (for example OC 178), and thus takes Moore's claims to be a form of "nonsense" (for example OC 10). Early in his remarks, Wittgenstein asks if one can

> … enumerate what one knows (like Moore)? Straight off like that, I believe not. – For otherwise the expression "I know" gets misused (OC 6).

To claim to "know" a proposition typically involves being able to justify the claim, by providing evidence in support of what one claims to know:

> What is the proof that I *know* something? Most certainly not my saying I know it (OC 487).
>
> It would not be enough to assure someone that I know what is going on at a certain place – without giving him grounds that satisfy him that I am in a position to know (OC 438).
>
> The correct use of the expression "I know". Someone with bad sight asks me: "do you believe that the thing we can see there is a tree?" I reply "I *know* it is; I can see it clearly and am familiar with it". – A: "Is N. N. at home?" – I: "I believe he is." – A: "Was he at home yesterday?" – I: "Yesterday he was – I know he was; I spoke to him." – A: "Do you know or only believe that this part of the house is built on later than the rest?" – I: "I *know* it is; I got it from so and so." (OC 483, original emphasis)
>
> In these cases, then, one says "I know" and mentions how one knows, or at least one can do so (OC 484).
>
> One says "I know" when one is ready to give compelling grounds. "I know" relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth. Whether someone knows something can come to light, assuming that he is convinced of it (OC 243).

> "I know it" I say to someone else; and here there is a justification (OC 174).

Throughout the notes published as *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein returns time after time to what we mean when we say that we "know" something, in an attempt to make sense of what Moore is trying to say. What Wittgenstein illustrates in the remarks above, is that it is no use attempting to convince someone that you know something by emphasising strongly that you *believe* your knowledge claim to be *true*, though you cannot prove it. What is required, rather, are justifications, or the giving of grounds, to what you claim to know.

For example, it could be that soon after I had moved to Åbo in Finland several years ago, while out in the street a person asks if I know the way to Åbo Akademi University. Perhaps I am wearing a student's boilersuit (*studentoverall/studenthalare*), but look lost, and so they are asking if I need directions, or perhaps I look like I know where I am going and they are asking if I can direct *them*. In both cases, the question "Do you know the way to Åbo Akademi?" is a question that makes sense to ask. Even if it turns out that the person was asking me I knew the way because I looked lost, but was not in fact lost, it makes sense for the person to say "My mistake, you looked lost, have a nice day". It could also be the case that I *thought* I knew the way, but that I was wrong and have eventually gotten lost, wishing I had gotten the directions.

As Wittgenstein will argue throughout *On Certainty*, such mistakes are possible and make sense when one is speaking about what one knows, but not in the case of propositions such as those that Moore claims to know with certainty but cannot prove. This is because "[i]n order to make a mistake, a man must already judge in conformity with mankind" (OC 156):

> For months I have lived at address A, I have read the name of the street and the number of the house countless times, have received countless letters here and given countless people the address. If I am wrong about

> it, the mistake is hardly less than if I were (wrongly) to believe I was writing Chinese and not German (OC 70).
>
> If my friend were to imagine one day that he had been living for a long time past in such and such a place, etc. etc., I should not call this a *mistake*, but rather a mental disturbance, perhaps a transient one (OC 71, original emphasis).
>
> Can we say: a *mistake* doesn't only have a cause, it also has a ground? I.e., roughly: when someone makes a mistake, this can be fitted into what he knows aright (OC 74, original emphasis).

Wittgenstein's point is that a mistake is something that makes sense within our practice of knowledge-claims, but not in relation to the propositions Moore is attempting to put forward as knowledge claims. If upon finally making my way to the university, I say to my friend, "I got lost because I accidentally turned left one street too early", my friend may remark that "That's an easy mistake to make, especially in an area you're unfamiliar with". The mistake makes sense. However, I cannot be making a mistake in relation to, for example, the possibility that the location of the university *changes*. If I were to say "I got lost because I crossed to the other side of the Aura River to make sure that the university had not teleported over there, and then couldn't find my way back when I realised that it hadn't", my friend would not take this to be a mistake on my part, but some form of mental disturbance, where my thinking had gone off the rails. In such a situation, my friend might call an ambulance, suspecting something had gone horribly wrong with me. It is not clear what sense could be made of such a wild claim.

Another way of saying that Moore cannot be making a mistake about what he claims to know is that there seems to be no possibility of doubting the propositions he puts forward. Moore (1959b) himself remarks in 'Proof of an External World' on the indubitable nature of his knowledge claims when he

states, while reflecting on the gesture he made with his hand and claiming that knows that his hand is *here*, that it would be absurd to say that this was merely a belief that he may be mistaken about, (p. 146):

> You might as well suggest that I do not know that I am now standing up and talking – that perhaps after all I'm not, and that it's not quite certain that I am! (pp. 146-147)

Wittgenstein also sees this point, remarking that

> [i]n certain circumstances a man cannot make a *mistake.* ("Can" is here used logically, and the proposition does not mean that a man cannot say anything false in those circumstances.) If Moore were to pronounce the opposite of those propositions which he declares certain, we should not just not share his opinion: we should regard him as demented (OC 155, original emphasis).

For Wittgenstein, Moore's inability to be making a mistake about what he claims to know is a logical impossibility, such that to make a mistake here would be to judge outside of the logic of human thought (OC 156). Where mistake is logically impossible, so too is doubt, and this leads Wittgenstein to consider at various points the possibility of propositions that are beyond doubt:

> … we are interested in the fact that about certain empirical propositions no doubt can exist if making judgements is to be possible at all. Or again: I am inclined to believe that not everything that has the form of an empirical proposition *is* one (OC 308, original emphasis).

> That is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn (OC 341, original emphasis).

Much of *On Certainty* is then dedicated to trying to make sense of the propositions in which Moore claims to know things that he cannot prove, for

Wittgenstein suspects that through Moore's misuse of knowledge-claims, "a queer and extremely important mental state seems to be revealed (OC 6). At one point, Wittgenstein will make a categorical distinction between "knowledge" and what he comes to refer to as "certainty" (OC 308), and thus *On Certainty* becomes in large part an attempt to make sense of this notion and its relation to Moore's strange propositions.

The Disputed Nature of Moore-Type Propositions

So far, I have presented an outline of Moore's claims to know the truth of certain propositions that can neither be proven nor doubted, and Wittgenstein's response to Moore that his propositions are nonsensical because he misuses the word "know", in a way that might suggest that were Moore to replace the word "know" with "certain", in propositions like "I am certain here is one hand", or "It is certain that the Earth existed long before my birth", that such propositions would no longer be nonsensical. That is, that it is perfectly intelligible what Moore is saying, but that his propositions as they stand are nevertheless nonsensical because he prefixes them with "I *know*". There are certainly many remarks throughout *On Certainty* that may suggest this kind of reading, some of which I have quoted above (for example, 155; 308; 341). This might lead one to conclude, as various philosophers have (for example, McGinn 1989; Moyal-Sharrock 2004; Pleasants 2008), that what Wittgenstein is ultimately claiming in *On Certainty* is that there exists a series of judgements or attitudes, spelled out in propositions like "Here is one hand", that are immune to doubt, and that the existence of these "certainties" dissolves the Cartesian scepticism that Moore was attempting to respond to with his failed knowledge claims. On this reading, Moore's nonsensical propositions, when reconceptualised as philosophical expressions of certainty, are no longer nonsensical to the philosopher.

However, Malcolm (1958) suggests an alternative approach in his reflections on his discussions with Wittgenstein:

> Instead of saying that Moore's statement 'I know that this is a tree' [for example] is a misuse of language, it is better to say that it has no clear meaning, and that Moore himself doesn't know how he is using it […] It isn't even clear to him that he is not giving it an ordinary usage. He is confused by the difference between using it in some ordinary sense and using it to make a philosophical point (p. 89).

That is, rather than saying as Wittgenstein seems to at various points in *On Certainty* that Moore is misusing the language-game of knowledge claims, by claiming that perfectly intelligible yet unprovable and undoubtable forms of words are states of affairs that one can "know", it actually isn't clear at all what Moore is trying to do with his words. Malcolm's suggestion, stemming from reflections in conversation with Wittgenstein about Moore's 'A Defence of Common Sense' (1959a) and 'Proof of an External World' (1959b), coupled with the remark of Wittgenstein's that struck Malcolm as "being especially noteworthy" (p. 93), that "[a]n expression has meaning only in the stream of life", raises an important question: in what sense should a philosopher take a proposition that is nonsensical within the stream of life to be meaningful in philosophical reflection *on* everyday life? Is there a risk here of making mistakes about what the stream of everyday life shows us about a notion if we rest on propositions that only make sense in the context of doing philosophy? My answer to these questions, displayed in various responses to the purported moral certainties that "Death is bad", "Murder is wrong", and "Racism is wrong", will be that there is a risk of distorting our claims about various aspects of everyday life when we take these propositions to be meaningful, in the sense that they are taken to express what is shown in everyday life.

In the remainder of this chapter, I develop the groundwork for the sentiment I have just expressed, by considering the significance of claiming that Moore's

propositions are, for Wittgenstein, nonsensical not because they are meaningful propositions uttered in an inappropriate context, but because no context has been given to them. Though forms of words like "Here is one hand", or "Murder is wrong" may appear to present us with intelligible expressions of thought, irrespective of context, it would be a mistake to take them to be meaningful outside of such contexts.

What this leads to is a disagreement over the nature of Wittgenstein's propositions, which revolves around what he means when he says that Moore-type propositions, both those that are prefixed with "I know" (OC 10; 500) and those that are not (OC 35; 37; 461) are "nonsense" (OC 10; 35; 37; 461; 500). The details of the disagreement are complex, and far from settled amongst philosophers doing exegetical work on Wittgenstein's remarks. However, aspects of this disagreement will be important for me to engage with in what follows, as what one takes Wittgenstein to mean when he claims that Moore's propositions are "nonsense" has deep consequences for what one takes the notion of moral certainty to amount to.

For my purposes, it will be enough to distinguish between the framework reading and the therapeutic reading of the nature of these propositions. In the next section, I outline the competing accounts of Wittgenstein's use of nonsense via a critique of the framework reading by James Conant (1998), before highlighting the significance of this criticism for most of the literature concerned with moral certainty.

Two Readings of Moore's Knowledge-Claims as "Nonsense"

At an early point in *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein makes the following remark:

> I know that a sick man is lying here? Nonsense! I am sitting at his bedside, I am looking attentively into his face. – So I don't know, then, that there is a sick man lying here? Neither the question nor the assertion makes sense. Any more than the assertion "I am here", which I might yet use at any moment, if suitable occasion presented itself [...] [i]t is only in use that the proposition has its sense. And "I know that there's a sick man lying here", used in an *unsuitable* situation, seems not to be nonsense but rather seems matter-of-course, only because one can fairly easily imagine a situation to fit it, and one thinks that the words "I know that..." are always in place where there is no doubt, and hence even where the expression of doubt would be unintelligible (OC 10, original emphasis).

Here, Wittgenstein reacts to a Moore-type proposition as an instance of "nonsense". As Wittgenstein goes on to say, "it is only in use that the proposition has its sense" (OC 10), and what the Moore-type proposition Wittgenstein opens OC 10 with presents us with a situation in which it is not clear why someone would say such a thing. As Wittgenstein continues, it is only because one can imagine situations in which the form of words "I know that a sick man is lying here" seem to make sense, that one may be tempted to take the form of words to be intelligible generally. A student doctor may, for example, claim that "I know that a sick man is lying here" during an exam in which students must identify which of a series of patients is the sick one among a group of healthy patients. As the exam allows for the possibility that the student is mistaken, there is the possibility of doubt, and when the student claims that they *know* that a sick man is lying *here*, they are able to support their claim by listing a series of symptoms they have identified in the man. But this case is very different to the case in which Wittgenstein remarks that "I know that a sick man is lying here" as he sits at his bedside, "looking attentively into his face" (OC 10). There is no possibility of doubt, and there is no way Wittgenstein is able to further prove what he claims to know. The situation is unsuitable for knowledge claims, and thus, an attempt

to put forward a knowledge claim in this context is nonsensical because it is met with confusion as to what someone is trying to say.

Importantly, it seems that the situation does not seem to resolve itself if Wittgenstein replaces the prefix "I know" with "I cannot be mistaken that…", or "I am certain that…", or even if he simply says that "There is a sick man lying here", because it is still not clear what information he would be attempting to convey if one is also sitting at the bedside of a sick man (next to Wittgenstein) and is also looking at the man's face. It would still make as little sense as the assertion that "I am here", where this assertion is made to a person I had been having an in person conversation with. Faced with such a nonsensical expression – "There is a sick man lying here", or "I am here" – one might respond to such Moore-type propositions by saying, "What do you mean by *that*?" or "What are you trying to say to me?" It may turn out that one's interlocutor has lost their mind, or, in the case of Wittgenstein's use of the Moore-type proposition, they may simply be "doing philosophy" (OC 467).

A disagreement appears in Wittgensteinian scholarship at this point concerning what Wittgenstein means when he uses the term "nonsense", and much of what I have to say on the notion of moral certainty bears on this discussion. The disagreement can be traced back to a disagreement over what the "early" Wittgenstein is taken to mean when he says in the penultimate remark of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (2001), that his propositions throughout that text

> serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)
>
> He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright (TLP 6.54).

The disagreement concerns what one takes Wittgenstein to mean by declaring his propositions nonsensical, and thus what Wittgenstein is urging his readers of that early text, once they have understood him, to throw away. For my purposes, two distinct ways to understand the word "nonsensical" lead to two ways to read Wittgenstein's earlier text, and these understandings are then connected to what Wittgenstein means by saying a form of words are nonsense in remarks in *On Certainty* such as OC 10.

As James Conant (2000) describes the distinction in 'Elucidation and Nonsense in Early Frege and Early Wittgenstein' , what he calls the substantial (standard/framework) conception of nonsense holds that there are two logically distinct forms of nonsense: "*substantial nonsense* and *mere nonsense*" (p. 191, original emphasis).[5] Here, substantial nonsense is a composition "of intelligible ingredients combined in an illegitimate way" that "expresses a logically incoherent thought", while mere nonsense is "simply unintelligible", and thus "expresses no thought" (p. 176).

This is connected by Conant to a disagreement concerning what Wittgenstein means at TLP 4.1212 when he says that "[w]hat *can* be shown, *cannot* be said" (original emphasis), and thus to a disagreement over what Wittgenstein means at TLP 6.54 when he says that his propositions "serve as elucidations". In what way do Wittgenstein's propositions, understood as nonsense, serve as elucidations? Conant outlines the distinction as follows:

> [A]ccording to the substantial conception, the task of elucidation is to "show" something which cannot be said; according to the austere conception, the task of elucidation is to show that we are prone to an illusion of meaning something when we mean nothing (p. 177).

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[5] These ideas were first developed in Diamond's 'What Nonsense Might Be' (1991d). Here, however, I focus on Conant's account, as it is directly concerned with the issue of nonsense in relation to the propositions Wittgenstein considers throughout *On Certainty*.

With this distinction in mind, it can be said that the "standard" (framework) reading of the *Tractatus* holds that Wittgenstein wants us to understand his propositions as a form of substantial nonsense, such that they cannot be said, but that what cannot be said shows us something about "the limits of language" (Wittgenstein quoted in Conant 1998, p. 198), while the "resolute" (therapeutic) reading of the *Tractatus* holds that Wittgenstein wants us to understand his propositions as an illusion of meaning that do *not* show us something about the limits of language, and thus ought to be fully thrown away. In this way, they still show us something about the limits of language, or "the logical form of reality" (TLP 4.121), but what is shown has nothing to do with a system that determines what can and cannot be said. Rather, on the resolute reading of nonsense, what we are shown could be described as our own responsibility for what we are willing and unwilling to give meaning to, when we follow Wittgenstein in drawing a limit to the expression of thought from within language. To take nonsense and the saying/showing distinction in this way seems largely in line with Wittgenstein's remark in the 'Preface' of the *Tractatus*, that

> … the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought).
>
> It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense (pp. 3-4).

As mentioned, my thesis takes the resolute/therapeutic rather than the standard/framework reading of Wittgenstein to be correct. Further, I understand the small body of literature focusing on a Wittgensteinian form of moral certainty, whether it is for or against the possibility of the notion, to be framed in terms that either implicitly or explicitly draw on a standard (framework) reading of Wittgenstein. This means that in such discussions, it seems taken for granted than Wittgenstein's charge of nonsense directed at

Moore-type propositions are nonsensical because there is a misfit between the claim to "know" and what is claimed to be known in a given context. That is, it is a combination of intelligible ingredients – "I know" and "there is a sick man lying here" – combined in an illegitimate way, as one cannot say that one knows *that* in *this* context. Nevertheless, such accounts go, as a philosophical expression of certainty, "There is a sick man lying here" in the same context shows us something about the nature of what Wittgenstein refers to as "certainty", in that it shows us *what* we are certain *of*. According to Moyal-Sharrock, it shows us "the *scaffolding* of our thoughts" (Wittgenstein quoted in Moyal-Sharrock 2004, p. 92, original emphasis). From this position, proponents and critics of Wittgensteinian notions of moral certainty discuss a series of so-called moral propositions that, while they are nonsensical to say, nevertheless, *as philosophical expressions*, show us the scaffolding of our moral thought. My intention is to show how the idea of philosophical expressions that cannot be said in everyday moral life and everyday moral life itself do not track with one another. By this, I mean that we can imagine many instances of everyday moral thought and/or action that stands in stark contrast to what particular philosophical expressions of moral certainties say about everyday life. To show what I mean, I draw on an alternative way of approaching Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense" in *On Certainty.* Thus, I turn to Conant's (1998) criticism of standard (framework) readings of *On Certainty* in 'Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use' to show what I think such accounts of moral certainty, developed from standard/framework readings like Moyal-Sharrock's (2004), get wrong.

Conant (1998) begins with Wittgenstein's remark at OC 10, and considers two ways in which Wittgenstein's charge of nonsense concerning both the propositions Moore claims to know, and the propositions the sceptic claims are *impossible* to be known, have been taken by philosophers. The first reading of "nonsense", which Conant suggests "is a fairly standard account of how such passages are to be read" (p. 223), holds that "I know that there's a sick man lying here" is nonsense in the context in which Wittgenstein considers it because the

situation in which the proposition is used is an unsuitable one. In other words, there is a kind of clash between a proposition that makes sense to us, and a situation in which it makes no sense to utter that proposition.

As Conant notes, however, such a reading relies on taking Wittgenstein's original term in German, "*Satz*", "either self-consciously or unwittingly" to translate to "proposition", where proposition means "the expression of a thought" (Conant 1998, p. 223), as opposed to "a mere form of words" (p. 223). "*Satz*" understood as "proposition" might suggest that a proposition like "I know that there's a sick man lying here" contains a clear expression of thought, regardless of the context in which someone attempts to use it to say something meaningful. "*Satz*" understood in this way, as Conant argues, tends to lead philosophers "to distinguish here between saying and asserting", so that "it is clear what is being said in such an illegitimate employment of language", but not clear why it is being asserted in *this* context (p. 223, original emphasis).

Conant cites Marie McGinn as an example of this kind of reading of Wittgenstein's charge of nonsense in relation to Wittgenstein (p. 224)[6]. In her book *Sense and Certainty*, for example, McGinn claims that

> …the class of Moore-type propositions might be thought of as the mass of both spoken and unspoken judgements which form, in the context, the completely unquestioned background against which all inquiry, description of the world, confirmation and disconfirmation of belief, etc. goes on; they are all the judgements that are either 'flamingly obvious' or which may be spoken with authority which will be accepted without doubt, and which may be taken for granted in the justifications that we give for the knowledge-claims or more interesting judgements that we advance (McGinn quoted in Conant 1998, p. 224).

[6] McGinn's (1989) reading is of Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein in various parts of Cavell's (1979) *The Claim of Reason*. However, it is enough for my purposes to present a general picture of the kind of view that Conant criticises.

What is clear from this quotation is that McGinn takes what Moore claims to know to be intelligible judgements that are so "flamingly obvious" so as to "be accepted without doubt". As such, they are not themselves objects of knowledge, but rather underpin or are "taken for granted" when we express our knowledge-claims. As Conant (1998) remarks, "McGinn's strategy is thus to understand Moore-type propositions to belong to a special class of judgements: those that are *immune to doubt*" (pp. 224-225, original emphasis). McGinn is quoted again by Conant when she claims, in relation to Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense", that the

> … attempt to show that the knowledge claims that the philosopher investigates are illegitimate or unintelligible is thus an attempt to show, not that the words that the philosopher utters in introducing these claims are themselves meaningless, but that, given the context in which he utters them, we cannot see the point of his saying them, we cannot see what he means by them, we cannot construe his utterance of them as an act of intelligible assertion (McGinn quoted in Conant 1998, p. 228).

What this means, Conant argues, is that McGinn's reading of Wittgenstein's response to Moore-type propositions as "nonsense" is directed not at the unintelligibility of the mere form of words – which is taken by McGinn to be a perfectly intelligible expression of thought – but at the unintelligibility of the asserter to assert *that* in a particular context in which it seems out of place. "I know that there's a sick man lying here", asserted while one sits at the man's bedside, is nonsense for Wittgenstein on this reading, because one cannot claim to know *that* when *that* is so "flamingly obvious".

It seems to me that a similar approach to Wittgenstein's response to Moore appears in Danièle Moyal-Sharrock's (2004) monograph *Understanding Wittgenstein's* On Certainty. For example, she draws on Wittgenstein's remarks at OC 151, 403, and 414 to claim that Wittgenstein "does not question the

legitimacy of Moore's assurance, only whether Moore and philosophical tradition are right to call it 'knowledge'" (p. 14). At another point, she claims that

> Wittgenstein rehearses Moore's scenario and variants of it in an attempt to penetrate its intended as well as its achieved meaning, and to understand why it is at the same time so compelling and so weak. Wittgenstein's being thus moved by Moore's essays is thus indicative of how tenuous the line is between what Moore was saying and what Wittgenstein would have said, and indeed, will say. Of course 'Here is one hand' is indubitable; of course, Moore is right to feel he is entitled to claim supreme assurance, and yet Wittgenstein crosses the tenuous dividing line when he recognizes that the fault in Moore's scenario is a fundamental category mistake. It appears to Wittgenstein that our *knowing* something is not our ultimate way of being sure; it does not constitute our fundamental assurance about our world and ourselves. Underlying knowing is a bedrock, logically solid, *objective certainty*. A nonepistemic belief, not a knowable one (p. 26, original emphasis).

It seems to me that, similar to McGinn's reading of Wittgenstein, Moyal-Sharrock takes Moore's propositions to be perfectly intelligible claims that are "indubitable" (p. 26), and that Wittgenstein "does not question the legitimacy of Moore's assurance" (p. 14) concerning them. Moore's knowledge-claims are "weak", because Moore is unable to say *how* he knows *what* he claims to know, but nevertheless compelling as they seem to intelligibly assert a "supreme assurance". For Moyal-Sharrock, Wittgenstein's crucial move in *On Certainty* is to cross "the tenuous dividing line" between knowledge and supreme assurance by recategorizing Moore's propositions as expressions of nonepistemic belief. Supreme assurance here refers to the logical impossibility of a mistake (OC 21) in relation to such assertions as Moore's "Here is one hand". The similarity with McGinn's reading concerns Moyal-Sharrock's claim that the content of Moore's propositions is perfectly intelligible, yet they fail as knowledge claims. The

failure is due to a category mistake, that is rectified when Wittgenstein reclassifies the content of Moore's propositions as expressions of "nonepistemic belief".

This leads Moyal-Sharrock (2004) to conceptualise Moore-type propositions as – interchangeably – "objective certainties", or "hinges" (p. 52). She distinguishes between "objective certainty", which is the *kind* of certainty that Wittgenstein is concerned with, "whose nature is foundational", and objective certainties, which are "the 'objects' of that [objective] certainty" (p. 52). The former is an attitude of certainty, whereas the latter describes the "what" that such an attitude is certain of. The term "objective" here refers to a situation in which a doubt is "*logically* excluded" (OC 194, original emphasis) from recognisable thought. For Moyal-Sharrock, Wittgenstein's objective certainties or hinges – the objects of our attitude of objective certainty – "make up the 'scaffolding of our thoughts' [OC 211]" and as such, "are recognized to be rules of grammar" (p. 53).

Thus, according to Moyal-Sharrock,

> [n]onsense is not a derogatory term for Wittgenstein; it is a technical term applied to strings of words that stand outside the bounds of sense – be they expressions of violations of rules, or *expressions of the rules themselves*. Indeed, inasmuch as Wittgenstein holds only falsifiable propositions to have sense, grammatical rules (in that they are unfalsifiable) are nonsense (p. 90, original emphasis).

In this way, according to Moyal-Sharrock, "nonsense is not only what violates sense, but also what defines it, demarcates it and, elucidates it" (pp. 90-91). This account of the nature of certainty is derived from a particular reading of the *Tractatus*. For example, she claims that the *Tractatus* establishes "the distinction between propositions and pseudopropositions – between what can be said and what can only be shown", which is by the time of *On Certainty* developed into a distinction between propositions and hinge propositions – "between what can

be known and what can only be objectively believed, what stands fast" (p. 92). While the pseudo-propositions of the *Tractatus* describe "the scaffolding of the world" (TLP 6.124), the pseudo-propositions of *On Certainty* describe "the *scaffolding* of our thoughts" (OC 211, original emphasis). As such, "'[h]inge propositions' should be seen as Wittgenstein's final version of pseudopropositions", that are to be understood as forms of words "[m]asquerading as propositions" which are then uncovered by Wittgenstein to belong "to the framework, the scaffolding of our thoughts, of our rightful propositions" (p. 92).

If we take the remark of Wittgenstein's around which this discussion revolves (OC 10), the proposition "I know that a sick man is lying here" is recategorised on Moyal-Sharrock's reading of Wittgenstein as an objective certainty, or hinge proposition, and thus as part of the scaffolding of the thoughts of a person sitting next to a sick man, as Wittgenstein at OC 10 imagines himself to be. Though removed from its misuse as a knowledge claim, the hinge proposition "A sick man is lying here" is nevertheless still a piece of nonsense *as* a hinge proposition were it to be attempted to be said. That is, it has gone from being nonsense due to being a violation of the grammatical rules that underpin the knowledge claims we make in practice to being nonsense due to being an expression of the rules around our practices concerning sick men lying in bed. In the former case, one cannot claim to know what is unable to be doubted or proven, while in the latter case, one cannot express within the context of sitting next to a sick man lying in bed a grammatical rule that underpins meaningful discourse concerning sitting next to a sick man lying in bed. In both cases – "I know that there is a sick man lying here" and "There is a sick man lying here" – one's expression stands outside of the bounds of sense.

But while the hinge pseudo-proposition "There is a sick man lying in bed", as a rule of grammar, makes no sense to say in our everyday lives, it nevertheless shows itself "*in* what we say and do" (Moyal-Sharrock 2004, p. 48, original

emphasis). That "There is a sick man lying here" shows itself, for example, in the way one goes about one's inquiry into the state of the sick man's affliction. This approach to the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown, drawn from the *Tractatus* (TLP 4.1212), according to Moyal-Sharrock, was maintained by Wittgenstein "throughout his philosophical career […] the only qualification being that gradually the *showing* is also referred to as an *acting*" (p. 48, original emphasis).

However, for Moyal-Sharrock, while we cannot *say* hinge propositions, on account of their nonsensicality in the stream of our lives, this does not mean that they cannot be *spoken* throughout our philosophical investigations (p. 44). She therefore introduces a distinction of her own between saying and speaking, "where 'speaking' might inconsequentially be replaced by 'voicing', 'articulating' or 'pronouncing'" (p. 45). This leads Moyal-Sharrock to claim that hinge propositions, as grammatical rules, "can be voiced outside the game (e.g. in order to instruct someone on the rules of the game)" (p. 45). That is, on Moyal-Sharrock's reading of Wittgenstein, "the *ineffable* – that which cannot be *said* – can nevertheless be *spoken*; that is: articulated in *sentences* (such as those expressing grammatical rules)" (p. 46, original emphasis). Thus, "[w]e can use words; indeed, sentences; indeed perfectly well-formed sentences, and yet no be *saying* anything; not be making sense" (p. 46, original emphasis).

I will leave discussion of the connection between Moyal-Sharrock's picture of objective certainties/hinges, and the possibility of nonsensical propositions showing us something about the scaffolding of our thoughts in relation to the notion of moral certainty, for later. For now, I want to emphasise the connection between Moyal-Sharrock's picture of objective certainties/hinges as intelligible forms of words that act outside the bounds of sense as rules of grammar, and McGinn's picture of Moore's propositions "as the mass of both spoken and unspoken judgements which form, in the context, the completely unquestioned background against which all inquiry, description of the world, confirmation and

disconfirmation of belief, etc, goes on" (McGinn quoted in Conant 1998, p. 224). What links Moyal-Sharrock's picture of objective certainties/hinges to McGinn's picture of the nature of Moore's propositions is the taking of the form of words that are put forward by Moore as something perfectly intelligible, though nonsensical when attempted to be used as knowledge claims. If this is the case, then Conant's criticism of McGinn's account, which I will now describe, is also a criticism that can be levelled at Moyal-Sharrock's account. This will have ramifications for the dominant view of moral certainty, that draws heavily on Moyal-Sharrock's account.

Conant (1998) makes the distinction between the standard kind of reading of Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense" he takes McGinn's reading to be an example of, and what he claims is a more accurate reading of Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense" (the resolute/therapeutic reading) in the following:

> According to McGinn, Wittgenstein's problem in *On Certainty*, strictly speaking, is not with Moore-type propositions – *Sätze*[7] – but with Moore-type *uses of Sätze*. But *Wittgenstein's* complaint with Moore seems to be – contrary to what McGinn would lead us to expect – that Moore fails to mean something fully determinate by his words because his words themselves fail to mean something determinate (p. 230, original emphasis).

To support his claim, Conant (1998) traces Wittgenstein's understanding of the term "nonsense" back to the *Tractatus*, and Wittgenstein's embrace of Gottlob Frege's three fundamental principles for philosophical analysis, from Frege's (1980) *The Foundations of Arithmetic*. Conant suggests that the later Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* draws in particular on Frege's second principle, which urges one "never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition" (Frege quoted in

[7] "*Sätze*" is the German word for the plural forms of the English word "proposition" or "sentence".

Conant 1998, p. 231), and generalises it to apply to not only words, but sentences (p. 233). In the *Tractatus*, early Wittgenstein already reformulates Frege's second principle in what Conant calls "the context principle":

> [o]nly the proposition has sense; only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning (TLP 3.3 quoted in Conant 1998, p. 236).

That is, the early Wittgenstein held that one should never ask for the meaning of a word outside of the context in which it was uttered. To do so often leads philosophers to look in the wrong place for the meaning of the sentences they reside in (for example, when one treats "I know" and "there is a sick man lying here" as meaningful forms of words independent of the context of the complete sentence in which they are found). As Conant notes, this often leads to the violation of Frege's first principle, that urges us "always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective" (Frege quoted in Conant 1998, p. 231). We should not, for example, ask about "the psychological associations the word carries with it", or "the linguistic intention with which we utter it" (p. 231). To do so is to presuppose forms of meaning associated with words (and later by Wittgenstein with sentences) independent of their actual use (for example, when one treats Moore's nonsensical propositions as intelligible expressions of supreme assurance, as in Moyal-Sharrock (2004) does.

Another way in which the importance of the context comes out is in its connection to Frege's third principle to "never lose sight of the distinction between concept and object" (Frege quoted in Conant 1998, p. 231). As Frege remarks in relation to the form of words "Trieste is no Vienna",

> [w]e must not let ourselves be deceived because language often uses the same word now as a proper name, now as a concept word; […] 'Vienna' is here a concept-word, like 'metropolis'. Using it in this sense, we may say; 'Trieste is no Vienna' (Frege quoted in Conant 1998, p. 234).

Frege's remark here is connected by Conant to the suggestion that across a series of remarks commenting on TLP 3.3, Wittgenstein develops "[t]he methodological import of Frege's three principles […] through the claim that in ordinary language it is often the case that the same sign symbolizes in different ways" (p. 235). This culminates in Wittgenstein's distinction between the "sign" and the "symbol" of a proposition. This distinction, Conant notes, is used to "clarify the notion of 'proposition' which figures in the context principle [TLP 3.3]" (p. 236). For Wittgenstein, a symbol is "any part of a proposition that characterizes its sense" (TLP 3.31), while "[a] sign is what can be perceived of a symbol" (TLP 3.32). Crucially, Wittgenstein says that

> … one and the same sign (written or spoken, etc.) can be common to two different symbols – in which case they will signify in different ways (TLP 3.321).

Returning to Frege's remark, while "'Trieste is no Vienna' and 'Vienna is the capital of Austria' have the sign 'Vienna' in common", they "have no symbol in common – all they have in common are the signs 'Vienna' and 'is'" (Conant 1998, pp. 236-237). In other words, the sign "Vienna" is the same in each sentence, comprising the same configuration of letters, but what "Vienna" *means* in each sentence differs. In the former, it might mean something like "metropolis", while in the latter, it means "the capital of Austria". The difference in the way the same sign symbolises in two different ways, however, is only seen when each sentence is taken in the context in which it is uttered.

The takeaway from Wittgenstein's embrace and development of Frege's three principles, Conant argues, is that

> … there will always be room for a question as to whether a given sign, when it occurs in two different sentences of ordinary language, is symbolizing the same way in each of those occurrences […] 'In order to recognize the symbol in the sign we must consider the context of

> significant use' (§3.326). We must ask ourselves on what occasion we would utter this sentence and what, in that context of use, we would then be meaning by it (p. 238).

This conceptualisation of the distinction between sign, symbol, and the importance of context, Conant argues, follows Wittgenstein from the *Tractatus*, through *Philosophical Investigations*, to *On Certainty*, where it presents itself as a response of "nonsense" to the Moore-type proposition like the one found in Wittgenstein's claim that "I know there is a sick man lying here", uttered while imagining himself sitting next to a sick man lying in bed (OC 10).

In *Philosophical Investigations*, it appears as the claim that

> [f]or a *large* class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language (PI 43 quoted in Conant 1998, p. 238).

In *On Certainty*, the sentiment appears, for example, when Wittgenstein remarks that

> … the words "I am here" have a meaning only in certain contexts, and not when I say them to someone who is sitting in front of me and sees me clearly, – and not because they are superfluous, but because their meaning is *not* determined by the situation, yet is stands in need of such determination (OC 348, original emphasis).

This thread through Wittgenstein's thinking, from early to late, leads Conant (1998) to claim that

> [f]or later Wittgenstein, as for early, understanding a proposition is still a matter of seeing the symbol in the sign – of perceiving certain physiognomy of meaning in a string of signs, or seeing the face of a meaning in an employment of words. And for later Wittgenstein, as for

> early, this is not something you can do apart from a consideration of the context of significant use (p. 244).

Conant argues that what Wittgenstein means here, is that when we are confronted with a particular sign – for example, a written sentence like "I know that a sick man is lying here" (OC 10) – "[w]e must ask ourselves on what occasion we would utter this sentence and what, in that context of use, we would then be meaning by it" (p. 238). If there is no determinate way to make sense of the sign in a given context, then we should not take it that the component symbols ensure that the proposition is nevertheless meaningful. That is, we should take it to be nonsense: "If a sign is *useless*, it is meaningless" (TLP 3.328, original emphasis).

The mistake of readings like McGinn's and Moyal-Sharrock's, on Conant's reading of "nonsense", is to hallucinate a determinate meaning into Moore-type propositions outside of a context in which they have a use, and from this point, to read Wittgenstein's charge of nonsense to be the claim that you can't use *these kinds of determinate expressions* in *these* contexts. This mistake, as I have tried to show, stems from taking a sign like "I know there is a sick man lying here", absent a use, to nevertheless be meaningful. The mistake remains, however, if one reads Wittgenstein as recategorizing the sign, after removing the prefix "I know", as an expression of a judgement that "is accepted without doubt" (McGinn 1989, p. 103), or an expression of a rule of grammar that makes up part of the "*scaffolding* of our thoughts" (Wittgenstein quoted in Moyal-Sharrock 2004, p. 53). In the latter case, philosophers have confused themselves by introducing the form of words "There is a sick man lying here" into what could be called the context of philosophical reflection, and thus claiming that *here* they are finally, unproblematically, meaningful. However, I follow Conant (1998) when he says that

> [w]hen later Wittgenstein raises questions concerning what a sentence appears to mean considered apart from any actual contexts of use, it is

> usually in the service of drawing attention to a particular sort of experience that a contemplation of the sentence can engender in us: the possibility of imagining what one's words mean even though no meaning has yet been conferred on them. Wittgenstein does think that meaning can in this respect often appear to come apart from us – especially under the pressure of philosophy. For we are prone to the illusion that simply knowing what our words mean suffices for knowing what we mean by them. Talk of 'meaning coming apart from use' in this sense is shorthand for talking about a peculiar species of hallucination which Wittgenstein takes to be an occupational hazard of philosophy: a hallucination of meaning (pp. 246-247).

Talking Nonsense

> Don't *for heaven's sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! But you must pay attention to your nonsense (CV, p. 56e, original emphasis).

An objection that could be raised at this point about my claims concerning Wittgenstein's treatment of Moore-type propositions so far is the following: "What do you mean by saying that Wittgenstein takes Moore's propositions to be nonsense in the sense that they don't say anything? That they say *something* seems to fuel his investigation throughout *On Certainty*. He takes them to be meaningful in the sense that he responds to the content of Moore-type propositions in a variety of ways that he could not do were they unintelligible. The claim that Moore misuses (OC 6) knowledge-claims can only be made if Wittgenstein understands *what* Moore says he knows."

That Wittgenstein takes Moore's propositions to be intelligible could certainly be read into many of Wittgenstein's remarks throughout *On Certainty*. For example,

at various points, Wittgenstein speaks of Moore-type propositions as propositions that have the form of empirical propositions for which "no doubt can exist if making judgements is to be possible at all" (OC 308); as propositions that act like hinges on which our questions and doubts turn (OC 341); as "propositions that stand fast for me" that act like an axis, the immobility of which is determined by "the movement around it" (OC 152); as propositions that have "the character of a rule" (OC 494), as propositions "descriptive of a language-game" that are thus "part of logic" (OC 56), as grammatical propositions (OC 57-58), as "*incontrovertible*" as "[t]he propositions of mathematics" (OC 657, original emphasis), and so on. Such remarks certainly seem to suggest that Moyal-Sharrock's account of certainties *as* rules, *as* grammatical propositions, *as* descriptions of logic is plausible.

However, I argue that the temptation to determinate meaning in to such forms of words would be to miss Wittgenstein's emphasis on the importance not only on the context of use (TLP, PI, OC 10), but also to miss the point that propositions cannot express logic. It is shown in the propositions we *do* use.

***On Certainty*: In the Beginning was the Deed (Throwing Away the Nonsense)**

What I take to be three of the most important remarks in *On Certainty* focus not on the content of the propositions Wittgenstein has been considering, but the way in which what the content is attempting, but failing, to say shows itself in what we say and do. The first appears to question the ability to describe the "logic" (or one could add, the "grammar", or the "rules", or the "hinges", or the "axes") of certainty:

> Am I not getting closer and closer to saying that in the end logic cannot be described? You must look at the practice of language, then you will see it (OC 501).

I take this first remark to present a kind of reminder of Wittgenstein's remark in *Philosophical Investigations* that if one wishes to see what the common link is between everything that we call language, that is, the *essence* of language, that it is no good to begin by saying that there *must* be a common link. Rather, Wittgenstein urges us to "*look and see* whether there is anything common to all […] don't think, but look!" (PI 66, original emphasis). In OC 501, then, I take Wittgenstein to making the same kind of remark as PI 66, which results in the following claim: Instead of saying that there *must* be a way to describe the logic of our language that seems to show itself in Moore's nonsensical propositions, one "must look at the practice of language" (OC 501) at what we say and do, and *then* you will see the logic of our language.

A similar claim appears in two connected remarks that could be read as a rethinking of – or a hesitation concerning – Wittgenstein's earlier remarks about propositions that have the form of empirical propositions but cannot be treated as such:

> I want to say: propositions of the form of empirical propositions , and not only propositions of logic, form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language). – This observation is not of the form "I know …". "I know…" states what *I* know, and that is not of logical interest (OC 401, original emphasis).
>
> In this remark the expression "propositions of the form of empirical propositions" is itself thoroughly bad; the statements in question are statements about material objects. And they do not serve as foundations in the same way as hypotheses which, if they turn out to be false, are replaced by others.

(…und schreib getrost "Im Anfang war die Tat") (… and write with confidence "In the beginning was the deed") (OC 402).[8]

The phrase "In the beginning was the Deed" (*Faust* 1237) that Wittgenstein uses here appears in Johann Wolfgang Goethe's (2007) poem *Faust*, at a moment when the protagonist Faust's remark is concerned with how best to "with sincerity [t]ranslate the Holy Gospel of St John [i]nto my own beloved native tongue" (*Faust* 1221-1223). He begins by reading the line to be translated as "In the beginning was the Word [*logos*]" (1224), but immediately hesitates to translate it as such, because "[t]he mere [w]ord for me has no resonance" (1224-1225), and so "I must translate it with a different sense" (1226). Faust then considers translating the passage as "In the beginning was the Thought" (1229), but again hesitates, and asks whether it is "thought that shapes [a]nd drives creation as its very source?" (1230-1232). Though he considers "In the beginning was the Force" to be a "[f]ar better" translation (1233-1234), he hesitates once more, suspecting "[t]hat this is not the meaning that I need" (1235). Finally, he claims that "[t]he spirit helps me" and that "now I see the light" (1236), before exclaiming that "I have it: In the beginning was the Deed!" (1237).

What is one to make of Wittgenstein's reference to the final remark in this section of *Faust*? One might imagine Wittgenstein in a Faust-like situation, sitting down to interpret – to attempt to make sense of – Moore's strange knowledge-claims. Wittgenstein might at first look at the words and think, to paraphrase OC 352 that, "Yes, these are sentences. English sentences. But what are they supposed to be doing?" The indeterminate nature of Moore's words could, for Wittgenstein, like for Faust, have "no such resonance" (*Faust* 1226), and need to be thought of "in a different sense" (1227). The next of Faust's attempts, the "thought", will do Wittgenstein no good, as no sense can be made of an indeterminate thought, and thus "the deeper truth escapes" (1230) one for whom Moore's words are

[8] Wittgenstein also makes a similar remark many years earlier in 1937, when he says that "[l]anguage – I want to say – is a refinement, 'in the beginning was the deed'" (CV p. 31e).

considered propositionally. The remark from Malcolm (1958) that Moore wanted "to give himself the *experience* of knowing" (p. 90) suggests how Wittgenstein, as the Faust-like character, might come to see Moore's words as focused on the *force* with which they are expressed. But this makes no more sense of Moore's propositions than before, and, if one reads the Faust-like Wittgenstein a certain way, one comes to understand why for this character, the notion of force "is not the meaning that I need" (*Faust* 1235). One could then read the Faust-like Wittgenstein as finally coming to see more clearly in OC 501, what he comes to see as "the light" (*Faust* 1236) in OC 402: "In the beginning was the deed" (Goethe quoted in OC 402). In other words, Wittgenstein begins from a state of confusion, where it is not quite clear what Moore means by his propositions, and upon investigating them from various angles as if they made sense, comes to see that they are attempts to put into words what can only be seen directly in what we say *and do*. Moore's propositions are thus wholly nonsensical and are thrown away, so that one may look at what we say and do with clear eyes.

I agree with Ray Monk's (1990) suggestion in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, then, that Wittgenstein's aim in *On Certainty* "is to focus the attention of philosophers away from words, from sentences, and on to the occasions in which we use them, the contexts which give them their sense" (p. 578), and his further claim that Wittgenstein's quotation of Goethe at OC 402 "might, with some justification, be regarded as the motto of *On Certainty* – and, indeed, of the whole of Wittgenstein's later philosophy" (p. 579).

What I have suggested so far is in line with Conant and Diamond's (2004) reading of Wittgenstein's remark at TLP 4.1212 that "[w]hat *can* be shown, *cannot* be said" (original emphasis). According to Conant and Diamond (2004), the resolute (therapeutic) reading of Wittgenstein is committed to drawing the distinction between saying and showing "in such a way that it applies only to *sinnvolle*

[meaningful] and *sinnlose* [senseless][9] *Sätze* [sentences] and never to unsinnige [nonsensical] propositional signs" (p. 66). For my purposes, it is enough to say that what is shown only applies to meaningful propositions from within a context, and not to nonsensical propositions outside of any context. Conant and Diamond draw this distinction

> … in such a way that showing ceases to require an irresolute waffle between wanting to claim that the content of that which is shown cannot be said (because that's what Wittgenstein says) and wanting to *hint* at what the content in question *is* (in ways that, in effect, turn it into a kind of quasi-sayable quasi-content). To fail to draw the distinction deeply enough here means: to construe the 'showing' side of the distinction as a kind of 'conveying' of a quasi-propositional content that we can at least attempt to say (though 'strictly speaking' we are unable to say it). To draw the distinction deeply enough means: no longer being tempted to construe 'showing' on the model of a funny kind of saying (p. 66, original emphasis).

It should be noted that this is not to say that Moyal-Sharrock (2004) does not see the significance of Wittgenstein's remark at OC 402, when she notes that

> … Wittgenstein echoes Goethe in *On Certainty* (402), thereby situating our beginnings in our doing rather than in our thinking. Wittgenstein breaks here not only with biblical mythology but also with philosophical dogma. Not the sacrosanct Word, not the Logos of the Ancients, not the Proposition of the Moderns lies at the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, but a way of acting (p. 6).

However, my claim is that Moyal-Sharrock nevertheless holds on to the propositions Wittgenstein considers throughout *On Certainty* as gesturing

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[9] As I noted in footnote 1, my focus is on *sinnvolle* (meaningful), rather than *sinnlose* (senseless) propositions.

towards *something*, and in doing so, *showing* us something of the structure of our grammar, such that Moore-type propositions are intelligible expressions of rules of grammar, and of the "what" that we are certain of. By contrast, in relation to the nonsensical propositions of the *Tractatus*, Conant and Diamond (2004) argue that when they

> … speak about the activity of philosophical clarification, grammar may impose on us the use of 'that'-clauses and 'what'-constructions in the results we give of the activity. But, one could say, the final 'throwing away of the ladder' involves the recognition that that grammar of 'what'-ness has been pervasively misleading us, even as we read through the *Tractatus*. To achieve the relevant sort of increasingly refined awareness of the logic of our language is not to grasp a content of any sort. 'What can be shown cannot be said' (§4.1212): to take the difference between saying and showing deeply enough is not to give up on showing but to give up on the picturing it as a 'what' (p. 67).

I suggest a similar sentiment can be read into some of the remarks in *On Certainty* that led Wittgenstein at OC 402 and 501 to "throw away the ladder" in a similar way – that is, throw away the Moore-type propositions so as to see the notion of certainty more clearly:

> [t]he propositions which one comes back to again and again as if bewitched – these I should like to expunge from philosophical language (OC 31).

> …we expunge the sentences that don't get us any further (OC 33).

To expunge the propositions of Moore's that bewitch Wittgenstein throughout his remarks, I suggest, is to do away with them completely, rather than recategorise them in a way that allows them to make sense in the context of philosophical clarification of what we say and do.

So far, I have outlined Moore's attempts to respond to the Cartesian sceptic with a series of propositions he claims to know, but which he can neither doubt nor prove, before turning to Wittgenstein's reflections upon Moore's propositions. The first-draft, non-linear nature of *On Certainty*, which constitutes Wittgenstein's reflection on Moore's propositions, leaves it open to interpretation exactly what to make of the notion of certainty that develops throughout. Focusing on Wittgenstein's remark at OC 10 that Moore's propositions are "nonsense", I have outlined two ways in which philosophers have understood Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense" there, and how they understand that use to be connected to his earlier remarks in the *Tractatus*. I have then tried to show how this is connected to how the notion of certainty might be conceptualised. Drawing on Conant's (1998) criticism of McGinn's framework reading of Moore's propositions, as well as what Conant's and Diamond's (2004) resolute reading commits them to in relation to both Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense" (TLP 6.54) and his remark on saying and showing (TLP 4.1212), I have attempted to criticise Moyal-Sharrock's conceptualisation of objective certainty and objective certainties/hinges. My claim is that Moyal-Sharrock hallucinates a meaning into Moore's propositions separate from a context, which leads her to bring the content of those propositions into a systematic description of the rules of grammar. While Moyal-Sharrock sees the importance of Wittgenstein's remarks concerning certainty ultimately being something that only shows itself in what we say and do, she nevertheless holds on to Moore's propositions as forms of nonsense that gesture at what can only be shown in what we say and do. In doing so, Moyal-Sharrock presents an example of a framework reading of Wittgenstein that takes Moore's propositions to contain a substantial form of nonsense that gestures towards something ineffable concerning the grammar of language.

I am more inclined to follow Conant's (1998) and Conant's and Diamond's (2004) reading of Wittgenstein on these matters, and I take their reading of nonsense, and of the saying/showing distinction to shape my approach in what follows. In

relation to morality, it seems clear to me that in conceptualising moral certainty both as a something that can only be shown in what we say and do, *and* as something that can be represented in philosophical expression with "moral" propositions, a distortion occurs that may deflect us away from really *looking and seeing* (OC 501; PI 66) what the things we say and do can tell us about the grammar of moral certainty. Next, I outline the moment in the literature on moral certainty that explicitly connects Moyal-Sharrock's reading of certainty with the notion of *moral* certainty, before turning to a more general discussion of how, from early to late, some form of framework reading of certainty has shaped philosophical discussions of the possibility of moral certainty.

The Connection Between Nonsense in *On Certainty* and Nonsense in the Literature on Moral Certainty

In 'Wittgenstein and Ethics: A Discussion with Reference to *On Certainty*' (2005), Alice Crary argues for a similar reading of Wittgenstein's charge of "nonsense" to Conant's reading of OC 10 when she argues the following:

> When Wittgenstein declares that Moore-type utterances are nonsense, he is not suggesting that the utterances involve judgements such that no claim to know them can be squared with the conditions of knowledge. He is suggesting instead that it is not clear what judgements are at issue at all (p. 285).
>
> … Wittgenstein is claiming that there is no such thing as a clash between sentence-meaning and circumstances that results in the expression of a 'senseless sense'. So we should expect that when Wittgenstein describes Moore's utterance of 'I know that such-and-such' as nonsense, his point is not that there is something discordant or ill-fitting about (what we may be inclined to think of as) the sense Moore's words do have; his point is,

> rather, that we reject Moore's words because they lack any clear meaning at all (p. 287).

Crary (2005) uses this understanding of what Wittgenstein is doing in *On Certainty* to argue that "since Wittgenstein isn't suggesting that any judgements are at play in Moore's anti-skeptical practice, it follows that he isn't suggesting that there are some judgements that are immune to criticism" (p. 287). Rather, Crary argues, in his "remarks about judgements 'standing fast for us' […] he is discussing ramifications of a view of judgement that is the conceptual counterpart of his view of the limits of sense" (p. 287). That view, according to Crary, appears as the early Wittgenstein's Tractarian remarks "to the effect that logic is internal to (or constitutive of) thought" (p. 286). This is seen, for example, when Wittgenstein says that "[a] logical picture of facts is a thought" (TLP 3.0). According to Crary, this is elaborated on when Wittgenstein remarks that "[t]hought can never be of anything illogical, since, if it were, we should have to think illogically" (TLP 3.03). In other words, "there is no such thing as recognizing something both as a thought and as lacking logical structure" (Crary 2005, p. 286). What this means, in line with a resolute/therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus*, is that there is no such thing as a substantial form of nonsense that, though it fails to make sense when someone attempts to say it, nevertheless gestures towards something ineffable.

In another similar move to Conant's, Crary (2005) then points to how this idea, first developed in the *Tractatus*, is presented in Wittgenstein's later writings, where what is stressed is the way in which the context in which a proposition is uttered constitutes its content and logical character (p. 286). Here, Crary points to *Philosophical Investigations* 499-500, to argue that Wittgenstein

> … attempts to distance himself from the idea of a combination of words-and-context that fails to make sense because of what it – in virtue of what we might confusedly slide into thinking of as its 'senseless sense' – tries but fails to convey (p. 286).

What Crary (2005) wants to do with this reading of Wittgenstein, is to emphasise what she takes to be Wittgenstein's invitation, "sprinkled throughout his writings" on topics as wide ranging as "logic, mathematics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology and so on", "to think of the ethical as a dimension of *all* our modes of thought and talk" (p. 275, original emphasis). Crary argues that the best way to see this dimension is to consider Wittgenstein's ethical remarks "not in isolation, but together with some of the philosophical preoccupations that, as it seems, first occasion them" (p. 276). The ethical remarks Crary has in mind as far as I can see include the following:

> You could attach prices to thoughts. Some cost a lot, some a little. And how does one pay for thoughts? The answer, I think, is: with courage (Wittgenstein quoted in Crary 2005, p. 291).

> Work on philosophy is … actually more of a kind of work on oneself (Wittgenstein quoted in Crary 2005 p. 295).

> No one can think a thought for me in the way no one can don my hat for me (Wittgenstein quoted in Crary 2005, p. 294).

In the case of *On Certainty*, this leads Crary to argue that Wittgenstein is there guided by the concern over the philosophical presupposition that "we can turn on and investigate the credentials of our most basic beliefs from a standpoint independent of modes of response we acquired in learned language" (p. 295). What this tendency looks like, in the case of both the sceptic's challenge to the possibility of knowledge, and Moore's response via what he takes to be a series of indubitable, but unprovable knowledge-claims, is the assumption that we need not

> … reflect on whether the circumstances in which we want to utter our (allegedly investigative) words bear any affinity to circumstances in which we ordinarily utter words. So it is with an eye towards getting us to repudiate the idea of a standpoint independent of our modes of

> response that he asks us to compare the utterances we produce in our philosophical endeavours with our ordinary modes of thought and speech. His goal is to get us to acknowledge that, to the extent that we fail to *perceive* any smooth and natural connection, we fail to attach any meaning to the words that we ourselves insistently produce. This is the respect in which the project of *On Certainty* is conceived as an ethical one. By redirecting our attention back to sensibilities we possess as speakers, Wittgenstein hopes to get us to confront our responsibility for what we say and think (p. 296, original emphasis).

In 'Wittgenstein, Ethics and Basic Moral Certainty' (2008), the first of three articles he writes on the subject of moral certainty, Nigel Pleasants pushes back against both Conant's (1998) and Crary's (2005) understanding of Wittgenstein's use of the notion of "nonsense", as well as what he calls Crary's "intrinsically-ethical reading" of Wittgenstein (p. 242)[10]. In relation to Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense" in *On Certainty*, Pleasants (2008) argues that there is an equivocation in Crary and Conant's reading

> … between "no *clear* meaning" and "*no* meaning". On the first side of the equivocation, I would say that a *Satz* not having a clear meaning is not a good reason for deciding that it is thereby "*meaningless* or *nonsense*". I readily agree that it is not clear how to interpret Moore's *Sätze* (I think we know what his *words* mean, though Crary and Conant deny this too.) But I disagree that a *Satz* lacking clear meaning is by itself particularly

[10] Pleasants also argues more broadly against other resolute readings, including Cora Diamond. However, he does not specifically mention Conant and Diamond (2004), nor have I to this point mentioned the papers of Diamond's that Pleasants does focus on. Thus I focus here only on his criticism of Conant (1998) and Crary (2005). Crary also presents similar arguments in an earlier paper called 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought' (2000), which Pleasants is also criticising. Both Crary (2000) and (2005) are focused on rethinking readings of Wittgenstein along "use-theory of meaning" and "inviolability interpretation" lines, while Pleasants argues to the contrary for an account of moral certainty that Crary would take to be an inviolability interpretation. The nuances of this discussion, however, would take me too far away from my present focus.

> remarkable or that this is what constitutes the peculiarity of Moore's *Sätze* […] On the other side of the equivocation, when Wittgenstein […] says of Moore's *Sätze* that "not everything in the *form* of an empirical proposition *is* one", I read him as implying that they are not *empirical* propositions, not that they are not *propositions*. […] I wish […] to reject the idea that Moore's (and other basic-certainty-expressing) *Sätze* express no thoughts, contain no judgements, are *meaningless* or *nonsense*, and are not even assertions. If Wittgenstein thought that Moore's *Sätze* were "*meaningless* or *nonsense*" […] that is, "mere nonsense", it is hard to see why he bothered so painstakingly to examine the particular things that Moore said […] If Wittgenstein thought that Moore was uttering "mere nonsense" that would have been the end of the story, for it leaves nothing to be said (pp. 252-253, original emphases).

Pleasants couples this argument against Conant's and Crary's reading of Wittgenstein's charge of "nonsense" as resolutely unintelligible, with a contrasting with one in which ethics reaches all our thought and talk:

> … Wittgenstein's later attitude is more conductive to the traditional picture. Or as I would put it, ethical discourse is best conceived of as an extended family of language-games with ethical terms *via which* we address matters of moral concern (make judgements about the rightness or permissibility of certain acts, practices and institutions, and argue about which kinds of things have moral value and to which extent) (pp. 249-250).

Thus, the underpinnings for Pleasants' account of moral certainty are an explicit repudiation of both the resolute/therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein's use of "nonsense", as well as the suggestion that Wittgenstein thinks of ethics as inherent in all language use. Pleasants' argument against the claim that the "ethical" is "a dimension of *all* our modes of thought and talk" (p. 275, original emphasis) is in large part a repudiation of Wittgenstein's Tractarian remarks

that "it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics" (TLP 6.42) and that "ethics cannot be put into words" (TLP 6.421) (also see Pleasants 2008, p. 244). This is coupled with the claim emphasised by Cora Diamond (2000) in 'Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the *Tractatus*' that Wittgenstein himself saw the *Tractatus* as an ethical work. Diamond points to a letter Wittgenstein wrote to Ludwig von Ficker, who Wittgenstein "hoped would publish the book" (p. 152). Contained in Wittgenstein's letter to von Ficker are the remarks that "the book's point is ethical", and that "the ethical gets its limit drawn from the inside, as it were, by my book" (Wittgenstein quoted in Diamond 2000, p. 152). Diamond takes this to mean that the "ethical aim is to be achieved by what the book does *not* say: the ethical is thereby delimited in the only way it can be, "from the inside"" (p. 152, original emphasis). By contrast, Pleasants (2008) argues that

> [t]he fact that Wittgenstein wrote nothing on ethics in his later work clearly is consistent with his continuing to believe that "ethics cannot be put into words". But the more economical interpretation that I favour is simply that by the time of his later philosophy he no longer held the doctrine of ethical ineffability and had nothing to say, philosophically, on ethical topics (p. 245).

Pleasants' arguments against these aspects of the resolute/therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein allow him to return a semblance of meaning to Moore's propositions, and, as they do not pertain to matters actions or attitudes that are morally "right" or "wrong", "good" or "bad", they have nothing to do with ethics. In short, Pleasants is at pains to re-establish the framework within which a discussion of the nature of Wittgenstein's certainty occurs in a way that allows for Moore-type propositions to express some form of thought, and thus, to be in some sense intelligible. This brings Pleasants' reading of *On Certainty* in line with Moyal-Sharrock's reading as a form of framework reading. Pleasants (2008) is explicit about the connection when he says that though Moore's knowledge-

claims "cannot actually be treated as propositional knowledge", they nevertheless invoke

> …states of affairs that no-one could doubt or question, and which no-one (apart from a philosopher trying to prove a philosophical thesis the negation of which cannot be taken seriously) would ever think of putting into propositional form. These states of affairs are the objects of what I call, following Danièle Moyal-Sharrock […] "basic certainty" (p. 250).

Pleasants' reference of Moyal-Sharrock's notion of "basic certainty" comes from Moyal-Sharrock's paper 'Unravelling Certainty' (2005), which she notes draws on Chapters 1-3 of her monograph *Understanding Wittgenstein's* On Certainty (p. 96, fn. 1), discussed at length above. It is from the notion of "basic certainty" that Moyal-Sharrock (2005), as outlined above, makes the distinction between "*objective certainty*" as "a *kind* of certainty […] whose nature is foundational" and "*objective certainties*, or *hinges*", which are "the 'objects' of that certainty" (p. 78, original emphases). Thus, in following Moyal-Sharrock on "basic certainty", Pleasants too signals that he follows Moyal-Sharrock on the distinction between the nature of certainty, and the contents of propositions that describe that certainty in philosophical discourse.

It is this embrace of the content of Moore's propositions as meaningful, and their lack of explicit ethical content, that allows Pleasants to develop an account of moral certainty as an analogue from a Moyal-Sharrock type reading of Wittgenstein's so-called empirical certainties:

> Are there moral propositions about things of ethical concern that take the *form* of ethical propositions but which cannot actually be treated as *ethical* propositions nor become propositional knowledge? There are indeed such propositions, and one sees philosophers contemplating them à la Moore with his pseudo empirical propositions. The objects of

> these propositions are what I call "basic moral certainties". (Pleasants 2008, p. 255, original emphasis).

From here, Pleasants will focus on the "ethical" notions of death and wrongful killings (the paradigm example being murder), and argue that

> [b]ecause of the role and significance that death, and hence killing, has for us as embodied, finite, vulnerable beings, the statements "death is bad" and "murder is wrong" are not moral propositions but expressions of basic moral certainty. Just as no-one in non-extraordinary circumstances is in a position to say *how* they know that they have hands, so no-one can say what the badness of death and wrongness of killing consist in (p. 677, original emphasis).[11]

This is a pattern that will become common in the dominant view of moral certainty: following a reading of objective certainties/hinges inspired by Moyal-Sharrock, proponents of the dominant view will frame their discussions of moral certainty around the development of moral analogues of Moore-type propositions.

In her monograph *On Moral Certainty, Justification and Practice: A Wittgensteinian Perspective* (2015), Julia Hermann says that "[f]ollowing Moyal-Sharrock, I will refer to the certainty Wittgenstein deals with as 'objective'" (p. 45), and with reference to Moyal-Sharrock, claims that "[o]bjective certainty is '*enacted*': it is 'not thought out but acted out'" (p. 59). Citing helpful remarks from Pleasants, Hermann also claims that

> [c]ertainties are formulated for heuristic and philosophical purposes. We as philosophers have to put them into propositional form in order to be

[11] Notice, however, that Pleasants switches between "murder" and "killing". Though Pleasants will often speak of "Killing is wrong" in his discussion of moral certainty, where "Killing" means "Wrongful killing", my focus in Chapter 3 will be on the narrower notion of murder, and the purported moral certainty that "Murder is wrong".

> able to reflect on them and to consider them as certainties. The fact that someone like Moore put them into propositional form made Wittgenstein and others aware of the fact that some things stand fast for us. While an agent who is not engaged in philosophical activity usually has no use for such propositions, the philosopher does (p. 65).

When Hermann speaks of moral certainty, she signals that she is speaking of the same kind of certainty as what Pleasants refers to as "basic moral certainties" (Pleasants 2008, p. 255), but notes that "[u]nlike Pleasants and others, I do not add the adjective 'basic' because being objectively certain implies having a fundamental role" (p. 86, fn. 1). Nothing much hangs on this distinction as far as I can see.

Finally, in his monograph *Moral Certainty and the Foundations of Morality* (2018), Neil O'Hara too signals that he "will be following Moyal-Sharrock's account of the features of basic certainties" (p. 6), and argues that "basic moral certainties" are best described

> … as being indubitable and non-epistemic, foundational for our morality and functioning as rules of logic in our moral thought and action (p. 20).

The picture that develops from these remarks of Pleasants, Hermann and O'Hara, is a picture of moral certainty that explicitly draws on Moyal-Sharrock's account of the epistemic certainties she sees Wittgenstein as reflecting upon throughout *On Certainty*.

What makes Pleasants (2008; 2009; 2015), Hermann (2015), and O'Hara (2018) proponents of a Moyal-Sharrock inspired form of a "framework" reading of moral certainty are their respective claims concerning philosophical propositions with *moral* content (like "Murder is wrong") that act as judgements that are treated in some sense as an ineffable framework on which our moral practices of language and of being in the world rest.

While proponents of the dominant view of Wittgensteinian accounts of moral certainty (Pleasants 2008; 2009; 2015), Hermann (2015), and O'Hara (2018) explicitly draw on Moyal-Sharrock's account of non-moral certainty to develop their respective accounts of the notion, the tendency to think of certainty in a similar way to Moyal-Sharrock's approach also appears to shape the majority of the discussion surrounding the possibility of moral certainty, whether philosophers are arguing for or against the analogy.

What Philosophers Talk About When They Talk About Moral Certainty

Though the dominant view approaches the notion of moral certainty from a reading of Wittgenstein explicitly in line with Moyal-Sharrock's, it is also my contention that all the literature surrounding the notion of moral certainty, both the literature that precedes the dominant view, as well as the literature that criticises the dominant view, also presupposes some form of framework reading. This can be seen, I argue, in the unquestioning way in which discussions, whether for or against accounts of moral certainty, revolve around various propositions, the content of which, outside of any particular context, is taken to be moral.

Now, what one takes to be a moral proposition will depend largely on what one takes the domain of morality to include, and this is by no means a settled question. This disagreement is tied, it seems to me, to what one thinks the purpose of moral certainty is. For example, in relation to Martha Nussbaum's approach to the topic of moral philosophy, Diamond (1991a) argues in 'Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is' that

> …Nussbaum's attempt to take as a starting point a widely agreed upon and inclusive notion of the aim of moral philosophy is pretty much doomed. No one knows what the subject is; most widely agreed upon

> accounts of it depend on suppositions that are not obvious and that reflect particular evaluations and views of the world, of human nature, and of what it is to speak, think, write, or read about the world. The more inclusive an account is, the more likely it will include what many philosophers would not dream of counting as part of the subject (p. 380).

This has already been seen in the different approaches to the question of how ethics might bear on *On Certainty* in the disagreement between Crary and Pleasants concerning the nature of morality. For example, Pleasants motivates his claim that "the ethical" is *not* "a dimension of *all* our modes of thought and talk" (Crary 2005, p. 275), as follows:

> I am quite sure that most people have no sense of an immanent ethical quality permeating all of their thoughts, use of language, and "everything there is or can be". I think most people would be perplexed by the idea of ethics being "tied to everything there is or can be, the world as a whole". Speaking for myself, I have a great difficulty understanding this numinous proposition. It is hard enough to know what is right or wrong, permissible or impermissible, etc., but if we also have to intuit what "the ethical" is or means (beyond how ethical words are used in the language-games in which they feature), our difficulty is compounded. Intrinsically-ethical readings seem to me to construct an aura of mystery which, if taken seriously, might divert attention from the important ethical questions and problems (Pleasants 2008, p. 248).

However, though it will be seen that philosophers interested in the possibility of a Wittgensteinian notion of moral certainty have different understandings of what does and does not count as the realm of "the ethical", as well as what does and does not count as the role of moral philosophy in our lives, it is no part of my thesis to differentiate between these accounts in a way that nevertheless focuses on the content of propositions purporting to show something we are morally certain of. In this sense, I retain Wittgenstein's Tractarian position that "ethics

cannot be put into words" (TLP 6.421). This will become clear in the chapters that follow.

For now, I turn to an overview proper of the current literature on moral certainty, paying attention to the way in which, at one point or another, each of these accounts refers to an ethical proposition, the nature of which is reflected upon as a potential example of a Wittgensteinian moral certainty.

Moral Knowledge

The first account that I am aware of that purports to bring Moore's approach into the moral realm appears in Renford Bambrough's (2021), *Moral Scepticism and Moral Knowledge*, first published in 1979. Bambrough's approach is to take Moore's claim to know, after gesturing with his hand, that "Here is one hand", to be a successful proof of there being at least one object that exists in the external world, and thus proves the existence of the external world: "Moore takes the words of the sceptic literally, and shows that what he says is literally false" (Chapter 2, para. 3). This motivates Bambrough to present a moral analogue to Moore's knowledge claims as they are found already in Moore's 'A Defence of Common Sense' and 'Proof of an External World':

> My proof that we have moral knowledge consists essentially in saying, 'We know that this child, who is about to undergo what would otherwise be painful surgery, should be given an anaesthetic before the operation. Therefore we know at least one moral proposition to be true.' (Chapter 2, para. 11)
>
> When Moore proves that there is an external world he is defending a commonsense belief. When I prove that we have moral knowledge I am defending a commonsense belief (Chapter 2, para. 12).

However, as Hermann (2015) rightly argues, Wittgenstein's criticism of Moore's empirical propositions can also be used here to deny that Bambrough's moral proposition is a legitimate knowledge claim, because "what reason would a morally competent agent [...] have to doubt that giving anaesthetic is what should be done in that situation?" (p. 91). If there is no space to doubt such a claim, then we cannot refer to such a claim as a knowledge-claim. It is also no response to say that doubt may nevertheless exist, since the child might be allergic to the anaesthetic, because, as Hermann also notes, Bambrough "intends to give an example of a paradigm case in which gratuitous suffering by a person is avoided where there are means to do so" (p. 91). In other words, doubt makes sense if we do not know whether the child is allergic to anaesthetic, but once we know that they are not allergic to it, no further doubt about the appropriateness of administering the anaesthetic makes sense. Thus, Bambrough's Moore-type proof of moral knowledge-claims falls apart.

Early Accounts of Moral Certainty and Outliers

In 'Wittgenstein and Ethics' (1982), Russell B. Goodman presents the first account I am aware of that combines Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* with the possibility of ethical propositions that can neither be proven (contrary to Bambrough's claim), nor doubted. Goodman is concerned to emphasise the ethical nature of Wittgenstein's thinking, from the *Tractatus* onwards, and in finding his claims there unsatisfactory, looks to "Wittgenstein's later writing, especially *On Certainty*", to correct the issues he sees with Wittgenstein's Tractarian positions (p. 138). Goodman outlines Wittgenstein's Tractarian remarks on ethics as dealing "with the transcendental, not with the boundaries and content of the world" (p. 138), before turning to Wittgenstein's remarks in 'A Lecture on Ethics' concerning the notion of the absolute good as an indescribable state of affairs (p. 139). As Goodman goes on to note, Wittgenstein nevertheless "persists in talking about absolute value, value lying at the limits of

the world rather than in it" (p. 139). The last remark is a reference to Wittgenstein's remarks towards the end of 'A Lecture on Ethics' (1993) where he claims that what ethics says "does not add to our knowledge in any sense", though attempts to express what cannot *be* expressed are "a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it" (p. 44; see also Goodman 1982 p. 141). At this point, Goodman argues that

> Wittgenstein never repudiated the pronouncements on ethics to which we have been attending in any of his writing. Nor is it clear that he continued to accept them. His later work is marked by an almost total disregard for the ethical questions he had maintained to be the whole point of the *Tractatus*. Yet there are good reasons why Wittgenstein ought to have modified his ethical view (p. 141).

One of the issues Goodman has with Wittgenstein's Tractarian remarks on ethics is the idea of what Wittgenstein describes in *Notebooks 1914-1916* (2018), which preceded the *Tractatus*, as "a "completely veiled" subject" (p. 142). As Goodman notes, this early view "completely ignores the public aspects of ethics, the do's and don't's of daily life, offering no validation on the injunctions against murder, for example" (p. 142). The issue as Goodman sees it is that a person may commit murder, while at the same time, maintaining an inner attitude describable as feeling absolutely safe or seeing the world as a miracle" (p. 142). This abhorrent example, Goodman suggests, is possible when Wittgenstein places "value solely in an attitude of what he calls the transcendental self, a self totally removed from worldly activity" (p. 142). Surely, Goodman remarks, we should "not say that such a creature possessed a good will" (p. 142).

This leads Goodman to suggest that ethics can be brought back into the realm of "the do's and don't's of daily life" (p. 142) via a moral analogue to Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* via a moral frame of reference "grounded in the way we act" (p. 143). Wittgenstein

> … might have grounded ethical propositions as he grounds certain logical and epistemological propositions – in the way we act, and in the facts of nature with which our actions are integrated […] Can we not say about moral actions, as we do about action that manifests a belief in a continuing objective world, that "Any reasonable person behaves like *this*?" Must we not also recognize that though our moral beliefs are eminently reasonable, we cannot prove them in terms of some more fundamental premise, nor are they justifiable through their form? They are foundation walls which "are carried by the whole house".
>
> The suggestion here then is that our morality, while it is not just a matter of instinct or of training, is nevertheless only intelligible against such a background […] [S]ome moral activity, and the associated moral judgements are, on this view, as much a prototype of our way of thinking as the belief that the world has existed for more than the last five minutes (pp. 144-145, original emphasis).

Though he is not presenting any particular ethical proposition upon which to reflect, Goodman suggests the development of a moral analogue of the logical and epistemological propositions that Wittgenstein focuses on in *On Certainty*. Goodman's talk of ethics as concerning the "do's and don't's of daily life", and his reference to "moral actions" suggests that Goodman's ethical propositions, if developed, entail a similar picture to that of Pleasants (2008), when the latter describes ethical discourse as "an extended family of language-games with ethical terms *via which* we address matters of moral certainty" (p. 249), including the making of judgements "about the rightness or permissibility of certain acts" (p. 250). Thus, though Goodman rightly notes that Wittgenstein ultimately grounds certainty in our deeds (p. 144), this reliance on ethical propositions as descriptions of prototypes of our moral thought suggests a kind of framework reading of Wittgenstein in line with those I seek to criticise in the following chapters.

In another early discussion of morality in relation to *On Certainty*, in 'Moral Certainty' (1994), Judith Lichtenberg considers our immediate responses to a series of descriptions of horrific acts, that are "real events recently reported in the news" (p. 181). These acts include a man engaging in "sexual intercourse with his three-year-old niece", and a woman intentionally driving "her car into a child on a bicycle" (p. 181). For Lichtenberg, we may only hesitate to call such acts "wrong" because "the word 'wrong' is too mild to express our responses to such acts" (p. 181). One of the reasons for this may be, I suggest, because to claim that something is wrong may be mistaken for a claim that is debatable, and for which reasons may be given for and against it. However, as Lichtenberg argues,

> …no matter how hard I try, I cannot imagine that I am mistaken in thinking that intentionally running down a child on a bicycle [for example] is an unspeakable thing to do – unspeakable, and not in need of 'speaking,' because it *goes without saying* as much as any proposition in our language could (p. 182, my emphasis).

With this in mind, Lichtenberg argues, in relation to *On Certainty*, that

> [a]lthough Wittgenstein never specifically discusses moral judgements, his explorations of the concepts of knowledge, certainty, belief, and justification in the context of nonmoral judgments help illuminate the realm of the moral as well (p. 184).

Though she admits that ethical propositions are absent from *On Certainty*,

> … Wittgenstein's remarks fit the moral case strikingly well. Moral judgments of the sort with which I began [some of which I quoted above] commend themselves to us just as powerfully as do ordinary commonsense judgments. Like Moore's 'I know that here is a hand' or Wittgenstein's 'I know my name is L.W.,' 'I know that running down a child on a bicycle is wrong' is odd precisely because the proposition said

to be known so goes without saying that the addition of 'I know' is (ordinarily) pointless or redundant or understated (pp. 185-186).

Lichtenberg's discussion of moral certainty is more explicit than Goodman's in the sense that it is solely focused on considering the possibility of a moral analogue. Talk of the addition of "I know" to the beginning of the proposition "Running down a child on a bicycle is wrong" as "(ordinarily) pointless or redundant or understated" shows, I argue, that Lichtenberg, like Goodman, takes the content of ethical propositions to be meaningful not in everyday life, but in the context of philosophical reflection on everyday life.

Other contributions to the discussion come from Michael Kober (1997), Rom Harré (2010), and Benjamin De Mesel (2016), all of which seem to take for granted the consideration of certain propositions in relation to the possibility of moral certainty. Kober (1997) considers the purported moral certainties that "Killing people is evil", "Helping others is right", and "All men and women have equal rights" (p. 373) as part of a non-universal account of moral certainty. Harré (2010) draws on Moyal-Sharrock's terminology of a propositions "doppelganger" to argue for a relation between moral "hinge-practices", and empirical "hinge-propositions" (p. 13). De Mesel (2016) draws on what he takes to be Pleasants' convincing argument "that the wrongness of killing is […] a moral certainty" (p. 447) in a discussion of moral argumentation. Though these accounts vary, all three philosophers take it as a given that discussion of moral certainties corresponds to a discussion of the content of various propositions.

Moral Certainty: The Galvanised Path

I now turn to a discussion of the dominant view and its critics, which begins with the two papers of Pleasants' (2008; 2009) I outlined above in my discussion of the links between the dominant view and Moyal-Sharrock's framework reading of *On Certainty.* As O'Hara (2018) has correctly noted in his monograph *Moral*

Certainty and the Foundations of Morality, "[s]ince Pleasants' original papers [on moral certainty] a flourishing debate has formed in which various philosophers have supported, criticized or sought to amend the notion of basic moral certainty" (p. 4). Pleasants' papers, though not the first on the subject, seem "to have galvanized the discussion and set it in a particular direction", while "[p]revious attempts are rarely dealt with in detail now" (O'Hara 2018, p. 4, fn. 2). It will pay to sketch, with a certain level of detail, where the galvanised path began, what inspired it, and where it has been taken in recent years. This enables one to see the direction the discussion of moral certainty has taken.

I begin with Pleasants (who will be my main focus), whose first implicit discussion of what he would later refer to as "basic moral certainties" (2008, p. 255) is suggested towards the end of 'Nonsense on Stilts? Wittgenstein, Ethics, and the Lives of Animals' (2006), when he comments on "…our actual practices (language-games) of moral perception and judgment regarding such fundamental wrongs as killing, assault, and torture" (2006, p. 331). He argues that an

> [e]xamination of these language-games shows, I aver, that the wrongness […] is directly-taken-in, immediately intuited, and not predicated upon anything more fundamental or consequential than the nature of the act itself. With such basic moral perception, whatever reasons or grounds may be offered in justification, none are 'as certain as the very thing they were supposed to be grounds for' (p. 331).

Towards the end of this passage, Pleasants quotes directly from *On Certainty* (307), but it is not until his paper 'Wittgenstein, Ethics and Basic Moral Certainty' (2008), that he approaches the topic of moral certainty explicitly. To this end, Danièle Moyal-Sharrock's (2004; 2005) work, as I have discussed above, is an important guide for Pleasants (as well as Hermann (2015) and O'Hara (2018), who follow a similar path).

As mentioned above, Pleasants focuses his discussion on the pseudo *ethical* propositions of "death is bad", "killing is wrong" (2008, p. 263), and "murder is wrong" (2009, p. 677). He sees an internal connection between the two "basic moral certainties", of "death is bad" and "killing is wrong", when he argues that "[t]he wrongness of killing, it seems reasonable to say, inheres primarily in what the act does to its victim: it renders them dead […] The wrongness of killing, then, is internally related to the badness of death" (p. 257). He argues further that "[e]very competent moral agent regards murder as morally abhorrent" (2008, p. 262; see also 2009, p. 676). On the connection to Wittgenstein's discussion of Moore-type propositions in *On Certainty,* Pleasants (2009) claims that

> [a] moral analogue of Moore's attempt to prove the existence of things in space and time would be to assert, whilst pointing to some particular child on a playground, "I *know* that it would be wrong to kill this child!" That it is wrong to kill an innocent, non-threatening person is just as certain as any logical or analytic truth, or any object of basic empirical certainty. This certainty is manifest in how we live and act, how we respond to particular deaths and killings and in what we say with the ethical propositions that we produce as expressions of sadness and condemnation at such events and acts.
>
> One could say, paraphrasing Wittgenstein (OC 341), that basic moral certainty of the badness of death and wrongness of killing functions as the "hinge" on which enquiry into the rightness or permissibility of particular acts, practices and institutions involving the death and killing of various kinds and states of beings turns. The concept of basic moral certainty may then serve as a reminder that without such a "hinge" or "foundation" we would not be able to enter into moral inquiry or argument, or make moral judgments, at all (p. 679, original emphasis).

I have just outlined the initial steps Pleasants takes in order to provide a brief sketch of the shape of his approach to the topic of moral certainty. I will now

briefly outline the responses that followed, and Pleasants' (2015) response to those responses, to highlight the way in which the galvanised path began to take shape. I then turn to the accounts of Hermann (2015) and O'Hara (2018) to show how this path became the dominant view in the literature on Wittgensteinian notions of moral certainty.

Mikel Burley (2010), Robert Greenleaf Brice (2013) and Stefan Rummens (2013) all challenge Pleasants' account, though each focuses on a different aspect. In 'Epicurus, Death, and the Wrongness of Killing' (2010), Burley rightly challenges the conceptual connection Pleasants argues for between the purported moral certainties "Death is bad" and "Killing is wrong", when he argues that "if we are to regard the wrongness of killing as a genuinely basic certainty, then we need not appeal to the badness of death in order to ground it, since it needs no grounding" (p. 69). One of the attitudes concerning death that Pleasants seeks to challenge by claiming that "Death is bad" is a moral certainty is put forward by Epicurus and Lucretius, who both argue for a version of a denial "that *any* death, including untimely death, is bad *at all*" (Pleasants 2008, p. 257, original emphasis). However, Burley's argument is that "the option is open to the Epicurean to accept what Pleasants says about the wrongness of killing while rejecting, or severely modifying, what he says about the wrongness of death" (p. 76).[12] This is a discussion I will return to in Chapter 2, which is dedicated to an analysis of Pleasants' claim that "Death is bad" can neither be proven nor doubted, and is thus a moral certainty that shows itself in our everyday lives.

In 'Mistakes and Mental Disturbances: Pleasants, Wittgenstein, and Basic Moral Certainty' (2013), Brice agrees with Pleasants that "[j]ust as there are epistemological convictions we accept without question, there are also ethical convictions that no reasonable person would even consider, much less be compelled to justify" (p. 479). However, Brice goes on to argue that "Pleasants

[12] I take Burley to mean the "badness", rather than "wrongness" of death here. As far as I can tell, the question is whether dying is a bad thing, rather than whether this inevitable part of human life is in itself morally *wrong*.

exposes himself to a tension that exists in *On Certainty* regarding how we acquire it: is certainty natural, is it social?" (p. 479). For Brice, "it seems appropriate here to include" Pleasants' example of the wrongness of killing as "the result of positive reinforcement within our culture or *form of life*", rather than something "natural and instinctive" (p. 479, original emphasis). However, in response to both Brice's challenge, and Pleasants' response (2015), it could be argued that the question of where certainties come from, is of little concern for Wittgenstein, as it seems to be an empirical issue.

In his paper 'On the Possibility of a Wittgensteinian Account of Moral Certainty' (2013), Stefan Rummens argues that while the possibility of extrapolating Wittgenstein's positions in *On Certainty* into discussions of morality is a "promising line of inquiry", Pleasants fails to fully convince, as his "analyses of the parallels between the empirical and the moral domains remain partial and fail to take into account all the relevant aspects of Wittgenstein's original argument against skepticism" (pp. 126-127). Most importantly, Rummens sees the possibility of moral relativism as a serious risk that Pleasants' account ought to address, if Pleasants wishes to avoid a morally relativistic account of moral certainty (p. 143) – which Pleasants *does* wish to avoid. I discuss Rummens' challenges to Pleasants' account of "Murder is wrong" as a moral certainty in Chapter 3.

Pleasants responds to various concerns from critics of his account of moral certainty in his third paper on the topic, 'If Killing Isn't Wrong, Then Nothing Is: A Naturalistic Defence of Basic Moral Certainty' (2015). Here he is concerned in particular, with defending his notion of moral certainty "against the arguments for moral certainty being relativistically limited to a plurality of cultural and historical contexts, and disjunctive from Wittgenstein's treatment of basic empirical certainties" (p. 199). He is not only arguing against accounts of moral certainty or challenges to it by Brice (2013) and Rummens (2013), but also Kober (1997) and Harré (2010), who all argue, according to Pleasants, that

"there are no *universal* moral certainties", but "only *localised* certainties embedded in culturally and historically specific moral language-games" (p. 199, original emphasis). To this end, Pleasants' overall aim in his third paper on the subject is "to bring out the universality and naturalism of basic moral certainty" (p. 199), and his

> … central claim is that basic moral certainty on the wrongness of killing and infliction of pain transcends history and culture (and moral language-games). On this I find myself aligned with some socio-biologists, in regarding this certainty as akin to an innate disposition (whether it is actually biologically generated, or a 'cultural universal' that derives from social membership as such, I would not like to say) (p. 210).

Following Pleasants' initial papers outlining and defending an account of moral certainty developed from a reading of Moyal-Sharrock's account of certainty, two book length treatments of the topic of moral certainty have now been published. Though each project is unique, both monographs belong to what I call the dominant view of moral certainty. Julia Hermann's (2015) *On Moral Certainty, Justification and Practice: A Wittgensteinian Perspective*, argues for what she calls a "practice-based view of morality", which involves the claims that "[t]he demand for justification of a moral judgment or norm does not always make sense", that "[p]ractices of moral justification are grounded in ways of acting and reacting that are themselves unjustified", that "[m]oral agency is first and foremost a matter of moral competence", and that "[f]or morally competent agents, some moral beliefs are beyond doubt and not susceptible to justification" (p. 4). Hermann focuses on the moral certainties of "It is wrong to kill this child" (pp. 94-99), "Promises have to be kept" (pp. 99-100), "Slavery is wrong", (pp. 100-101), and "People are free to do otherwise" (p. 101-103) and sketches out an account of moral certainty largely shaped by an account of moral justification. Hermann notes that her discussion of moral certainty is in large part inspired by "the problem of the justificatory regress" (p. 8), and that Wittgenstein's remark

at OC 204 "sets the stage" for her reflections on this problem (p. 4). The remark Hermann refers to is the following:

> Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; - but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game (OC 204, original emphases).

Hermann draws on this to make the claim, central to her project, that

> [o]ur everyday practices reveal that in justifying our moral convictions we sooner or later run out of reasons. At some point we cannot do more than repeat – though this time with stronger emphasis – a moral conviction the truth of which seems to be most obvious to us (pp. 2-3).

In Chapter 4, I analyse Hermann's claim in relation to the moral certainty, heavily implied by her remarks on the grammar of moral justification, that "Racism is wrong".

Neil O'Hara's (2018) *Moral Certainty and the Foundations of Morality* is concerned with arguing for the view that morality is other regarding, that its source is in a phenomenon he calls "primary recognition", and that this other regarding, primary recognition is "grounded in basic moral certainties" (p. vi). For O'Hara, the notion of primary recognition "is the source of all our moral thinking", amounting to the "indubitable certainty that 'This one before me is owed some consideration' or that I cannot treat them as a mere object" (p. vi). O'Hara's project draws heavily on the ethical insights of Knud Ejler Løgstrup (p. vi) and the "ethical demand", which "is about the care we implicitly owe others by virtue of our being in relationship with them" (p. 31).

For my purposes, it is important to note that O'Hara claims he "will be following Moyal-Sharrock's account of the features of basic certainties", claiming that, in the case of moral certainties, they are indubitable, foundational, non-epistemic,

and that “they function as rules of logic” (p. 6). While Moyal-Sharrock (2004) provides a systematic treatment of the certainties found in *On Certainty*, organising them into the sub-categories of linguistic, personal (p. 117), local and universal certainties (p. 136), O’Hara, though following Moyal-Sharrock, nevertheless limits cases of moral certainties to the sub- categories of universal and local notions of the concept. He focuses on the “universal moral certainties” that “At least some killings are wrong”, and that “Some acts are more wrong/right than others” (p. 100), before discussing at length local notions of moral certainties concerning the wrongness of pig sacrifice in early Judaism (pp. 118-127), “the goodness of showing hospitality among the Pashtun people of Southern Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan” (p. 127), the wrongness for the ancient Greeks of eating the dead (pp. 134-141), and the shifting moral certainty of obligations of revenge concerning the ancient Attica (pp. 141-148).

Though I will draw on O’Hara’s account of universal moral certainty at times throughout the remainder of my thesis, the particular propositions I consider in each chapter are from either Pleasants’ (Chapter 2 and 3) or Hermann’s (Chapter 4) discussion of the notion.

Conclusion

My aim in this chapter has been to develop a clear motivation for the approach to a Wittgensteinian notion of moral certainty I seek to develop throughout the remainder of this thesis. This notion will develop through responses to the dominant view of moral certainty via a broadly therapeutic/resolute reading of Wittgenstein. I began with a discussion of the deep disagreements that occur in general Wittgensteinian scholarship between the competing readings of both early and late Wittgenstein’s use of “nonsense” and the saying/showing distinction. My aim here was to show that these disagreements stem from whether one reads the *Tractatus* along framework lines, or along resolute lines,

and then to show how this disagreement feeds into a disagreement over what Wittgenstein says in a single remark in *On Certainty* (OC 10). Drawing on Conant's (1998) critique of McGinn's framework reading of *On Certainty*, and Conant's and Diamond's (2004) reading of the saying/showing distinction of the *Tractatus*, I developed a resolute critique of Moyal-Sharrock's (2004) framework reading of *On Certainty*. I then sought to show how Moyal-Sharrock's reading of *On Certainty* has influenced what has become the dominant view of moral certainty in the current literature, and suggested that the dominant view can thus be criticised along the same lines in which I criticised Moyal-Sharrock's view. With this preliminary scene setting complete, I then turned to a more general review of the small body of literature on Wittgensteinian notions of moral certainty, in an attempt to show its reliance on the nature of a series of purportedly moral propositions in relation to the notion of moral certainty. Though these accounts, as with the dominant view, take moral certainties to ultimately be shown only in what we say and do, my claim is that in focusing their discussions on some form of purportedly moral propositions, which are claimed to be impossible to doubt, proven or said, a rift occurs between philosophical reflection on moral certainty, and the everyday lives in which philosophers claim moral certainty occurs.

It is to this tendency to speak of moral certainty with reference to various moral propositions, influenced by the framework readings of *On Certainty*, that I seek to apply pressure in the remainder of my thesis. To do this, I dedicate each of the following three chapters to a single purported moral certainty, and then compare what it attempts to express to what we say and do in everyday life. In Chapter 2, I focus on Pleasants' "Death is bad"; in Chapter 3, I focus on Pleasants' "Murder is wrong"; in Chapter 4, I focus on "Racism is wrong", which I argue can be derived from Hermann's discussion of the grammar of moral justification. In each case, I attempt to give a picture of the respective notion – death, murder, racism – that seems to put pressure on the respective claims that "There is nothing to think but that …", where what follows "that" is one of the three moral certainties

I analyse. The picture I give has two aims: 1) to show the limitations of accounts of moral certainty that rely, in any sense, on philosophical expressions of purportedly moral propositions, and 2) to begin to sketch a rough story of a more plausible account of moral certainty.

2 – On the Badness of Death

Introduction

Across three papers, Nigel Pleasants (2008, 2009, 2015) argues that attempts by philosophers to provide explanations for the badness of death and the wrongness of wrongful killing (murder and manslaughter, etc.) "seem incapable of articulating just *how bad* death, and *how wrong* murder, are" (2008, p. 260, original emphasis). These explanations, according to Pleasants (2009), are "woefully inadequate to the momentousness of what death and killing *are*" (p. 675, original emphasis). He argues that "[b]ecause of the role that death, and hence killing, has for us in our personal, social and moral lives, the *Sätze* "death is bad" and "killing is wrong" are not, and cannot become propositional knowledge for us" (p. 263). Rather, they function as hinges "on which enquiry into the rightness or permissibility of particular acts, practices and institutions involving the death and killing of various kinds and states of human beings turns" (p. 264).

As Pleasants (2008) notes, philosophical attempts to explain the badness of death and the wrongness of killing are usually couched in terms of what the victim of the killing is "deprived" of in being killed, often with reference to what is "lost" or "taken" from them in their being dead (p. 258). A notable example of such "deprivation explanations" (Pleasants 2009, p. 674) include Don Marquis' (1997) claim in 'An Argument that Abortion is Wrong' that the wrongness of killing inheres in a premature death, which "deprives an individual of a future of value" (p. 96). Another example is Robert Young's (1979) claim in 'What Is So Wrong with Killing People?' that the wrongness of killing inheres in

> … its character as an irrevocable, maximally unjust prevention of the realization either of the victim's life-purposes or of such life-purposes as

the victim may reasonably have been expected to resume or to come to have" (p. 519).

Such explanations, according to Pleasants, are "either tautologies dressed up as explanations, or utterly banal (under)-statements of the blatantly obvious" (p. 260). Pleasants draws on a particular reading of Wittgenstein's notion of "the limits of language" to argue that deprivation explanations of the badness of death and the wrongness of killing are ensnared in the fruitless project of attempting to explain an aspect of an object of basic moral certainties. Though "Death is bad" and "Killing is wrong" have the form of ethical propositions, according to Pleasants, when one attempts to *say* such propositions "in a real-life context the effect is a mixture of absurdity, mirth, incongruity, bemusement and offensiveness". Therefore, rather than ethical propositions, they are "*expressions* of basic moral certainty" (p. 675, original emphasis).[13]

Though I agree with Pleasants that it may be the case that deprivation explanations fail to convey the badness of death or the wrongness of killing, I think it is a mistaken to suggest that this is *because* "Death is bad" and "Killing is wrong" are basic moral certainties. My suggestion in both this chapter and the next is that to conceptualise forms of words like "Death is bad" and "Killing is wrong", outside of any context, as expressions of moral certainty, as Pleasants seems to, is to risk missing much of what everyday life can show us about the notions such forms of words purport to express something about. Leaving a discussion of "Killing is wrong" for the following chapter, in the present chapter, I focus on Pleasants' position on the nature of propositions of the form "Death is bad" or "Death is bad because ..." (where "..." stands for an explanation) as intelligible but unsayable expressions of basic moral certainties, before turning

[13] I will refer to Pleasants' certainty "Death is bad" as a "moral certainty" so as to make the distinction that Pleasants sees between his certainty and the non-moral certainties he takes *On Certainty* to solely contain. In correspondence with Mikel Burley (2010), Pleasants suggested "Death is bad" might be an evaluative rather than moral certainty. However, I agree with Burley when he says that not much seems to hang on this distinction (p. 84, fn. 9).

to Burley's Epicurean response. Coming from a broadly resolute reading of Wittgenstein, I then critique the framework reading of moral certainty that Pleasants and Burley support. To this end, I consider Pleasants' and Burley's accounts of "Death is bad" as a basic moral certainty against a brief reflection on what human beings talk about when they talk about death.

My claim is that in holding on to the proposition "Death is bad" in his account of moral certainty, Pleasants misses much of how the notion of "death" may show itself to us in our everyday talk about death. Rather than looking directly at the practice of language to illuminate the question of how the notion of death might shape one's world picture, Pleasants' claim that "Death is bad" is a philosophical expression that shows itself in our everyday lives blocks the possibility of thinking other things about death. The problem for Pleasants, is that if we look at everyday examples, talk of death often reflects attitudes that can have nothing to do with death being "bad". If we take Wittgenstein seriously in *On Certainty* when he says that "[y]ou must look at the practice of language" (OC 501), in order to see the logic of our language, then we must ask whether "Death is bad" really *must* – as Pleasants seems to think – be something that goes without saying in our everyday lives.

On Certainty and Ethical Propositions

As I noted in Chapter 1, Pleasants (2008) argues that the early Wittgenstein's claims that "it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics" (TLP 6.42) and that "ethics cannot be put into words" (TLP 6.421) were no longer positions that the later Wittgenstein supported when writing *On Certainty*. According to Pleasants, though Wittgenstein "expounded on the Tractarian doctrine of ethical ineffability" in 'A Lecture on Ethics', "by the time of his later philosophy he no longer held the doctrine of ethical ineffability and had nothing to say, philosophically, on ethical topics" (p. 245). Pleasants makes this remark to

contrast his reading of *On Certainty* with the reading he takes "intrinsically-ethical readings of Wittgenstein" (p. 243) to subscribe to. These include Crary's (2005) suggestion, as discussed in Chapter 1, that "Wittgenstein invites us […] to think of the ethical as a dimension of *all* our modes of thought and talk" (p. 275). While a resolute/therapeutic reader of early Wittgenstein like Crary (2005) wants to suggest that "Wittgenstein's Tractarian attitude to ethics endured throughout his writings" (p. 244), Pleasants (2008) argues that "Wittgenstein's later philosophy exhibits an attitude towards ethical propositions that is the antithesis of the Tractarian view" (p. 254). That is, by the time of *On Certainty*, on Pleasants' reading of Wittgenstein, it *is* possible for there to be propositions of ethics, and they *can* be put into words.

To this end, he argues that "[a]lthough Wittgenstein does not consider ethical propositions in *On Certainty*, they fit nicely into its anthropological examination of knowledge and non-epistemic certainty" (p. 254):

> Adopting the perspective of *On Certainty*, as I read it, one does not muse on the nature of the ethical and where it resides, nor concern oneself with the epistemic status of ethical propositions. In practice, as we encounter or produce them in everyday life, ethical propositions are just like the other kinds of proposition *(Satz)* that Wittgenstein examines in *On Certainty*, and they repay the same kind of anthropological consideration. […] Ethical propositions, such as "sex before marriage is wrong", "contraception is permissible", "parents should make personal sacrifices for their children's sake", or "slavery is evil", are regarded as plain statements of what (morally) is or ought to be the case. Those who believe that sex before marriage is wrong are not usually uncertain or confused about what it is or means for something to be right, wrong, or permissible. […] As with empirical propositions, ethical propositions admit varying degrees of certitude, unchangeability, revisability, uncertainty, and contentiousness. With regard to both kinds of

> proposition, people's certainty and confidence range from being unshakably sure, to completely sure, to very sure, to not very sure, to very unsure (pp. 254-255).

What Pleasants does here is re-introduce into Wittgensteinian analysis the possibility of expressing ethical propositions. When he provides examples of ethical propositions, he does so outside of any context in a way that suggests that an ethical proposition can be identified solely by a form of words, absent a use. This is because, as mentioned in Chapter 1, he takes ethical discourse to be

> … an extended family of language-games with ethical terms *via which* we address matters of moral concern (make judgements about the rightness or permissibility of certain acts, practices and instructions, and argue about which kinds of thing have moral value and to which extent) (pp. 249-250, original emphasis).

For Pleasants, "sex before marriage is wrong" and "slavery is evil" are both ethical propositions, because they describe both an act and practice, as well as a judgement concerning its permissibility. This is to say nothing of the person who uses each form of words, or the contexts in which they are uttered. It is with this picture of ethical propositions in mind that Pleasants develops his moral analogue of the empirical propositions Wittgenstein considers throughout *On Certainty*. For Pleasants (2008), there are propositions

> … that take the *form* of ethical propositions but which cannot actually be treated as *ethical* propositions nor become propositional knowledge […] and one sees philosophers contemplating them à la Moore with his pseudo empirical propositions. The objects of these propositions are what I call "basic moral certainties" (p. 255, original emphases).

The Badness of Death and the Wrongness of Killing as Basic Moral Certainties

One form of words that Pleasants suggests as a philosophical expression of the object of a basic moral certainty is "Death is bad", which is discussed mostly in relation to its connection with another basic moral certainty: "Killing is wrong". By "Killing is wrong", Pleasants seems to mean "wrongful killing", which includes acts of murder, but is broad enough to include other acts of wrongful killing like manslaughter.[14] (Interestingly, this seems to make the moral certainty "Killing is wrong" into a tautology, saying nothing about killing in particular.)

Nevertheless, Pleasants' (2008) discussion begins with the consideration of Moore's contemplation of "the justifiability of *murder*" (p. 256, original emphasis), and so though he goes on to focus on *both* the badness of death *and* the wrongness of killing as examples of basic moral certainties, the discussion that leads him there focuses mostly on deaths as the result of acts of wrongful killing. I will leave most of my discussion of "Killing is wrong" and my discussion of "Murder is wrong" as basic moral certainties for Chapter 3. For now I bring up "Killing is wrong" only to bring attention to the way in which Pleasants shapes his discussion of "Death is bad" as a basic moral certainty around the question of the permissibility of acts of wrongful killing.

As Pleasants notes,

> [t]he very same G.E. Moore who insisted that he *knew* that the hands he was waving existed and that he had never been far from the earth's surface, had previously averred that the proposition that "universal murder would not be a good thing at this moment can [...] not be proved" [...] His reason for this agnosticism was that he thought that the thesis

[14] If "Killing is wrong" is a basic moral certainty, then it seems to follow that "Murder is wrong" and "Manslaughter is wrong" are also basic moral certainties. I leave discussion of "Murder is wrong" for Chapter 3.

> “the existence of human life is on the whole an evil” could not be refuted, and if it is true then murder “would be good as a means” of reducing the amount of evil in “the Universe” (pp. 255-256, original emphasis).

In *Principia Ethica* (2004), Moore claims that “no moral law is self-evident”, because “they are capable of being confirmed or refuted by an investigation of causes and effects” (pp. 148-149) aimed at determining what would produce the most good. Roughly, Moore defines one’s moral duty “as that action which will cause more good to exist in the Universe than any possible alternative”, such that when “Ethics presumes to assert that certain ways of acting are ‘duties’ it presumes to assert that to act in those ways will always produce the greatest possible sum of good” (p. 148). With this in mind, Moore argues we cannot be certain of what will produce the greatest sum of good, and therefore “can only hope to discover which, among a few alternatives, will *generally* produce the greatest balance of good in the immediate future” (p. 154, original emphasis). Thus, we cannot claim “that obedience to such commands as […] ‘Thou shalt do no murder,’ is *universally* better than the alternative […] of […] murder” (p. 154, original emphasis) as a general principle, because we can never prove or refute conclusively that “the existence of human life is on the whole an evil” (p. 156). If the existence of human life were evil, then the murder of human beings would be permissible. All we can say, according to Moore, is that “it is generally wrong for any single person to commit murder”, based on “the general disutility of murder […] provided the majority of the human race will certainly persist in existing” (p. 156). Thus, Moore claims that he can neither prove nor disprove the universal wrongness of murder, because he can neither prove nor disprove the central tenet of pessimism that “the experience of human life is on the whole an evil” (p. 156). In other words, since we cannot rule out that “Human life is evil”, we cannot say universally that “Murder is wrong”.

Pleasants (2008) responds to Moore by claiming that on his reading of *On Certainty*,

> … being prepared to even consider such a possibility is tantamount to renouncing the ability to make *any* moral judgement, and the hypothesis that perhaps "the existence of human life is on the whole an evil" is no more an ethical proposition than "perhaps there are no physical objects" […] is an empirical one" (p. 256, original emphasis).

The proposition "there are no physical objects" is from OC 23, where Wittgenstein reflects on a situation in which it makes sense to believe a man who tells him that he has two hands. The mention of "coverings and bandages" (OC 23) suggests the man's claim that he has two hands is made in the context of possibly losing his hands in an accident. Wittgenstein says that he is willing to "believe his assurance that he has two hands, if he is trustworthy", and that his believing the "man stems from my admitting that it is possible for him to make sure" (OC 23). The man could check under the bandages, for example. Wittgenstein then contrasts this scenario with "someone who says that perhaps there are no physical objects", and remarks that in this case there is "no such admission" (OC 23). No admission is given in the latter case because it is not even clear what "making sure" would mean in relation to the non-existence of objects. Contrary to the man in the accident claiming that he has checked and now knows that he has two hands, in the second case a context is not brought up in which it would make sense to suggest that physical objects do not exist, because no context exists. The contrast thus seems to be between propositions like "Here is one hand", for which a situation can be imagined in which it makes sense to say that one knows that "Here is one hand" (situations like the one Wittgenstein describes of the person with bandages), and propositions like "perhaps there are no physical objects" (OC 23), for which situations in which it makes sense to say it seem ruled out.

Pleasants seems to want to say that "Murder is wrong" is a philosophical expression of a basic moral certainty, and as such, the proposition "Murder is right" makes no sense. There is no context in which "Murder is right" can enter

seriously into our moral discourse. Similarly, Pleasants seems to suggest that the proposition "the existence of human life is on the whole an evil" is also a proposition for which there is no space in our moral language games, which may suggest that he takes "The existence of human life is on the whole a good" to be a basic moral certainty as well.

What Pleasants does want to suggest, however, is that

> … if "murder" entails "wrongful killing" there is no room to ask whether murder is always wrong, but we might want to ask what the wrongness of wrongful killing consists in. Some philosophers think we need to address this question, for if we don't know what makes wrongful killing wrong we won't know if we are correctly judging those highly contentious cases of which there is doubt or dispute as to whether it is wrong to kill (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, non-human animals) (p. 257).

He goes on to say that while it makes no sense to ask whether acts or murder are always wrong, it may make sense to wonder at what the wrongness of wrongful killing, of which acts of murder are examples, consists of. Some philosophers go further, as Pleasants notes, and claim that the question *must* be addressed if we are to make sense of our discussions over whether acts like abortion, euthanasia, and the killing of non-human animals are tantamount to acts of wrongful killing (p. 257). An example of the latter approach, Pleasants (2008) notes, is found in Don Marquis' remark from 'Why Abortion is Immoral' that

> … if we merely believe, but do not understand, why killing adult human beings such as ourselves is wrong, how could we conceivably show that abortion is either immoral or permissible? (Marquis quoted in Pleasants 2008, p. 189).

Marquis' (1989) aim is to use an analogy between an unborn foetus and an adult human being to argue "that abortion is, except possibly in rare cases, seriously immoral, [and] that it is in the same moral category as killing an innocent adult

human being" (p. 183). He thinks that if he can show why it is wrong to kill an innocent adult human being, and thus *why* "Wrongful killing is wrong", he will also have shown why it is wrong to kill an unborn foetus. To this end, Marquis provides the following explanation of the wrongness of killing adult human beings:

> The loss of one's life deprives one of all the experiences, activities, projects, and enjoyments that would otherwise have constituted one's future. Therefore, killing someone is wrong, primarily because the killing inflicts (one of) the greatest possible losses on the victim (p. 189).

Marquis' explanation of the wrongness of killing is an example of what Pleasants calls "deprivation explanations" (2009, p. 675). Pleasants describes such explanations as tending to be

> … couched in terms of some kind of loss or deprivation of something valuable to the victim, and correlatively of the victim having something of great value unjustly and unlawfully taken from them. What is lost/taken is variously identified as: the victim's future; their ability to fulfil desires and pursue projects; their ability to have pleasurable and satisfying experiences, attachments and relations; their hopes and wishes to see various things come to pass in the future (Pleasants 2008, p. 258).

However, Pleasants (2009) goes on to argue, these explanations "egregiously fail to do what they claim to do, namely, to *explain* the wrongness of killing" (p. 674, original emphasis). This is because

> … the concepts of losing and taking something of value, on which deprivation explanations are parasitic, are incapable of stating just *how bad* death, and *how wrong* murder, are. In saying that the deceased "loses" her life, and that the murderer "takes" his victim's life, our ability

> to articulate the badness and wrongness involved is limited by the senses of "losing" and "taking" that those concepts have when applied to a *living* subject who loses something of value or who has something of value unjustly taken from them (p. 675, original emphases).

Such theories, Pleasants (2009) argues, "are either tautologies dressed up as explanations, or utterly banal understatements of the blatantly obvious" (p. 676). They

> … simply rephrase in grandiloquent philosophical language what everyone already knows just in virtue of being able to use the concepts "death", "killing" and murder appropriately. Mere (re)statements of what everyone already knows clearly neither explain nor justify what they already know (p. 676).

So the badness involved in "Death is bad", and the wrongness involved in "Killing is wrong", according to Pleasants, cannot be explained, as our explanations, which usually rely on words like "loss" or "take", fail to convey what the badness or the wrongness involves. Rather, all such explanations do is rephrase what is already indubitable, that "Death is bad", and that "Killing is wrong". The limitation of our language here is a symptom of a deprivation explanation clashing with the limits of what the words "lose" and "take" *can* mean. Because of what these words mean in regular use, even when we speak of "losing" a deceased loved one, or having a deceased loved one "taken" from us, they cannot do the work philosophers want them to do in explanations concerning the wrongness of killing or the badness of death (Pleasants 2009, p. 675).

The reason for such limitations in our language, according to Pleasants, is that the content of the propositions "Death is bad" and "Killing is wrong" are "objects" of basic moral certainty:

> The primary symptom of a basic certainty is that when an attempt is made at putting an unquestionable truism into propositional form in a real-life context the effect is a mixture of absurdity, mirth, incongruity, bemusement and offensiveness. Statements taking the form: "Death is bad because …" or "Killing is wrong because …" may *look* like ethical propositions, but contemplation on the effect of offering or receiving such an "explanation" in a real-life context shows them rather to be *expressions* of basic moral certainty" (p. 675, original emphasis).

Pleasants began from a response to Moore's claim that the wrongness of murder could not be universally proven, and ended with an account of "Killing is wrong" and "Death is bad" as expressions of basic moral certainties that cannot "be affirmed or doubted, nor treated as propositional knowledge" (p. 262). By the time of his third paper on moral certainty, Pleasants (2015) argues "that basic moral certainty on the wrongness of killing […] transcends history and culture (and moral language-games)" (p. 210). He concludes that

> … what is relevant to time and place are ideas and beliefs on what is not to count as wrongful killing (very often on the grounds of a taken for granted naturalness, necessity, or unavoidability of the deaths involved) not the wrongness of killing as such (p. 210).

What Pleasants seems to mean is that killing as such is wrong, though exceptional circumstances do exist. But then the burden of proof is on the killer to explain how their act was not wrong.

Thus, he wants "to bring out the universality […] of basic moral certainty" (p. 199), ultimately arguing that it is "grounded in our biological and social nature":

> We are finite, sentient, vulnerable creatures, or in Macintyre's nice turn of phrase, "dependent rational animals". Basic moral certainty is a reflection of our human social nature, our deepest collective interest in

> living together cooperatively, productively, harmoniously, and in a way that enables us to flourish both individually and collectively (pp. 213-214).[15]

Nothing to Think but That "Death is Bad"?

Pleasants wants to defend this account against philosophers who think there are things to think about "death" or "killing" *other than* that "Death is bad" and that "Killing is wrong". In this chapter I focus on the possibility of thinking things other than that "Death is bad", leaving the majority of the discussion concerning the possibility of thinking things other than that "Killing is wrong" for the following chapter. However, I will need to speak about "Killing is wrong" briefly here because Pleasants' response to the question of what makes death "bad" is couched in terms of what makes killing "wrong". This seems to stem from how Pleasants takes the notions of "killing" and "death" to be internally related.

Pleasants claims that

> [t]he wrongness of killing, it seems reasonable to say, inheres primarily in what the act does to its victim: it renders them dead. Being killed may, but does not necessarily, involve physical, psychological, and emotional suffering. But the specific harm inflicted by killing clearly is that of being rendered dead, otherwise killing would not differ from assault occasioning actual or grievous bodily harm. The wrongness of killing, then, is internally related to the badness of death (p. 257).

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[15] Pleasants' remarks here risk being read as an attempted explanation of "Murder is wrong". I.e., "Murder is wrong *because* of the kinds of beings we are. However, I will not take this kind of criticism up in my thesis.

With this connection in mind, Pleasants begins a response to thinking things other than that death is bad by saying that

> … many would claim that death in itself may not be bad, or not *all that* bad, if it comes at the end of a reasonably long and satisfactory life and does not involve much suffering. It is often said of the death of an elderly person that they enjoyed "a good innings" or "lived to a ripe old age", whereas dead young people are tragically "taken before their time" (p. 257, original emphasis).

Here, Pleasants is drawing on everyday discussions of the badness of death, noting that "[t]his is the response I've often elicited upon asking people what they think the badness of death consists in" (p. 265, fn. 14). Pleasants also considers the "much more radical claim, based on arguments propounded by the ancient Greek philosophers Epicurus and Lucretius, that flatly denies that *any* death, including untimely death, is bad *at all*" (p. 257, original emphasis). He connects Wittgenstein's Tractarian remark that "Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death" (Wittgenstein quoted in Pleasants 2008, p. 265, fn. 15) to a discussion of both Epicurus' "no-subject" argument, as well as Lucretius' "symmetry" argument (p. 265). In this way "Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death", seems to frame the discussion between Pleasants and the Epicureans such that neither side doubts that death is not experienced. What is disagreed upon is whether death is "bad", or is "nothing at all".

What Pleasants calls the "no-subject" argument stems from two places in the writings of Epicurus. First, in *The Principal Doctrines* (1994b), Epicurus states that

> [d]eath is nothing to us. For what has been dissolved has no sense-experience, and what has no sense-experience is nothing to us (p. 32).

Second, in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (1994a), Epicurus instructs Menoeceus to

> [g]et used to believing that death is nothing to us. For all good and bad consists in sense-experience, and death is the privation of sense-experience […] So death, the most frightening of bad things, is nothing to us; since when we exist, death is not yet present, and when death is present, then we do not exist (p. 29).

What Pleasants calls the "symmetry" argument is later put forward by Lucretius (2001), a follower of Epicurus, in the form of two entries in Book Three of his epic poem *On the Nature of Things*. First, Lucretius states that

> [d]eath, then, is nothing to us and does not affect us in the least, now that the nature of the mind is understood to be mortal. And as in time past [when we were not *yet* alive] we felt no distress when the advancing Punic hosts were threatening Rome on every side, when the whole earth, rocked by the terrifying tumult of war, shudderingly quaked beneath the coasts of high heaven, while the entire human race was doubtful into whose possession the sovereignty of the land and the sea was destined to fall; so, when we are no more […] you may be sure that nothing at all will have the power to affect us or awaken sensation in us, who shall not then exist (Book Three, 830-841).

Soon after he makes a second, similar remark:

> Look back now and consider how the bygone ages of eternity that elapsed before our birth were nothing to us. Here, then, is a mirror in which nature shows us the time to come after our death. Do you see anything fearful in it? Do you perceive anything grim? Does it not appear more peaceful that the deepest sleep? (Book Three, 972-970).[16]

[16] The identification of these remarks as those making up the symmetry argument are found in Stephen E. Rosenbaum's (1989) 'The Symmetry Argument: Lucretius Against the Fear of Death'.

Lucretius' symmetry argument is that if one agrees that it is not rational to fear past events that we were not alive to experience, then it is just as irrational to fear future events that we are not alive to experience either. While it seems to me that Pleasants, following Wittgenstein (TLP 6.4311), would agree with the Epicureans that one's death is not something that one lives to experience, he does not follow the Epicureans' claim that death is therefore "nothing to us".

Pleasants (2008) responds to both the person that might say that "death in itself may not be bad, or not *all that* bad, if it comes at the end of a reasonably long and satisfactory life" (p. 257), *and* the person that says that "death is nothing to us" because "what has been dissolved has no sense-experience" (Epicurus 1994b, p. 32), in the following way:

> … if some deaths are much worse than others – if some are personal tragedies and some are hardly bad at all – why do we not judge that the murder of an elderly person (*ceteris paribus*) does less wrong, never mind hardly any wrong, to the victim than that of a young person? If the wrongness of killing is proportional to the badness of death, and the degree of badness of death ranges from tragic to hardly bad at all, should we not conclude that some murders really do little wrong to the victim (because in being killed at "a ripe old age" the victim doesn't lose very much)? Even more sceptically, the "no-subject" and "symmetry" arguments could be seen to entail that *no killing* in which the victim has no experience of being killed is wrong either (and where the victim does experience being killed, the wrong done to them is not that they end up dead). In such cases the killing annihilates the subject of experience, *ipso facto* leaving no victim to suffer the effects of the supposed crime. Moreover, killing *ex hypothesi* merely returns a person to a state of non-existence identical to their pre-natal non-existence with regard to which their attitude when alive was one of unperturbed equanimity. Thus killing is a "victimless crime"! (p. 258, original emphases)

However, as Mikel Burley (2010) suggests in 'Epicurus, Death, and the Wrongness of Killing',

> …the option is open to the Epicurean to accept what Pleasants says about the wrongness of killing while rejecting, or severely modifying, what he says about the badness of death (p. 76).

Burley questions the validity of Pleasants' conceptualisation of the relation between the wrongness of killing and the badness of death, claiming that what makes killing wrong for Pleasants "is its rendering a person dead, and death is the gravest of harms or is at least *among* the gravest of harms" (p. 76, original emphasis). However, as Burley goes on to argue,

> … this proposal undermines the claim that the wrongness of killing is itself a basic moral certainty, since it appears to ground the conviction that killing is wrong upon a more fundamental principle, namely that death is bad (p. 76).

Burley argues that Pleasants

> … takes it for granted that the badness of death *must* count among our basic moral certainties because, were it to be dispensed with, moral chaos would allegedly ensue. The thought is, of course, that such chaos would ensue precisely because the certainty that death is bad is needed to support the conviction that killing is wrong. If, however, as the logic of Pleasants' own argument implies, the latter conviction is itself a basic moral certainty, then it needs no support from any *particular* belief or value, whether that be the belief that death is bad or anything else; rather, it stands fast in our lives due to its internal relations with a *wide range* of inter-connected values and beliefs, which may or may not include the belief that death is bad. This possibility – that the wrongness of killing is not reliant upon the badness of death – is not, as it were,

> ungirded by it – provides for the Epicurean a means of retaining the former conviction while jettisoning the latter, and of thereby denying that the Epicurean view, that death is nothing to us, is incompatible with the common view that killing is prima facie, wrong (pp. 78-79, original emphases).

This leads Burley, who acknowledges Moyal-Sharrock's notion of "basic certainties", to follow Pleasants in claiming that

> … we can legitimately suppose there to be a network of values that stand fast for us in our ethical activities, and which we might call "basic moral certainties" (p. 75, original emphasis).

To this end, Burley suggests the Epicurean can, in effect, agree that the badness of death, like the wrongness of killing, is part of "our basic moral framework", and that the badness of death "figures only in ways that are relatively unstable and confused when contrasted with those in which the latter characteristically figures" (p. 81). He goes on to suggest that

> … since neither Pleasants nor anyone else is arguing that our moral framework is immune to reform, the Epicurean can construe his own therapeutic task as being to rationally attenuate the influence of a psychologically damaging feature of our moral framework while leaving in place the framework's psychologically and morally salutary aspects, including the conviction that killing is wrong […] it may be possible for the Epicurean to highlight examples illustrative of the fact that the attitudes towards death we display in our lives are significantly less consistent, and perhaps more confused, than are those that we display towards killing, and hence that rational amelioration is more warranted in the former case (p. 81).

By “rational amelioration”, I take Burley to be referring to the possibility of thinking “rationally” about death so as to alleviate one’s fear of it (“If only she thought about death in a more logical way, remembering it is not an event we experience. *Then* she would no longer fear it”). As I understand Burley, he wants to argue from within Pleasants’ framework reading of Wittgenstein, that “Killing is wrong” is an expression of a basic moral certainty, and as an expression of basic moral certainty, it is not grounded in anything more fundamental than it itself is. As such, it can be asked whether “Death is bad” really is, like “Killing is wrong”, an expression of basic moral certainty. Burley says that it is *but*, that it has the potential to be “a psychologically damaging feature of our moral framework” (p. 81), and thus may be brought into question to alleviate suffering. Burley takes the Epicurean to be offering those fearful of death reminders, drawing on Wittgenstein’s remarks in *Philosophical Investigations* that “[p]hilosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything” (PI 126 quoted in Burley 2010, p. 83) and that “[t]he work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose” (PI 127 quoted in Burley 2010, p. 83):

> Insofar as we take death to involve the extinction of consciousness, we of course all admit that being dead cannot be intrinsically or experientially bad for us. Yet, insofar as the emotional attitudes that we exhibit towards our own deaths, or towards the deaths of those we care about, appear to betray a forgetfulness of this basic understanding, the Epicurean may perceive it to be necessary to offer us a reminder of what, at some level, we already accept (p. 83).

On the one hand, I think Burley is right to question Pleasants’ claim that “Death is bad” is an expression of a basic moral certainty. On the other hand, I think that by staying within a framework reading of Wittgenstein, Burley, like Pleasants before him, limits the scope of the connections between the notion of death and Wittgenstein’s remarks in *On Certainty*. Thus, I turn to a response to Pleasants’

(and Burley's) framework accounts of moral certainty, from a broadly therapeutic/resolute reading of Wittgenstein.

A Therapeutic/Resolute Reading of "Death Is Bad" and "Death Is Nothing To Us"

As previously mentioned, Pleasants' approach to what counts as an expression of basic moral certainty is shaped by his understanding of the form that moral discourse – moral propositions – takes. They contain "ethical terms *via which* we address matters of moral concern" (p. 249, original emphasis), by which Pleasants means the making of "judgements about the rightness or permissibility of certain acts, practices and institutions" (pp. 249-250). Thus, propositions like "sex before marriage is wrong", or "slavery is evil" are taken to be ethical propositions because they "are regarded as plain statements of what (morally) is or ought to be the case" (p. 255). Moral certainties, generally speaking, have a similar form to *these* kinds of propositions, but cannot be treated *as* ethical propositions themselves, because of their indubitable nature. Pleasants sees himself in line with what he takes to be Wittgenstein's attitude towards ethical propositions at the time of writing *On Certainty*, which according to Pleasants, is "the antithesis of the Tractarian view" (p. 254) that "it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics" (TLP 6.42) and "that ethics cannot be put into words" (TLP 6.421).

Though a somewhat unique candidate, as human beings cannot help but die *one day*, "Death is bad" has the form of an ethical proposition in *this* sense, because the "badness" that the word "bad" denotes is a form of moral judgement. Though of course as a basic moral certainty, it is indubitable, unprovable, and nonsensical to express in everyday life, and so cannot be treated *as* an ethical proposition. Burley's Epicurean response to Pleasants sits within this

conceptualisation of basic moral certainty, such that the badness of death, expressed in "Death is bad", is very much part of the human condition – shown in the fear of death – but can be to an extent alleviated through a reminder to the effect that "when we exist, death is not yet present, and when death is present, then we do not exist" (Epicurus 1994a, p. 32).

By contrast, to read *On Certainty* along resolute lines is to read the text such that Wittgenstein's attitude towards ethics in the *Tractatus* remains largely intact. To see what this might look like, I draw on some of Diamond's remarks from her paper 'Wittgenstein, Mathematics, and Ethics: Resisting the Attractions of Realism' (1996) concerning how "Wittgenstein's later thought bear[s] on moral philosophy" (p. 226). Diamond seeks to challenge Sabina Lovibond's (1991) account in *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* of a Wittgensteinian form of moral realism (Diamond 1996, p. 226), and part of Lovibond's account of moral realism is an account of moral discourse that "emphasizes the significance of moral predicates" (Diamond 1996, p. 242). My intention is not to discuss the details of Diamond's disagreement with Lovibond concerning whether Wittgenstein was a moral realist (Diamond thinks "Wittgenstein is misread […] when taken either as a philosophical realist or as an antirealist" (p. 226)). Rather, I want to draw attention to the connection between Lovibond's account of Wittgensteinian ethics as one in which ethical propositions are identifiable by their moral predicates, and Pleasants' largely similar account of propositions of a certain *form* as being identifiable as ethical propositions. Diamond's criticism of those kinds of ways of conceiving of ethics, and ethical propositions, will then be considered.

Diamond argues that in Lovibond's emphasising of "the significance of moral predicates" (p. 242) in her account of moral discourse, she fails to take into account what Diamond calls the "striking fact"

> … that some talk and writing that one might very well take to be the expression of moral thought involves no specifically moral words at all,

> or involves relatively few such words, which bear relatively little weight (p. 243).

Diamond describes Lovibond as holding "that it is primarily the use of *moral predicates* in a language that reflects human moral interests" (pp. 244-245, original emphasis), and argues to the contrary that

> [t]he presence of moral thought […] may be reflected in language, not in the use of moral predicates, tied to our interest in moral properties, but in some of the ways we use language about all sorts of not specifically moral things, like death in war, for example, or pulling horses out of deep snow. The idea that moral discourse is tied to moral predicates shows, I think, a false conception of what it is for our thought to be *about* something moral. Being good and evil is a matter of use, not subject matter (p. 245, original emphasis).

Diamond elaborates this point when she argues that

> [t]he very idea of "the moral vocabulary" is the idea of a particular group of nouns and adjectives; it expresses the hold on our minds, when we think philosophically about ethics, of bits of language having the form of *judgements* […] We do use little sentences with moral words in moral teaching, and big and little sentences with moral words in our moral thought; but the existence of these indicative sentences has had too great of a fascination for us in moral philosophy. If we want to see what moral thinking is, we need to be able to look away from the case of "moral propositions," and to free ourselves from the idea that goes easily with exclusive focus on that case, of sentences as about moral subject matter through the presence in them of moral words (pp. 251-252, original emphasis).

Diamond means the view just outlined "to sound *not terribly far* from the *Tractatus* view of ethics" (p. 252, original emphasis), which is why her remarks here are significant for my focus. According to Diamond, the starting point of thinking about ethics in relation to the *Tractatus* "is the idea that "ethics" is not a term for a subject matter alongside other subjects, any more than "logic" is" (p. 252). She cites TLP 6.122 here to argue that according to the *Tractatus*, "there is no need for logical propositions" (p. 252):

> *Inference* has a place in our lives and thought simply through our being thinking beings, having a world; and the justification for our inferring as we do cannot be tied to laws of logic, taken to be specific judgements (sentences in which "*we* express what we wish with the help of signs," TLP, 6.124) (p. 252, original emphasis).

As I read Diamond, she wants to say that Wittgenstein's picture of ethics is like that of his picture of logic, in that neither are made up of "propositions with a specific subject matter" (p. 252). Rather, ethics and logic, as Diamond notes Wittgenstein remarks at TLP 6.13 and 6.421, are both transcendental (p. 252). What this means, according to Diamond, is that logic and ethics are

> …"symbolized," as it were, by the variable for *every* particular thing we might say, a variable none of whose values is a proposition with a logical or ethical subject matter. There is not, on this view, a "moral vocabulary," a vocabulary through which we mean moral things. If one wants to give sense to "moral vocabulary" one might mean: vocabulary we use in saying things that might have an application in moral life, but that excludes no words. Since the *Tractatus* might have such use (and was intended to), "variable," "Frege," and "Theory of Types" belong, in this sense, to "moral vocabulary" (pp. 252-253, original emphasis).

In other words, there is no class of propositions such that, from their appearance alone, they can be classified as ethical propositions. Rather, one must look to the

use of a proposition in a given context to see whether it is being used as something concerning the ethical.

What Diamond takes from Wittgenstein's discussion in *On Certainty*, in line with her reading of the *Tractatus*, is not only that "there is no sharp boundary between propositions of logic (in a broad sense) and empirical propositions" (p. 240), but that "a proposition's function may change" (p. 240), depending on what it is used to say:

> If a proposition may thus change in function, it follows that we cannot tell what the function is from an examination of the proposition itself. The *look* of a sentence (its being an indicative sentence, say) does not make clear what its use is (pp. 240-241, original emphasis).

Diamond argues that this means that there is no limit to what words count as moral words, or words about a moral subject matter:

> … anything made of the resources of ordinary language may be brought into such a relation to our lives and actions and understanding of the world that we might speak of the thinking involved in that connection as "moral" […] If a sentence or image or word has this character, it arises not through its content but from its use on a particular occasion (p. 248).

The limit is set, it could be suggested, by what we are willing to accept as meaningful speech and thought. It can "only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense" (TLP 'Preface'). It is in this way, as Diamond remarks, that it could be said that "[t]he *Tractatus* approach to ethics is shaped by a general conception of language", and that "[t]he moral, if there is one, is that what we need to learn from Wittgenstein's later philosophy is not "the right view of language" but rather: how hard it is to look" (Diamond 1996, p. 254).

My suggestion is that in taking the form of words “Death is bad” to be, by form alone, an ethical proposition, and as a framework reader of Wittgenstein would argue as some form of grammatical proposition such that our everyday thought and talk concerning death hinges on it, Pleasants’ and Burley’s accounts fail to take into account a broad range of everyday thought and talk concerning death. If this is the case, then it is not the case that “Death is bad” is an expression of basic moral certainty. I now turn to a reflection on some examples of what we talk about when we talk about death. It is my contention that the use of our words in relation to the notion of death is far more complex than the claim that ““Death is bad” is a basic moral certainty” ultimately allows for.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Death

In this section, I will briefly describe and discuss five examples of talk about death. For my purposes, I will take it to be the case that understanding life, and understanding philosophy hang together, such that they are two aspects *of* life. In doing this, I take myself to be roughly following Wittgenstein’s own approach to life and philosophy. Conant (2001) remarks in ‘Philosophy and Biography’ that Monk’s biography *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* makes clear, that

> Wittgenstein neither wanted to, nor thought he could, separate the task of becoming the sort of human being he wanted to be from the task of becoming the sort of philosopher he wanted to be (p. 29).

First, as has already been mentioned, in the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein claims that “[d]eath is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death” (TLP 6.4311). Second, in ‘Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*’ (1993), Wittgenstein speaks of a person “who is affected by the majesty of death” (p. 123). In the same text, he also speaks about the notion of “death” more generally as one of a series of

notions that we live with and observe “year in and year out” (p. 127) in a way that plays a part in our thinking and philosophising (p. 129).

Third, in 1913, Wittgenstein wrote to Bertrand Russell, that

> [m]y dear father died yesterday in the afternoon. He had the most beautiful death that I can imagine; without the slightest pains and falling asleep like a child! I did not feel sad for a single moment during all the last hours, but the most joyful and I think that this death was worth his whole life (Wittgenstein quoted in Monk 1991, p. 72).

Fourth, Malcolm (1958) recalls that towards the end of Wittgenstein’s own life,

> … when informed by the doctor that he [Wittgenstein] could live only a few days, he exclaimed ‘Good!’” […] Before losing consciousness he said to Mrs. Bevan (who was with him throughout the night) ‘Tell them I’ve had a wonderful life!’ By ‘them’ he undoubtably meant his close friends (p. 100).

Before turning to the fifth and final example, I will say something about the first four examples. The first example might be said to conceptualise the notion of death for Wittgenstein. It describes what death is, it could be said: the absence of being alive. This is also the conception of death that Pleasants’ and Burley’s discussion revolves around.

In the second example, Wittgenstein begins to imbue the notion of death with a sense of our attitudes towards it, describing “the majesty of death” as something that human beings develop religious practices around. The notion of death appears again in the same paper in relation to “everything we observe around us year in and year out” (RFGB, p. 127) in a way that shapes our thinking and our philosophising (p. 129). I take Wittgenstein here to be describing the notion of death in relation to a common sense of its majesty, its awesomeness. This is connected to Wittgenstein’s other remark that the notion of death is one “that

shapes our thinking and our philosophising". I read Wittgenstein here as saying that though we are not always involved in religious practices representing the majesty of death, the notion nevertheless shapes our thinking, both our everyday thinking, and our philosophising. The connection between philosophy and death goes back many centuries. In Plato's (1999) 'Phaedo', Socrates is quoted by Phaedo as saying that "those who tackle philosophy aright are simply and solely practising dying, practising death, all the time, but nobody sees it" (p. 556). Pleasants (2008) himself, as has been noted, criticised deprivation explanations for their woeful inadequacy "to the momentousness of what death and killing *are*" (2009, p. 675, original emphasis). In describing "the majesty of death", and the place that the notion of death has in our lives as human beings, Wittgenstein remarks that "[h]ere one can only *describe* and say: this is what human life is like" (p. 121, original emphasis). Attitudes towards death relating to awe inspiring majesty, or thinking of the notion of death as somehow shaping human thought and philosophising, on this view, are simply part of the human condition. One might say that the notion of death, and the notion of its majesty, its momentousness, are "there – like our life" (OC 559).

In the third example, Wittgenstein speaks candidly to Russell in a letter about the death of his father, Karl Wittgenstein. What is interesting to note here is that he speaks about the death as something that is "beautiful", and one that he was not sad about "for a single moment during all the last hours". Wittgenstein might be seen to be making a similarly positive remark concerning his own death, when responding by saying, "Good!" when he is told that he will not live much longer. In both speaking of his father's death and his own death, Wittgenstein seems to cast the phenomenon of death as something whose meaning comes out when contrasted with life. When he says that his father's "death was worth his whole life", and uses his last words to request that his friends be told that he has had "a wonderful life", Wittgenstein seems to be reflecting on the meaning of both death and life.

My aim in these first four examples has simply been to bring forward a range of examples in which a person, in this case Wittgenstein, speaks and thinks about death. Though, as example one shows, Wittgenstein understands what it *means* for a human being to be dead, and as example two shows, there might be said to be a certain kind of majesty or sense of awe when reflecting upon the notion of death in our religious practices, as examples three and four show, this does not necessitate a sense of "badness" attached to all talk of death. One can speak perfectly intelligibly about even the death of a loved one or oneself in a way that does not connote that "Death is bad". This is not to say that one is *glad* that one's loved one has passed. Rather, it is to say that understanding one's death as something inevitable, and in certain contexts expected, one may approach such deaths in a way that celebrates the life that has been lived. So it seems that Pleasants and Burley are wrong if what they are suggesting is that, even in the case of a death "at the end of a reasonably long and satisfactory life and [which] does not involve much suffering", that there is nothing to think but that "Death is bad".[17]

The fifth and final example is more detailed than the other four. But I think it helps to bring out another aspect of the notion of death: the difficulty of coming to terms with it. To this end, I draw on Diamond's (2008) discussion in 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy' about "a range of phenomena" (p. 43) she wants to describe as difficulties of reality. Diamond takes the term "the difficulty of reality" from John Updike, and uses it to describe

> … experiences in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in its inexplicability. *We take things so*. And the things we take so may simply not, to others,

[17] Here I take Burley to hold that it would be possible to attempt to alleviate the fear of death of such a person.

> present the kind of difficulty, of being hard or impossible or agonizing to get one's mind around (p. 46, original emphasis).

One of the things in reality that may be "resistant to our thinking", according to Diamond, is the notion of death. She considers the example of Ted Hughes' (2003) poem 'Six Young Men'. The story of the poem is told through the eyes of a speaker looking "at a photo of six smiling young men, seated in a familiar spot" (Diamond 2008, p. 43):

> Four decades have faded the photo; it came from 1914. The men are profoundly, fully alive, one bashfully lowering his eye, one chewing a piece of grass, one "is ridiculous with cocky pride". Within six months of the picture's having been taken, all six were dead. In the photograph, then, there can also be thought the death of these men: the worst "flash and rending" of war falling into these smiles not forty years rotted and gone (p. 44).

What Diamond's description of the poem is concerned with

> … is the experience of the mind's eye not being able to encompass something which it encounters. It is capable of making one go mad to try, to bring together in thought what cannot be thought: the impossibility of anyone's being more alive than these smiling men, nothing's being more dead. (No one is more alive than is the person looking at the photo; no one is more alive than you are, reading the poem […]) (pp. 44-45).

As Diamond goes on to say, it is of course the case that in one way there is nothing difficult or "boggling" about the deaths of the six men in the photograph: "It is a photo of men who died young, not long after the picture was taken" (p. 45). There is no issue in using the concept of death in this way to make sense of the men's deaths. The language-game in which someone might say "It is a photo of men who died young, not long after the picture was taken", is perhaps that of

describing to a child who has asked how dead men are able to smile, how that is possible. Diamond describes this kind of scenario as one in which the child is learning "the language-game, being shown how her problem disappears as she comes to see how things are spoken of in the game" (p. 45). But as Diamond goes on to note, the difficulty that confronts "the poet-speaker is that of someone who can no longer speak within the game. Language is shouldered out from the game, as the body from its instant and heat" (p. 45). Under such circumstances, it could be said that such a person is confronted with something in reality "resistant to our thinking it" (pp. 45-46). It might be imagined that the poet-speaker, looking at the photograph of the six young men, were exclaiming, "How could they possibly be *dead*?!" As I read Diamond, in asking "How could they possibly be *dead*?!" in the context of the poet-speaker gazing on the photograph of the six young men, such a person would be experiencing a difficulty of reality – a difficulty of making sense of the place of these men's deaths in one's picture of the world.

The second part to the fifth example comes from a discussion in Martin Gustafsson's (2013) 'Berkeley at Vesuvius – Philosophy, *Dichtung*, and Common Sense', where he reflects upon Diamond's discussion of the difficulty of reality. Gustafsson briefly describes the time in his life when his "daughter was around one year old", and the thought that repeatedly struck him at the time: "*She is going to survive me*" (p. 36, original emphasis). The general significance of the thought, according to Gustafsson, was "the insight that *human life will go on after I'm dead*" (p. 36, original emphasis). Gustafsson asks:

> Hadn't I realized this before? Well, I would certainly have subscribed to the statement, 'The world and its inhabitants will continue to exist after I'm dead'. I might even have called this statement a truism, á la Moore. And yet, my sense now is that my earlier self had *not* realized this, not *really*, and that what we are dealing with here is not at all a truism but an

> insight that can be immensely difficult to make (p. 36, original emphases).

Gustafsson emphasises on the one hand, that he used the exact words he wanted to when characterising the insights that "she is going to survive me", and that "Human life will go on after I'm dead". However, he continues, "even if those words can be heard as mere everyday truisms, an important part of my experience was that I no longer heard them that way […] I felt that, for the first time, I had recognized their real, deeper significance" (p. 36). On the other hand, Gustafsson claims that

> … this deeper significance was not something I am about to *explain*, in any ordinary sense of that word. In fact, paradoxically, the words' achieving this deeper significance was a matter of their *losing* a central element of ordinary meaningfulness. More precisely, they lost their status as propositions, if by 'propositions' we mean entities that are logically related to other propositions in such ways that they can figure in arguments and debates, and can be explained by means of other words. It is as if the phrases […] withdrew from that arena of language use in which arguments, proofs and debates take place. By becoming in this sense nonsensical, they, as it were, gained their true significance (p. 36, original emphases).

I take Gustafsson here to be saying that though "She is going to survive me" might at first look like something that he knows with certainty to be true, in the sense that Moore spoke of human bodies being alive before dying, the words struck him this time in a way that affected the picture of the world Moore-type propositions attempt to describe. In other words, Gustafsson was struck, in relation to his daughter outliving him, with the significance of that in his own life. As Gustafsson goes on to suggest, the insight he describes here is terribly hard to make in the sense that "one has to wait for it. It comes when it comes, as from

without – and once you have been struck by it, it is not as if it needs any further support or proof" (p. 37).

Gustafsson wants to connect these insights about the significance of the remarks "She is going to survive me" and "Human life will go on after I'm dead" has for him in those moments to Diamond's discussion of a "difficulty of reality". But where Diamond speaks of being "shouldered out" of reality, Gustafsson suggests the contrasting notion of being "shouldered in" to reality:

> Diamond's case is one in which an encounter with reality makes one repudiate everyday concepts – my case is one in which an encounter with reality makes one truly accept, as for the first time, the applicability of such concepts (p. 37).

Gustafsson suggests that in both the case of being shouldered out, and the case of being shouldered into reality,

> … an essential element is the sense that accepting our everyday ways of thinking and speaking is not an easy matter – and, in particular, that it is not a matter of subscribing to a set of truisms. Rather, accepting or repudiating those ways of thinking and speaking is conceived as involving one's whole view of, and mode of being in, the world (p. 38).

In the first four examples, my aim was simply to show a series of remarks on the notion of death that I suggest are largely recognisable. One might disagree with religious practices surrounding death, or of speaking of one's own father's death as "beautiful". However, what one would be disagreeing with are not attitudes towards death that are unthinkable for human beings to maintain. In the two parts that make up my fifth example, my aim was to reflect on the notion of death in a way that showed that the notion *can* be one that is totally perplexing, or on the other hand, totally anchoring. Understanding, or struggling to understand an aspect of death – perhaps the death of a loved one, or the world continuing after

one's own death – can both throw one's life into chaos, or help make deeper sense of one's life.

What all five examples have in common, however, is that they appear to be ruled out by Pleasants' and Burley's conception of "Death is bad" as a basic moral certainty. By presupposing a picture of moral discourse such that moral propositions can be identified by their so-called moral content, and using that picture to shape a picture of basic moral certainties as propositions of the form of ethical propositions that can neither be doubted nor proven, Pleasants and Burley blind themselves to much that our everyday lives show us about attitudes towards death.

On the Limitations of the Epicurean Approach to Overcoming the "Badness" of Death

As I mentioned above, Burley (2010) suggests that an Epicurean may concede to Pleasants that "Death of bad" features in our fundamental moral framework, along with "Killing is wrong", etc. However, Burley continues, the Epicurean may seek to overcome the potentially "psychologically damaging feature" (p. 81) of fears or concerns over death, by reminding one of what "at some level" (p. 83), they already accept – that death is not something we experience.

However, it could be argued that even if it *were* granted that the "badness" described in "Death is bad" is something we are prone to sometimes become overwhelmed by, Burley's Epicurean presents a rather narrow conception of both the notion of the fear of death, and the idea of overcoming such fear. It seems to me that it is very often the case that we fear death ourselves, or struggle with the death, or the approaching – inevitable – death, of a loved one, in ways that have nothing to do with whether the death is an event that is experienced. Burley's Epicurean seems to assume that whether or not death is bad is a

question of whether death is bad for the deceased or soon to be deceased, and further, that whether death is bad is a question of what being dead feels like. In the former case, a person's death is often an emotional blow for those left behind. In such cases, overwhelming grief is an expression of the thought that it is a bad thing that a particular person has died. In the latter case, our lives show many instances of avoidances of death, such that one instinctively jumps out of the way to avoid an approaching car, or assesses the safest way to cross a road without being hit by a car. But these ways of being in the world are not a reflection of thinking along the lines that "Death is bad because being dead might feel horrible". Often death is avoided because of the devastation it would cause one's family or loved ones, who would grieve and possibly be left without financial support, etc. However in these cases, thinking of a person's death as a bad thing seems to have nothing to do with ways of thinking that would be alleviated were one to be reminded that "what has been dissolved has no sense-experience, and what has no sense-experience is nothing to us" (Epicurus 1994b, p. 32).

A further remark, that refers to both Pleasants' "Death is bad" as a moral certainty, and Burley's Epicurean "Death is nothing to us" as an attempted alleviation of such "badness", is that assigning either positive or negative points to an inevitable life-event – the death of a human being – might be thought of as problematic in itself. It could be asked: "Death is bad" compared to what? A situation in which a particular person, or human beings in general, live forever? If "Death is bad" is a moral certainty, is it also the case that "Immortality is good" is a moral certainty? Would that not suggest that we share our human moral certainties with vampires? One may respond that what is "bad" is the moment of death, such that if person A dies at time t, rather than t1, the death as time t is bad. But here, it would no longer be the case that we were evaluating death *itself*.

In short, were one to accept the Epicurean arguments against the "badness" of death, such arguments only appear to be relevant to a very small amount of the

situations in which a human being may be struggling with thoughts concerning death.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my aim has been to shed light on the certainties at the centre of Pleasants' (2008; 2009) discussion of moral certainty, with a focus on the purported moral certainty that "Death is bad". I then agreed with Burley's argument that Pleasants' conceptualisation of the link between the moral certainties "Death is bad" and "Killing is wrong" is such that, contrary to his account of moral certainty, "Killing is wrong" *because* "Death is bad". However, though I think Burley is correct to consider the badness of death in isolation from "Killing is wrong", as moral certainties are not grounded in anything more fundamental than they themselves are, I do not find his argument that the Epicurean may accept Pleasants' account of "Death is bad" as a moral certainty, such that the Epicurean project is then to overcome issues associated with such "badness" as they occur, overly helpful. From a broadly therapeutic/resolute reading of Wittgenstein, I first claimed that Pleasants' and Burley's accounts of moral certainties in the form of ethical propositions that could not be treated as such was problematic. This was due to the fact that both philosophers take the form of words "Death is bad", outside of any context, to be a meaningful expression. Drawing on Diamond's (1996) reading of Wittgenstein, I supported the position that "ethical propositions" are not propositions containing words associated with actions, and evaluations of the permissibility of those actions, but depend entirely on the language we use. This led to a consideration of various ways in which one may think of death, in relation to morality, that has nothing to do with an inherent evaluation of "badness". What my various examples show, I argue, is the importance of *looking* and *seeing* what everyday life shows us about the notions we are interested in as philosophers, rather than wittingly or

unwittingly putting philosophical limitations on what we see prior to us looking. Lastly, I argued that even if it were the case that one accepts Burley's Epicurean response to Pleasants' account of moral certainty, the kinds of alleviation the Epicurean focuses on seem incredibly limited in scope and application.

3 – On the Wrongness of Murder as a Universal Moral Hinge

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the conceptual foundations of Pleasants' claim that the inability of philosophers to explain the badness of death and the wrongness of killing is symptomatic of the role the badness of death and the wrongness of killing play in our everyday lives. For Pleasants (2008), that "Death is bad" and that "Killing is wrong" are philosophical expressions of Wittgensteinian "hinges" (see for example OC 341) that are immune to doubt when we enquire into "the rightness or permissibility of particular acts, practices and institutions involving the death and killing of various kinds and states of beings" (p. 264). In short, "Death is bad" and "Killing is wrong" are moral certainties, such that they express philosophically what cannot be said, but is only shown in what we say and do in our everyday lives. In the previous chapter, I focused on the purported moral certainty that "Death is bad", arguing that in claiming that "Death is bad" is a moral certainty, Pleasants' account of death in relation to moral certainty is conceptually blind to much that everyday life shows us about our attitudes towards death. Though, as I suggested, the notion of death could be said to have a central role in the lives of human beings, as I illustrated through various examples, it would be mistaken to claim, as Pleasants does, that thinking about death in ways not shaped by death's "badness" is thinking done outside of morality.

In this chapter, I focus on Pleasants' account of the wrongness of killing, particularly the wrongness of murder, and the purported moral certainty that "Murder is wrong". It might be claimed in response to my arguments in the previous chapter that though "Death is bad" is perhaps a poor candidate for

Pleasants' account of moral certainty, both because we think about death in a variety of ways, and because it seems strange to think of death as a life-event to which positive or negative points are assigned, "Murder is wrong" is surely a form of words that is beyond doubt.[18] However, my claim will be that Pleasants' account of "Murder is wrong" as a moral certainty is also blind to recognisable ways of thinking about particular acts of murder, the wrongness of which might be brought into question. In support of my argument, I will outline a section of lyrics from hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar's (2017) song 'XXX'. Growing up in gang dominated Compton, Los Angeles, USA, Lamar has been surrounded from an early age by murder and death. Though his lyrics often focus on minimising future deaths and murders, in 'XXX', Lamar tells the story in which he responds to a friend's plea for advise by telling him to murder the murderer of his son, before saying that if someone killed a member of his family, that he would do the same. In contrast with Pleasants' conceptualisation of "Murder is wrong" as a philosophical expression of a moral certainty shown in everyday life, I argue that what Lamar shows us in 'XXX' is a way of thinking about murder in which it is not so clear if the murder described would be morally wrong. My claim is not that sometimes it might be the case that "Murder is right". Rather, my claim is that though acts of murder are very often – if not almost always – met with attitudes of abhorrence, in thinking of moral certainty in a way that holds that there is *nothing* to think about murder but that "Murder is wrong", the dominant view on moral certainty blinds itself to much of the complexity that everyday life shows us about this aspect of morality.

[18] As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the claim that an act of wrongful killing (of which murder is an example) is wrong appears tautological. However, my criticism of Pleasants' account in particular, and the dominant view in general, does not revolve around whether moral certainties are tautological. Rather, it revolves around what it means to take them to be "nonsensical" (see for example OC 10).

Rummens on the Intelligibility of Moral Doubt and the Possibility of Alternative Moral Language-Games

Before turning to my challenge to Pleasants' account of "Murder is wrong" as a moral certainty, I will briefly outline the dominant view's picture of universal moral certainties. To this end, I will outline three challenges to Pleasants' (2008; 2009) account from Stefan Rummens (2013), before turning to how Pleasants (2015), as well as Hermann (2015) and O'Hara (2018), respond to them. My aim is to develop a clear picture of the kinds of accounts of moral certainty that I intend to challenge with my counter example in the form of Lamar's thoughts on murder in 'XXX'.

In his essay 'On the Possibility of a Wittgensteinian Account of Moral Certainty' (2013), Rummens argues that Wittgenstein's grammatical analysis of Moorean propositions in *On Certainty* "constitutes a response to skepticism in the sense that it aims to show that the doubts typically raised by the skeptic are meaningless", in the sense that "[t]he skeptic has no language game or framework available that is properly connected to the way we act that would allow her to meaningfully raise the doubts she wants to raise" (p. 125). With this in mind, he argues that though *On Certainty* does not discuss *moral* statements, extrapolations of "the arguments and conclusions of *On Certainty* […] into the moral realm" (such as Pleasants' account) suggest a "promising line of inquiry" (p. 126, original emphasis). However, Rummens continues, accounts like Pleasants' fail to properly "take into account all the relevant aspects of Wittgenstein's original argument against skepticism" (p. 127), and thus fail to adequately mirror all aspects of what Rummens sees to be Wittgenstein's full approach to scepticism in *On Certainty*.

For Pleasants' account of moral certainty to succeed, according to Rummens, it must be shown

> … that our moral hinges cannot be challenged from within *any* alternative moral language game and thus to effectively preclude the possible existence of a plurality of radically incompatible moral language games (p. 143, original emphasis).

As I understand Rummens here, what he is requesting from Pleasants is an account of moral hinges that leaves no hinge open to meaningful doubt from the moral sceptic. When Rummens says that it must be shown that "moral hinges cannot be challenged from within *any* alternative moral language game" (p. 143, original emphasis), the "cannot" here is a moral constraint. What needs to be shown on this account, is the existence of a moral statement that cannot be doubted in any moral language-game recognisable as a moral one.

From here, Rummens issues three challenges to Pleasants' account of moral certainty as it stands, which I turn to now. Rummens (2013) considers the statement "killing this child is wrong" (p. 135).[19] The first problem for Pleasants, according to Rummens, is the existence of the Mayan practice of human sacrifice, and the holocaust of Nazi Germany:

> In Mayan culture, for instance, the practice of large-scale human sacrifice was considered part of a form of life supported by an elaborate religious or mythical worldview. In Nazi Germany, the systematic killing of innocent human beings was justified on the basis of racist ideology (p. 144).

The argument is that in both cases, it is not at all certain that "Killing this child is wrong", for the killing of children is in some sense institutionalised as part of the world picture of the particular culture involved. In the former case, the argument goes, it makes sense for a Mayan soldier to point to a child prisoner of war and say that "It is right to kill this child!", in a show of his devotion to Mayan deities.

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[19] Pleasants (2008) uses a similar form of words – "it is *wrong* to kill this child" (p. 263, original emphasis) – in his discussion of a moral analogue of Moore-type propositions.

Rummens concludes that "there actually exists a plethora of moral language games that deny some or even most of the moral certainties we take for granted" (p. 144).[20]

The second problem for Pleasants, is that while Rummens (2013) is ultimately sympathetic to the possibility of a universal account of moral certainty, he suspects an issue such accounts may face that doesn't arise in relation to the empirical certainties on which their existence is extrapolated:

> It makes sense to say that somebody who believes that killing is wrong can, *in spite of that belief*, still commit murder. In contrast, it makes no sense at all to say that somebody who *believes* that human beings do not have wings can, in spite of that belief, still jump out of the window and simply fly off (p. 144, my emphases).

On the other hand, Rummens suggests that this

> … does not necessarily imply that the statement that "killing this child is wrong" could not be certain in some robust sense. To the extent that the murderer agrees that killing is wrong, the reality of the murder simply shows that *the murderer is physically capable of violating the moral norm he himself endorses* (p. 144, my emphasis).

In a similar spirit, he argues later in the same paper that

> … it could perhaps still be argued that in order for an alternative form of life to be recognizably human (and, thus, not some form of moral madness), at least some minimal shared set of moral certainties is required (p. 146).

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[20] However, I am not sure I would want to call the practices of the Nazis part of a moral language-game.

The third problem for Pleasants, according to Rummens, is that for "Killing this child is wrong" to be a moral hinge, and thus constitute a purportedly complete Wittgensteinian response to moral scepticism, it must be the case that "Killing this child is wrong" 1) cannot be doubted, 2) cannot be justified, 3) must be shown through everyday action, 4) is only doubted by the insane or the psychopathic, 5) is a precondition of local moral doubt (abortion, euthanasia, etc.), 6) forms part of a system, and 7) is not certain by necessity (p. 134).[21] Against these seven targets, Rummens argues that Pleasants' explicitly non-relativistic account of moral certainty is not complete:

> Although the claim that there are moral propositions that cannot themselves be justified (2) and form the background framework against which moral questions can be meaningfully asked (5) seems plausible to me, it does not yet satisfactorily establish the full parallel between the empirical and the moral realm that we are looking for in our search for an argument against moral skepticism. Even if Pleasants occasionally mentions that it is not only the case that the wrongness of killing cannot be justified or explained but that the wrongness of killing can also not be doubted (1), *he fails to really explain why the latter would be the case*. In this regard, he just briefly suggests that these certainties have an "existential status" and that they are "manifest in how we live and conduct ourselves." Although he thereby suggests that basic moral certainties are certainties of our acting (3), *he does not really explain why these basic moral certainties are really supposed to be beyond doubt* (1) (p. 136, my emphases).

The first thing to say, in relation to the third problem Rummens sees for Pleasants, is that it is not clear what kind of account of the impossibility of doubt

[21] Rummens does not seem to rely on characteristics 6 or 7 to make his point, and I thus leave discussion of these aside. I also leave discussion of characteristic 5 aside, which Rummens suggests in the case of Pleasants' account "seems plausible" (p. 136), but is not further elaborated on. My focus is on characteristics 1-4.

Rummens is asking for. The absence of an explanation of why the wrongness of killing is beyond doubt is equated with an incomplete account by Rummens. However, it seems open to Pleasants to respond that the inability to provide an explanation of why the wrongness of killing is beyond doubt is precisely what makes it a candidate for moral certainty. While I have dealt with Rummens' third issue here, for responses to the issues one and two, I turn to Pleasants et al. This will allow me to develop a clear picture of the connection such accounts take there to be between the notion of universality, and idea of forms of words as philosophical expressions of moral certainties.

The Dominant View's Response to Rummens' First Challenge

Pleasants (2015) argues in response to Rummens, that rather than treating the Nazi holocaust as a counter example to the possibility of a universal prohibition on the act murder,

> … that the people of this society did not *lose* their basic moral certainty on the wrongness of killing. Rather, they learned to withdraw that certainty from whole kinds of people who came to be re-categorised as dangerously threatening non-persons, whilst holding on to if for those that they continued to recognise as *bona fide* moral persons (p. 208, original emphases).

What Pleasants means, it could be said, is that though the Nazis murdered roughly six million human beings, they saw these human beings as an inferior *kind* of human that was a threat to their own racial purity. However, they continued to see one another, as well as very many other human beings, *as* human beings, such as it would be unthinkable to murder *them*. Thus, as

abhorrently racist as Nazi thinking was, it was not a form of thinking in which "Murder is wrong", was open to doubt.

In a similar way that explicitly quotes from Pleasants, Hermann (2015) argues that

> … despite the boundless cruelty that took place under that regime, I would not conceive of the Nazis as having played a radically different moral language-game. Instead, I am inclined to think that what makes it look as if they did is their ability to overcome their natural barrier against killing innocents by regarding them as sub-human. Pleasants suggests that the citizens of Nazi Germany learned to accept far more exceptions to the prohibition on killing than are usually allowed. Nazi German society 'learned to suspend that certainty for large categories of people'. In a short period of time, the in-group shrank rapidly (p. 184).

The Dominant View's Response to Rummens' Second Challenge

In relation to differences between empirical and moral realms as outlined by Rummens, I will draw on not only Pleasants' (2015) response, but also similar responses by Hermann (2015) and O'Hara (2018). Their responses taken together will in turn help to form a picture of what I am calling the dominant account of moral certainty. That is, accounts of moral certainty that, though agreeing that moral certainty is only every shown in what we say and do, nevertheless invoke propositions taken to be philosophical expressions of what cannot be said in everyday life to steer their philosophical investigations.

Beginning with Pleasants' (2015) response to Rummens, he argues that one can in fact violate both empirical *and* moral certainties, though one will suffer

consequences in each case.[22] On the one hand, he argues, it is possible for one to *attempt* to act against an empirical certainty like "Human beings can't fly" by jumping out of a window and flapping one's arms as if they were wings (p. 203). Another example might be an attempt on the empirical certainty "Human beings can't walk through brick walls", by attempting to walk through a brick wall.[23] In both cases, the argument goes, a person will suffer the empirical consequences of pain, injury, or death in attempting to act against a respective empirical certainty. In doing so, one's actions might also show some form of mental disturbance. In a similar way, Pleasants argues it is possible for one to act against a moral certainty like "Murder is wrong", or "Killing this child is wrong" by murdering a child. However, the person that does this is at risk of suffering "the normative sanction of guilt and punishment" (Pleasants 2015, p. 203). Further, in killing a child, one does not prove that "Killing this child is wrong" was *false* or bring its wrongness into question. To this end, Pleasants argues that

> [t]he murderer does not lose or give up their certainty that killing is morally wrong by committing murder. Indeed, while most of us no doubt possess the *subjective* certainty that we simply *could not* commit murder, empirical evidence provided by social and historical sciences, and the law of courts, demonstrates that some thoroughly ordinary and good people just like us *do* sometimes perform such acts. In a word, moral certainty is about what one *should not* do, not what one *cannot* do – this is what Wittgenstein would call a grammatical remark or reminder about morality (pp. 203-204, original emphases).

From here, Pleasants (2015) then questions whether it is really the case, as Rummens suggests, "that the objects of empirical certainty do impose

[22] Pleasants says "'rule' (moral and empirical certainty)" (p. 203). The distinction between moral certainties as rule or norm or rule of grammar, etc. is not the focus for now.
[23] The notion of "trying" to fly, or "trying" to walk through a wall, is peculiar. Would behaviour like a person continuously walking into a wall be described as "trying to walk through a wall"? It might be suggested that it is simply not clear quite what such a person is doing, or why.

themselves with an irresistible force of a kind that the objects of basic moral certainty lack" (p. 204). Pleasants' claim, as I understand it, is that propositions like "Everyone has a brain inside his skull" are not imposed upon a person by reality, as with Rummens' example of human beings' inability to fly. Rather, according to Pleasants, they are best thought of as "grounded in *social* belief, the forcefulness of which is *normative*, not physical" (p. 204, original emphases). He says that the differences "between the *objects* of basic empirical and basic moral certainty do not amount to a relevant difference between the respective states of *certainty* itself" (p. 204, original emphases). Thus, Pleasants aims to blur the lines that Rummens wants to impose, between empirical certainties limited by reality, and moral certainties which are not. However, he does not seem to consider blurring the lines from the other side, such that the wrongness of murder is forced on us by reality. Rather, his overall response to Rummens, as I understand it, is that there is not a conceptual distinction between propositions expressing empirical certainties, and those expressing moral certainties, such that the former cannot be physically transcended, while the latter can.

Likewise, O'Hara (2018) follows Pleasants when he argues that

> … to be morally certain is to have an attitude towards what one *ought* (or is permitted) to do, not towards that which is physically possible. So instances of murder are no sure sign that the *wrongness* of killing has been doubted (p. 97, original emphases).

Hermann (2015) is also largely in agreement with Pleasants when she argues that

> [s]ince the moral certainty concerns the *wrongness* of killing and not the human *ability* to kill, acting in contradiction with it requires more than simply committing murder. It requires murdering someone in the conviction that this action is morally right, or at least not wrong. More generally, acting against moral certainties requires acting in a way that

> reveals complete indifference or even a positive attitude towards killing, harming, stealing and so on (p. 115, original emphases).

Pleasants, Hermann, and O'Hara are thus in agreement with one another when they argue against Rummens' challenges to a moral analogue to Wittgenstein's notion of empirical certainty. All three philosophers respond with an account of moral certainty on which acts of murder do not alter the wrongness of murder.

Hermann's formulation emphasises most clearly the kind of philosophical thinking I will argue against in this chapter. Namely, that there are propositions that have the form of ethical propositions, but cannot be treated as such, because they are universally beyond doubt or the need for justification. Whether talking about "Killing this child is wrong", or "Murder is wrong", such propositions are taken by the dominant view to be philosophical expressions of what everyday morality shows us. As Hermann emphasises, to contradict this moral certainty, one would need to commit a murder in a context in which "this action is morally right, or at least not wrong" (p. 115). Hermann's point is not that such contexts exist: they are conceptually ruled out by an exclamation of the moral certainty, after pointing to some random child, that "Killing this child I wrong". Rather, as Hermann goes on to claim, to act against a moral certainty like "Killing this child is wrong" (or one might add more generally "Murder is wrong") is to act "in a way that reveals complete indifference or even a positive attitude towards killing" (p. 155). Persuasive as this conceptualisation may at first appear, my claim is that in thinking of moral certainty as having to do with undoubtable propositions, the content of which is ethical, such accounts seem to rule out much of the moral complexity of what everyday life shows us.

On the Universality of Moral Certainties

So far, I have outlined three challenges to Pleasants' account of universal moral certainties, and responded to one challenge on Pleasants' behalf, before turning

to Pleasants', Hermann's, and O'Hara's respective responses to the other two. In doing so, my aim has been to bring out several aspects concerning moral certainties as the notion is conceived on the dominant view. Most notably, the philosophical discussion of moral certainty appears to largely revolve around whether or not it can be said that certain propositions are beyond doubt and the need for justification. These propositions are said to have moral content that can be seen simply from looking at the words used in the formation of the proposition, outside of any context. Though it may be the case that people or even cultures seem to act in ways contrary to the content of these propositions, this does not bring into question their indubitable nature. In this section, I briefly outline more clearly the relation between universality and the propositions at the heart of the dominant view's approach to moral certainty.

To begin with, Pleasants (2015) states explicitly that he wants "to bring out the universality […] or basic moral certainty", arguing "that basic moral certainty on the wrongness of killing and infliction of pain transcends history and culture (and moral language-games)" (p. 210).

Similarly, Hermann (2015) argues that

> [w]e have good reason to believe that *there are universal moral norms*, which are not justified by certain natural facts, but which together with these facts constitute moral practices (p. 184, my emphasis).
>
> Examples of these 'moral universals' include the prohibitions on lying and murder, restrictions on the use of violence, the rule that infants must be protected, and the incest taboo (p. 180).

Finally, O'Hara (2018) draws explicitly on Moyal-Sharrock's distinction "between universal and local basic certainties" to argue "that some of our basic moral certainties are indubitable beliefs for *all* moral agents" (p. 95, original emphasis). O'Hara provides the most comprehensive account of the universal nature of the Moyal-Sharrock inspired notion of moral certainty that also runs

through Pleasants' and Hermann's accounts. Thus, it will be worthwhile to briefly elaborate on O'Hara's arguments for universal moral certainty.

Central to O'Hara's approach to moral certainty are the two purportedly universal moral certainties "At least some killings are wrong" (K)[24], and "Some acts are more wrong/right than others" (H) (p. 100). Of course, it could be argued that these propositions, though they are unable to be said in everyday life, do not say much as philosophical propositions either. In the proposition "At least some X's are wrong", one could substitute X for almost any action, and it would still be true. For example: "At least some instances of smiling are wrong", or "Some acts of smiling are more wrong/right than others". Though often a way of presenting a welcoming demeanour, smiling at a stranger for too long, for example, can make that person quite uncomfortable, and perhaps even fearful of their safety. However, neither formulation really says much of anything about smiling.

Nevertheless, O'Hara argues that

> [b]oth K and H are [...] necessary parts of any moral thought, that is any moral system recognisable as such. That is to say they are necessary beliefs for all moral agents, and in this sense they are *universal* basic moral certainties (p. 106, original emphasis).

[24] O'Hara is quick to point out that the difference between his example of K, and Pleasants' more general example of "Killing is wrong". He says the difference is that "Pleasants' formulation [wrongness of killing] is much more substantial and *if correct* surely a step up on the rather tentative seeming K" (p. 102, original emphasis). The issue, as O'Hara sees it, is that there are various cases, acknowledged by Pleasants, in which killing would *not* be wrong (killing in self-defence, killing during war, etc.). Though, as O'Hara notes, Pleasants attempts to stave off concerns over this by arguing that "[t]he fact that in some (special) circumstances … killing [is] not wrong, [this] does not undermine the basic certainty of [killing's] … wrongness in most circumstances" (Pleasants quoted in O'Hara 2018, p. 103), O'Hara argues that "there are many circumstances in which we doubt the wrongness of killing broadly construed", and that there "the belief in 'the wrongness of killing' is not always indubitable" (p. 104).

The Problem with Propositions

So far, what I have attempted to do is to present a picture of moral certainty on the dominant view, focusing on how their responses to Rummens (2013) challenges emphasise both the notion of universality, as well as the tendency to talk about moral certainty in relation to a series of propositions, the content of which is taken to be moral. The last aspect I will mention before turning to my response to this kind of picture of moral certainty, is that, as I discussed in Chapter 1, the dominant view are aware of the importance for Wittgenstein of thinking of certainty as being grounded in action, rather than in propositions. However, as I will argue below, in taking propositions like "Murder is wrong" to nevertheless show all that can be philosophically said about the notion of murder in everyday life, they miss much of what *is* shown in everyday life. The consequence of this is that notions like murder, when thought about in relation to the notion of moral certainty, become distorted, such that what *is shown*, is not *seen* by the philosopher. The philosopher's proposition – "Murder is wrong" – already tells them all they need to know about the notion of murder in relation to moral certainty. They no longer need to bother to look, though they may gesture towards doing so.

This comes out most clearly in Hermann's (2015) discussion, when she argues that

> … it is not the proposition 'Killing is wrong' that is the object of moral certainty, but the wrongness of killing in paradigmatic cases. This attitude cannot be put into propositional form: put simply, no proposition will encapsulate that attitude in all of its complexity. According to Pleasants' non-propositional account, 'basic certainty' is an attitude towards 'innumerable taken for granted states of affairs'. The objects of this attitude play a foundational role in our epistemic and moral practices respectively (pp. 104-105).

More specifically, she argues that

> [j]ust like certainty regarding the empirical world, moral certainty is 'enacted'. It is displayed in 'how we live and conduct ourselves, how we respond to sad events and wrongful acts, and in what we say in the ethical propositions that we produce as expressions of sadness and condemnation directed at such events and acts' [Pleasants]. The naturalness of what formulations such as 'Lying is wrong' express is the naturalness of our acting – in this case of our acting as morally competent agents (p. 111).
>
> We can thus adapt some of Wittgenstein's remarks in *Last Writings*: the important thing about moral certainty, and the most important expression of moral convictions, is the way one behaves. We therefore have to ask how it 'shows' that we are morally certain (see LW II, p. 21). This is apparent for example in how we react when we find out that someone whom we trusted has lied to us, for instance our parents. It also shows in their response to our reaction. They try to justify why they did not tell us the truth, or reinterpret it as for instance an act of being silent on something as opposed to lying (lying by omission). Our certainty also manifests itself in feelings of shame and guilt (pp. 112-113).

Though I agree with Hermann's stress on the importance of moral certainty only showing itself in what we say and do, her conception of "wrongness" in "paradigmatic cases" nevertheless presupposes a form of generality separate from any particular context. And as discussion of the notion of moral certainty is developed, propositions like "Murder is wrong", and references to paradigmatic cases, begin to close off one's ability to *look and see* what everyday life shows us about the notions we work with. Thus, though such accounts take themselves to be non-propositional, à la Moyal-Sharrock, they nevertheless attribute some form of sense to any string of words they take to constitute a rule or norm. Moyal-Sharrock (2004) argues that "nonpropositionality is attributed to any string of

words that constitutes a rule or a norm" (p. 38). She takes Wittgenstein to hold that belief starts

> … in the nonintellectual, nonconceptual realms of instinct and action. Belief, at this primitive level, is a *nonpropositional attitude* […] On Wittgenstein's view, the world is *not* primitively embraced in thought. We embrace it nonintellectually, and then move on to a more sophisticated grasp. This nonintellectual taking hold of the world is heuristically or artificially articulated in so-called hinge propositions. It is, however an immediate taking-hold that is articulated here, an *Einstellung* [attitude], an (inexorable) attitude, not a reasoned understanding. An attitude which, in spite of being nonpropositional, I shall argue […] is a form of belief (p. 9, original emphases).

My suggestion is that there is a tendency in thinking like this, in which propositions (in Moyal-Sharrock's case, "Here is a hand" (p. 52), in Pleasants' case "Murder is wrong" (2009, p. 677)) are taken to represent indubitable beliefs, either to forget to look and see what is shown when looking *at* instances of certainty, or to take propositions like "Here is a hand" or "Murder is wrong" to be what *would be* seen if one *were* to look at what our lives show us about these notions. However what one misses, I argue, are the complexities of what everyday life shows us, directly, about moral certainty.

"Tell me what you do for love" – Thinking About Murder with Kendrick Lamar

So far, my aim has been to bring out the connection between the idea of universality and its relation to various propositions that for the dominant view, represent moral "hinges" on which all moral discourse turns. Such accounts emphasise that it is not *propositions* like "Murder is wrong" that are morally

certain, but the various acts and attitudes of everyday human morality that these propositions try, but fail, to fully encapsulate. As I suggested in Chapter 1, this way of thinking about moral certainty stems from a reading of Wittgenstein in which propositions, outside of any use, can nevertheless present us with intelligible expressions of thought, and that in the case of moral certainty, these intelligible expressions of thought steer thinking about what is and is not shown in everyday life.[25]

The issue with this approach, from a broadly therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein on moral certainty, is that what is steering such conceptualisations are ultimately nonsensical forms of words. Though "Killing this child is wrong" or "Murder is wrong" might appear like intelligible expressions of moral thought, in that they purport to morally condemn particular kinds of actions, absent a particular *use* (that is, a context in which it makes sense to utter these forms of words), they don't determinately say anything at all. The risk for proponents of the dominant view of moral certainty, is that much that *does* make sense to say on the topics of child-killing and murder in everyday life is ignored. My argument here is not that it might be possible that "Killing this child is *right*", or that "Murder is *permissible*". Rather, it is that in attempting to formulate the notion of moral certainty with the help of forms of words that are not used in everyday life, the dominant view on moral certainty risks distorting our philosophical understanding *of* the everyday notions we are discussing.

In the previous chapter, I drew on four examples to emphasise various ways we may think about death that had nothing to do with what Pleasants sees as its necessary "badness". My claim there was that reflecting on what I take to be intelligible ways of thinking about death in everyday life showed that Pleasants' claim that "Death is bad" is a moral certainty is mistaken. The mistake is seen in its failure to properly track everyday thinking about death.

[25] This is referred to as the standard/framework reading of Wittgenstein, which I criticise from a broadly therapeutic/resolute reading of Wittgenstein (see Chapter 1).

In this chapter, by contrast, I will consider only one example, in the form of a section of lyrics from hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar's (2017) song 'XXX'. My intention is to present an account of thinking about murder in a way that, though it does not attempt to present an example of a case in which "Murder is right", nevertheless puts pressure on the claim that there is nothing to think in this case but that "Murder is wrong". Part of what Lamar shows us in 'XXX', I claim, is a portrait of a person confronting their own relation to the notion of murder from within, rather than from outside morality. That is, Lamar's reflections make sense *as* moral thought, even though they are a discussion about murdering another human being.[26]

Born June 17, 1987, Kendrick Lamar Duckworth (better known simply as Kendrick Lamar) grew up in Compton, a city in Los Angeles, California, in the United States of America. Growing up, he was surrounded by gang violence which often resulted in murder. Briefly, there are two main gangs in the Compton area – the Crips and the Bloods. The Crips formed in the 1960s and soon became known as one of the most violent gangs in the Compton area, while the Bloods formed in the 1970s in an effort to protect themselves from the Crips. Though not a member of either gang, Lamar grew up in an area of Compton that is understood to be Blood territory, and many of his friends, some of whom he has known since attending one of the local schools, *are* members of the Bloods. Bloods identify themselves with the colour red, while the Crips identify themselves with the colour blue.

Many of Lamar's songs contain descriptions of violence, murder, and death, as well as the territorial nature and codes of conduct relating to the lifestyles of the gang members that surround him. For example, in the song 'm.A.A.d city' (2012), from the album *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, Lamar describes the first time that he saw a dead body, before remarking that "That was back when I was nine" (Lamar 2012). In other songs, Lamar details how he reacted to the deaths of some of his

[26] See Driscoll, Pinn & Miller (eds.) 2020 for further discussion of Lamar and his lyrics.

closest friends from gang related gun violence. Reflecting on the death of his friend Chad in the documentary *Bompton: Growing up with Kendrick Lamar* (2016) (henceforth *Bompton*) Lamar says

> I grew up with Chad's brother, and he [Chad, is], actually like my little brother as well. And have to hear about his passing, it messes you up … All the way.[27]

In bringing out aspects of Lamar's life in which murder and death are an all-too-common occurrence, my aim is to emphasise the centrality of these notions in Lamar's understanding of life. He has seen the cycles of murder, death, and retaliation in his immediate surroundings from a young age. It might be said that these notions are part of his world in a visceral way.

As Lamar explains in 2015, in the segment 'Kendrick Lamar Still Feels Anger & Hatred On 'The Blacker the Berry'[28] (Pt. 3), during an interview with Rob Markman for MTV,

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[27] This notion of "all the way", here, suggests to me the violence done to a person's world picture when someone is murdered. Here, one goes from living in a world where "Chad" refers to a friend that is alive, to referring to someone murdered – someone who is gone forever. In another song, 'Hood Politics' (2015a), from *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Lamar opens the song explosively with the following lines:

> I don't give a fuck about no politics in rap, my n****
> My lil' homie Stunna Deuce ain't never comin' back, my n****
> So you better go hard every time you jump on wax, my n****

Stunna Deuce is Chad's nickname, and here Lamar mentions his death to make the point that he doesn't care about the pettiness that often occurs in the world of rap (there are a lot of big egos competing with one another to be heard, for example), because there are more important things to worry about (such as how to come to terms with the death of his friend, and how to put messages about this across). He then warns himself to go hard (stay true to himself and not waste any time) every time he jumps on wax (records a song).

[28] Lamar's (2015) 'The Blacker the Berry' is a confrontational song about racism, white supremacy, and gang violence in the United States. The quotation that follows is part of Lamar's response to the controversy surrounding the song. One of most controversial lines in the song comes when Lamar says

> So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street
> When gang-banging make me kill a n***a blacker than me?
> Hypocrite!

… a few people think it's just talk, and it's just rap … no, these are my experiences. When I say "gang-banging make me kill a n***a blacker than me"… these are, this is my life that I'm talkin' about […] I'm not speaking *to* the community, I'm not speaking *of* the community, I *am* the community […] So, when I say these lines, it's for myself, it's therapeutic for myself, because I still feel that urge, and I still feel that hatred for this man next door […] I still feel that, I still feel that hatred. I still feel that… ill will to want to do something…

Markman asks Lamar, "Do you feel you have that in you?", to which Lamar replies,

> All the time. I've only been in this [music] industry for three or four years, and I can't forget twenty years of me being in the city of Compton. So, when I say these things its therapeutic for me. It's making me remind … I need to respect this man because he is a black man, not because of the color[29] that he wearing.

To this end, in *Bompton*, host Zach Goldbaum notes that "[u]nlike Kendrick's gangster rap predecessors, he [Lamar, is] doing it [making music] from the perspective of someone who's really trying to avoid that life of crime", and explains that the documentary crew have come to Compton to find out how Lamar's "music and his message is making them [the people in his community] rethink gang life".

Lamar explains the aim of his lyrics:

> From Compton I could've easily came out and say I did this, I did that, I killed a whole bunch of n***** [people] and whatnot, just given of the fact

I take Lamar here to be confronting a difficulty or tension he sees in himself as both proclaiming the importance of black lives (what would become the Black Lives Matter movement, discussed at length in the following chapter), and taking the life of a fellow black man. Lamar is calls himself a hypocrite for this.

[29] Lamar is referring to the colour coordination of the Bloods and Crips gangs, respectively.

> of where I'm from. But that ain't me, I rather talk about my reality. I rather talk about something a little more deeper than that. The reasons and the problems and the solutions behind it. So when you hear these stories in *Good Kid, m.A.A.d city,* when you hear these stories in *To Pimp a Butterfly* [at the time of recording Lamar's two most recent albums], it's a little bit deeper than just the music. It's kids out here really trying to do something and really trying to spark the idea of … positivity … in the community. Let me tell my story, let me tell other stories as I hear that's they wanna do somethin' different … but can't … because you're in an environment where you just gotta adapt. And what happens is, it invites people in and get another perspective. It brings a whole 'nother side of the world to Compton, to the backyard right here, and say, "Okay these are actually … people".

What Lamar does in his lyrics in the context of his violent surroundings, then, is to emphasise the humanity of the human beings involved in these situations. That "These are actually people" here is not a proposition that can neither be doubted nor requires justification, but a kind of reminder of the human beings at the centre of all the suffering. It's a reminder to human beings, to see other human beings *as* human beings. If this is the case, then Lamar may be attempting, with his music, to overcome a kind of soul-blindness he sees in his world. The notion of "soul-blindness" and of "seeing human beings *as* human beings" is drawn from Stanley Cavell's (1979) discussion of slavery in *The Claim of Reason* (pp. 375-378). I elaborate on these notions in relation to racism in the following chapter. My point here, is that Lamar sees a kind of clash between a respect for, and a disregard for human life in his community, and steers his lyrics towards overcoming the latter attitude via appeals from the former attitude.

These aspects of Lamar's life, and the attitude he brings from life into his hip-hop lyrics, are the first part of my example. It's against this context that the second part of my example, in the form of lyrics from Lamar's song, 'XXX', acts as a

contrast. ‘XXX’ in itself is a complex song, with Lamar beginning by framing the theme of the song as a reflection on race in the United States of America. Bēkon & Kid Capri open the song by singing in unison, with reference to America. “God bless you if it’s good to ya”, asking America to “please take my hand”, and “help me underst-”. The word “understand” is cut off before the guest vocalists can finish the word, and a heavy hitting drum beat kicks in. What happened to the person who wanted to understand? We don’t find out. They’re gone now.

Instead, Lamar begins his first verse, in which he seems to emphasise a connection between animal nature and human nature, in relation to what might be called a similarity in primitive responses to adversity:

> Throw a steak off the ark
>
> To a pool full or sharks, he’ll take it
>
> Leave him [a human being] in the wilderness
>
> With a sworn nemesis, he’ll make it
>
> Take the gratitude from him
>
> I bet he’ll show you somethin’, whoa

Here, while the first two lines focus on the animal nature of sharks, the remaining four lines focus on the animal nature of human beings. This is what sharks do; this is what human beings do. This is what human beings are *like*. In the fifth and sixth lines, Lamar suggests a darker side to human nature still, when what Lamar calls one’s “gratitude” is taken from them. Then, Lamar finishes by saying, “I bet he’ll show you somethin’, whoa”. What Lamar shows the listener in the following, I claim, presents an issue for accounts of moral certainty which hold (i) that “Murder is wrong” has the form of a moral proposition, and that (ii) due to its indubitable nature is a philosophical expression of what can and is only shown in everyday life.

So what is the "something" that Lamar shows us? And why are we going to react by exclaiming, "whoa"? The answer is immediate: Lamar says three times, in quick succession, "I chip [shoot] a n***a lil' bit of nothin'", before elaborating with

> I chip a n***a, then throw the blower [gun] in his lap
>
> Walk myself to the court like, "Bitch, I did that!," X-rated

The reference to the remark being "X-rated" is connected to the title of the song, 'XXX', and what Lamar seems to take to be for "adults only" is the remark that, if his *own* "gratitude", was taken, he would "chip" (shoot) a person, and he would do it as if it were a "lil' bit of nothin'". In his elaboration of this remark, he says that he would "throw the blower [gun] in his lap", before walking himself to the court room to confess, to say "I did that!". Someone familiar with the general themes in Lamar's music, as I outlined in the first part of my example, may be taken aback by what appears to be an attitude that is usually absent from his music: the threat of violence, especially in a way in which it is a "lil' bit of nothin'" for the perpetrator to commit. As I outlined in the first part of my example, Lamar wants to show us through his music that "Okay these are actually … people". So why is Lamar now saying he would kill one of these people? The answer to this question comes in a series of lines that follow soon after what I have just outlined, in the form of a story Lamar tells in which he receives a phone call from a friend whose son has just been murdered in what sounds like a drug-related incident involving money:

> Yesterday I got a call like from my dog like 101
>
> Said they killed his only son because of insufficient funds
>
> He was sobbin', he was mobbin', way belligerent and drunk
>
> Talkin' out his head, philosophin' on what the Lord had done

He said: "K-Dot[30], can you pray for me?

It been a fucked up day for me

I know that you anointed, show me how to overcome."

He was lookin' for some closure

Hopin' I could bring him closer

To the spiritual, my spirit do know better, but I told him

"I can't sugar coat the answer for you, this is how I feel:

If somebody kill my son, that mean somebody getting' killed."

Tell me what you do for love, loyalty, and passion of

All the memories collected, moments you could never touch

I'll wait in front of n****'s spot and watch him hit his block

I'll catch a n**** leavin' service if that's all I got

I'll chip a n****, then throw the blower in his lap

Walk myself to the court like "Bitch, I did that!"

Ain't no Black Power when your baby killed by a coward

I can't even keep the peace, don't you fuck with one of ours

It be murder in the street, it be bodies in the hour

Ghetto bird be on the street, paramedics on the dial

Let somebody touch my momma

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[30] One of Lamar's nicknames.

Touch my sister, touch my woman

Touch my daddy, touch my niece

Touch my nephew, touch my brother

You should chip a n**** then throw the blower in his lap

Matter fact, I'm 'bout to speak at this convention

Call you back

At this point, Lamar abruptly ends the phone call, the listener hearing a phone click off and car tyres screeching to a halt, Lamar arriving at the convention he mentions in the second to last line.

In the section I have just quoted, Lamar describes a phone call he receives from a friend. His friend tells him that his son has been murdered over a dispute about money, and, as he knows that Lamar is a person that works to stifle the violence he is surrounded by in the community, he asks him for advice on how to overcome the urge to seek revenge for his dead son by murdering his son's murderer. Surprisingly, Lamar says that he can't sugar coat his answer, and that if someone killed *his* son, then that would mean that *his* son's murderer would soon be dead, by Lamar's own hands. It is here that he links the notion of murder to the notion of love, when he asks his friend – and the listener – "Tell me what you do for love". That is, Lamar is saying that this act of murder, to which he would confess, would be an act of love. Because of the love for his son, Lamar *cannot* continue to live in a world in which his son's murderer is alive and breathing. The "cannot" here may refer to a form of moral necessity, and a way of thinking that we may, as observers of Lamar's conversation with his friend, be sympathetic to.

Now, it could be argued with some plausibility that what Lamar is giving his friend here, when he says, "Tell me what you do for love", is his picture of the

world – a world in which Lamar would not only commit murder, but would do so out of a form of necessity connected to the notion of love. This form of "giving a picture of one's world" could be thought of as a form of persuasion along the lines of Wittgenstein's remark at OC 262 (I discuss the notion of persuasion in detail in the following chapter). It is a picture that one assumes the friend would be shocked to hear, the context in which the phone call taking place being one in which he is seeking Lamar's advice on how to *overcome* the very act that Lamar is urging him he ought to go ahead and perform. However, in giving this picture to his friend, Lamar may show his friend a much more complex picture of morality that his friend anticipated. It is as if Lamar were saying, "I am *not* a saint that has overcome the want to murder in such contexts. I do not have a "cure" for wanting to murder such a person. I would want to murder the murderer of my son as much as the next person! Don't you see that that is the difficulty?"

I noted that after Lamar hangs the phone up on his friend in the story, following the advice that he should in fact murder the murderer of his son, and to do so as an act of love, we hear Lamar arrive at the convention he is to speak at. Lamar goes on to address his audience:

> Alright, kids, we're gonna talk about gun control [in the background, you hear children cry "yay!"]
>
> (Pray for me) Damn!

It is revealed that after giving his friend the advice that he should murder his son's murderer, Lamar is in a classroom giving advice to children on the dangers of firearms. Firearms like the one he would, assumedly, "chip" a human being with were they to harm a member of his family. When Lamar says "Pray for me", followed by "Damn!", I take him to be confronted, all at once, with the tension between what he would do were he in his friend's position, and what he tries to get the community to do through his music. It could be suggested that at this moment in the song, Lamar is at risk of again seeing himself as a hypocrite, as he

had during the final lines of 'The Blacker the Berry' (2015). 'XXX' (2017), appearing on an album two years after 'The Blacker the Berry', may suggest the depth of Lamar's struggles to overcome the tensions he sees in his own sense of morality. It is important to note that what Lamar presents us with in 'XXX' is not an example of a psychopath, who is indifferent to the horrors of murder. Rather, he presents us with a human being, a person we may recognise aspects of ourself in, struggling with various moral tensions in their life. Of course, it may be the case that one has no sympathy with Lamar, and simply claims that the act of murder he describes would be wrong *necessarily*. It would be, after all, an act of *murder*. Nevertheless, I claim, it would be an act of murder that we might, on some level, be said to understand. We may understand someone who wanted to turn their back on violence that they committed in their youth, such that they are at pains to remember to respect the people in their community. We may also understand the person that, despite this, found it impossible to allow the murderer of their son to remain alive. My point is that one might think that what Lamar did was morally wrong, but one could not plausibly say that anyone that sympathised with Lamar, along with Lamar himself, were psychopathic. On the other hand, one could think that Lamar would not have done anything "wrong" at all, were he to commit such an act. A final possibility, is that one might find themselves simply puzzled by what to think of such an act: "I know it was an act of murder, but would I not have done the same? But what does *that* mean? Surely I am not saying that murder is *right*!"

Having a Rough Story about What Moral Certainty Is

It seems to me that the Lamar example presents an issue for the dominant view's account of "Murder is wrong" as an example of a moral certainty. The view I refer to is perhaps best expressed by Hermann (2015) when she says, as I quoted earlier, that "acting against moral certainties requires acting in a way that reveals complete indifference or even a positive attitude towards killing, harming,

stealing and so on (p. 115)". Another relevant remark comes from O'Hara (2018), when he claims that

> [w]e may still find revenge killing understandable, but we generally don't see it as morally right. And as we don't think of revenge killings as even permissible, it is very hard for us to understand it being a positive moral obligation to carry them out. It would strike a very discordant note to us to hear someone we considered a moral authority demanding, in response to a murder, that we gather the men of the family and go out to kill the culprit, using the language of justice and moral right to urge us on (O'Hara 2018, p. 143).

And though Pleasants (2008) argues that "thoroughly ordinary and good people just like us *do* sometimes perform such acts" (p. 203), on the dominant view, the wrongness of murder is never doubted. To commit murder while holding that "Murder is right" makes one a psychopath, judging outside of morality. But Lamar presents a situation in which the wrongness of an act of murder appears absent, or it is at least less clear about the wrongness involved. My claim is that in the context in which Lamar says "[i]f somebody kill my son, that mean somebody gettin' killed", or "[i]t be murder in the street, in be bodies in the hour", or "[t]ell me what you do for love", we may find ourselves understanding him. We may continue to find ourselves in agreement with Lamar when he says that he would "chip" (shoot) a man, before throwing "the blower [gun] in his lap", and then he would walk himself to the authorities and declare that "I did that!", confessing to the crime. We might find ourselves saying, "Though I think it is right that he is in jail, I am unable to find what he has done to be morally abhorrent. I might have done the same thing in his place". If this is the case, then the Lamar example presents a picture of a context in which murder could be said to be by law "wrong", but as far as morality is concerned, either unblameworthy, or morally unclear. As I mentioned in the previous section, some will maintain that since what Lamar would have committed was murder, it was necessarily wrong.

However the latter possibility, it seems to me, is the *only* avenue that appears open to the dominant view, which seems committed to saying that what Lamar would have done would have been necessarily wrong. What this means is that thinking about murder in any other way except that it is wrong is thinking outside of morality. The thinking of a psychopath, for example. The problem for the dominant view, however, is that Lamar may not strike us as a psychopath. Far from it.

One of the reasons that the dominant view may miss this possibility, is because their picture of moral propositions, and what moral discourse involves, revolves around questions of the *permissibility* or *impermissibility* of certain acts. This is one of the reasons why it is possible on their view to identify a moral proposition simply by looking at the form of words used in its formation. If the proposition mentions an action, like "Murder", and a judgement, like "is wrong", then from this alone, the proposition can be identified as a moral proposition. Of course, in the case of moral certainties, the proposition only has the *form* of a moral proposition, but cannot be treated as a moral proposition because it is immune to doubt.

However, on the therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein that I am drawing on, there are no moral propositions such that from their form alone one can determine whether they are a moral proposition. There *is* no general form of a moral proposition on this view. But there are many propositions, many expressions of thought in which we do express something to do with morality. And these forms of words may look nothing like propositions that contain the canonical vocabulary of "right", "wrong", "ought", etc. To see what these expressions of thought are, however, one must look and see the use they are put to, the context in which they are said.

"Murder is wrong", as a form of words outside of a context, has no clear meaning on a therapeutic reading. It is not attached to a speaker, and no context has been given in which a speaker has said this form of words. Thus, it cannot be

determined *what* kind of proposition "Murder is wrong" *is*. Without a clear meaning, it is nonsensical. Being nonsensical in this way, however, has nothing to do with treating "Murder is wrong" as an intelligible proposition to use in philosophical discussion of moral certainties, because it makes no sense to say in everyday life. If one wants to look at the relation between the notion of murder and the notion of moral certainty in everyday life, I suggest, one must look at examples.

In this chapter, I have presented the example of Lamar's thinking in the song 'XXX'. One of the reasons that the example is so important in the context of thinking about moral certainty, I think, is because it reminds us of what we judge when we morally judge other human beings. In line with Wittgenstein's emphasis on the importance of context in understanding the meaning of a form of words, we don't consider just what someone *does*. It would be more correct to say that we assess what a person is *like*. In her paper 'Vision and Choice in Morality' (1956), Iris Murdoch writes about this kind of thinking in the following way:

> When we apprehend and assess other people we do not consider only their solutions to specifiable practical problems, we consider something more elusive which may be called their total vision of life, as shown in their mode of speech or silence, their choice of words, their assessments of others, their conception of their own lives, what they think attractive or praise-worthy, what they think funny: in short, the configurations of their thought which show continually in their reactions and conversation. These things, which may be overtly and comprehensibly displayed or inwardly elaborated and guessed at, constitute what, making different points in two metaphors, one may call the texture of a man's being or the nature of his personal vision (p. 39).

One might be apprehensive about Murdoch's reference to a *total* vision of life here, as it might suggest a complete picture of the world able to be accessed by

another person. However, I will use the notion of a "total vision of life" to simply mean one's understanding of life at a particular moment, or as Murdoch says, "in the ordinary sense", what "a person 'is like'" (p. 39). One might ask, "What do you see their total vision of life to be?", which might mean something like, "What kind of person do you think they are? What are they like?" The crucial point is that when assessing another human being, we do not only consider whether they have committed a certain action, but what they are like *as* a person. This is not to say that what they *do* does not affect our vision of what they are *like*, but that when we are assessing what a person *is* like, we assess far more than their actions. It might be said that we are assessing not what a person's actions *are*, but what a person's actions *mean*.

Murdoch is arguing against an approach to philosophy, what she calls the "current view", for which an individual's "stream of consciousness" (p. 34), by which she means an individual's "personal attitudes and visions which do not obviously take the form of choice-guiding arguments" (p. 39), are largely irrelevant for moral judgement.

In his paper 'Moral Integrity' (1972b), Winch presents a similar position to Murdoch's, arguing against a picture in which morality guides the choices a moral agent makes in exercising their will upon the world (p. 174):

> If we wish to understand the moral character of a particular man and his acts it is, often at any rate, not enough to notice that, for such and such reasons, he chooses a given course of action from among those he considers as alternatives. It may be at least as important to notice *what he considers the alternatives to be* and, what is closely connected, what are the reasons he considers it relevant to deploy in deciding between them. Thus one kind of difference between two men is that in which, agreeing about what the issues are with which their identical situations present them, they decide differently in the light of those issues. But an even more important difference [...] is that in which they cannot even

> agree in their descriptions of the situation and in their account of the issues raised by it. For one man, for instance, a situation will raise a moral issue; for another, it will not (p. 178, original emphasis)

Winch goes on to argue that "a situation, the issues which it raises and the kind of reason which is appropriate to a discussion of those issues, involve a certain perspective" (p. 180). That perspective, Winch continues, is the agent: "the agent *is* the perspective" (p. 180, original emphasis).

One way to put the connection I see between Murdoch and Winch here, is to say that both philosophers are concerned to emphasise the importance of considering the person at the centre of the situation, and what they are *like*, rather than comparing their actions against some kind of principle or form of words concerning the permissibility of a particular action. What is missing from this approach is the perspective of the agent, and thus the context of the situation. Thus I agree with Winch (1972b) when he goes on to argue

> … that there is *no* general kind of behaviour of which we have to say that it is good without qualification […] All we can do, I am arguing, is to look at particular examples and see what we *do* want to say about them; there are no general rules which can determine in advance what we *must* say about them (pp 181-182, original emphases).

> … my suggestion is that we do not always need to think of a man's action as performed by him in accordance with some principle ('maxim') in order to think of it as unequivocally *his* act and to attach moral value to it (p 184, original emphasis).

Winch then goes on to say that "there *is* no room for the notion of 'the right thing to do' in such a situation and that this shows yet again that morality is *wrongly* conceived as a guide to conduct" (p. 188, original emphasis):

> … what a man makes of the possibilities he can comprehend is a matter of what man he is. This is revealed in the way he lives; it is revealed *to him* in his understanding of what he can and what he cannot attach importance to (p. 191, original emphasis).

The issue with the dominant view's approach to propositions like "Murder is wrong", it might be said, is that it presupposes the shape of everyday moral life without first looking *at* everyday morality to see what it *is* like. In ascribing the wrongness of murder to a central point in their account of moral certainty, the dominant view is blind to the kind of everyday thinking Lamar shows in 'XXX'. This leads to a distortion in one's understanding of moral certainty, and thus morality. In 'Human Nature'(1972a), Winch puts this point as follows:

> … what we can ascribe to human nature does not determine what we can and what we cannot make sense of; rather, what we can and what we cannot make sense of determines what we can ascribe to human nature. It is indeed precisely for this reason that the concept of human nature is not the concept of something fixed and given; i.e. the reason for this is a philosophical, not a sociological, one (p. 84)

My claim is that the dominant view's approach is an attempt to determine what we can and cannot make sense of, based on what can be ascribed to human nature (such as the moral certainty that "Murder is wrong"), while my approach attempts to determine what we can and cannot make sense of (via consideration of the complexity of the Lamar example), and allows this to guide what is ascribed to human nature.

Conclusion

This chapter is a kind of companion piece for the former chapter. In the previous chapter, I considered how Pleasants conceptualises what he takes to be the

connected moral certainties of "Death is bad" and "Murder is wrong", before focusing on the notion of "Death is bad". In this chapter, my focus has been on "Murder is wrong". I began by outlining challenges to Pleasants' (2008; 2009) initial account of moral certainty put forward by Rummens (2013). I argued that one of Rummens' challenges, that Pleasants "does not really explain why these basic moral certainties are really supposed to be beyond doubt" (p. 136) fails, because Pleasants could respond that were they in need of explanation, they would not *be* moral certainties. I then turned to Pleasants' (2015), as well as Hermann's (2015) and O'Hara's (2018) responses to Rummens, and their emphases on the connection in their accounts between the forms of words they put forward as objects of moral certainty, and the notion of universality. I then presented the Lamar case as an intelligible example of acting and thinking in contradiction to the moral certainty "Murder is wrong". Importantly, it should be noted that Lamar's remarks in 'XXX' seem to also be a case in which a person might act against a moral certainty in a way that involves no principle. Though Lamar does say that "[i]f somebody kill my son, that mean somebody gettin' killed" (Lamar 2017), he is not here expressing a principle that he lives by. Rather, I take him as expressing a kind of temptation that, upon reflection, disturbs him ("Damn!" (Lamar 2017)). Connecting the remark back to Lamar's opening lines on human nature, Lamar's expression of "Damn!" suggests a moment in which Lamar is confronted with his own nature, and it is not what he thought (or hoped) it was. "Is this what I would do?" Lamar might ask himself, "Is this what I am *like*? A murderer?" This is in contrast, for example, with the various ways in which the dominant view seeks to avoid criticisms of their claim that "Murder is wrong" is a *universal* moral certainty. Another point is that there seems to be at least two ways in which the principle "Murder is wrong" might be understood to be indubitable. On the one hand, one might claim that they will stand by the principle, whether there are principled qualifications or not. On the other hand, one might claim that the principle is held universally, such that no human being doubts it. I take the dominant view to emphasise the latter. The

consequences of this for the dominant view, however, is that their universal principle, the moral certainty that "Murder is wrong", blinds them to what I take to be Lamar's illuminating remarks on tensions in morality that have nothing to do with principles, or particular forms of "moral" words taken to be indubitable, outside of any context.

4 – On the Wrongness of Racism and the Possibility of Moral Persuasion

Introduction

Hermann draws on a reading of Wittgenstein's remarks from *On Certainty* (204) and *Philosophical Investigations* (211 and 217) concerning what happens at the limits of justification, to claim that sooner or later in our moral clashes with others, it will no longer make sense to justify a moral conviction that we cannot ultimately doubt. She argues that

> … the assumption that we need to know what it is that makes wrongful acts of killing wrong in order to be able to judge cases in which the wrongness of killing is subject to doubt (for example abortion or euthanasia) is mistaken. Our everyday practices reveal that in justifying our moral convictions we sooner or later run out of reasons. At some point we cannot do more than repeat – though this time with stronger emphasis – a moral conviction the truth of which seems to be most obvious to us. I intend to show why this is so, and that it is nothing to be worried about (pp. 2-3).

Following Pleasants (2008), Hermann refers to the paradigm example of acts of wrongful killing – I will again focus on murder – to make the point central to her account of moral certainty that there "is nothing to be worried about" in relation to the inability to provide the philosophical sceptic with a moral justification for the wrongness of wrongful killings. My *life* and the *lives* of those around me *show*, Hermann's Wittgensteinian argument goes, that there is nothing to think but that "Murder is wrong". As such, the sceptic's request for a moral justification of the wrongness of murder makes no sense. While it makes no sense to discuss the permissibility of murder, it *does* make sense to talk about what Hermann,

following Pleasants, calls the "proper objects of ethical enquiry" (Pleasants quoted in Hermann 2015, p. 73). These include types of actions – as opposed to particular acts – like abortion, euthanasia, eating animals, and so on. What makes such topics "proper objects of ethical enquiry", the thinking goes, is that the moral permissibility or impermissibility of these practices is not settled once and for all, so to speak: some argue they are morally permissible while others argue they are morally impermissible, and people often position themselves somewhere in the middle, allowing for exceptions. But to treat murder as not settled, that is, to entertain the possibility that murder in paradigm cases might *not* be wrong, would be to abandon all moral concern. One might argue that "Abortion is impermissible, unless the pregnancy is the result of incest or rape", for example. These "proper ethical enquiries" often concern whether acts of abortion, euthanasia, eating animals, etc. are to be considered acts of murder or not. That "Murder is wrong" thus acts as an indubitable hinge on which discussions over whether certain kinds of acts count as acts of murder.

Though the focus in Hermann's approach here concerns acts of wrongful killing, the form of the sceptic's challenge and Hermann's response to it are just as relevant to other moral certainties put forward by Hermann and others subscribing to the dominant view of moral certainty. Take the pseudo proposition "Racism is wrong". Hermann's discussion of the grammar of moral justification as ruling out attempts to justify racist convictions (p. 72) seems to suggest that "Racism is wrong", like "Murder is wrong", is an undoubtable moral hinge, or moral certainty. In other words, if someone tried to morally justify the permissibility of racism, there would be no possibility of them succeeding, such that we would accept their justification, *because* of what it would be: an attempt to morally justify racism.

Thus, in line with her remarks on the wrongness of murder, Hermann seems committed to saying that our everyday practices reveal that it makes no sense to doubt that "Racism is wrong", and that therefore the sceptic's request for a

justification for the wrongness of racism makes no sense. Our everyday practices reveal that there is nothing to think but that "Racism is wrong".

At first glance this may seem such an obvious truism "as not to be worth stating" (Moore 1959a, p. 32). However, racism may be a case in which the limitations of Hermann's response to the sceptic, and her imagined responses to other kinds of antagonists on similar questions, begin to show in a similar yet distinct way to my criticisms in the previous two chapters concerning "Death is bad" and "Murder is wrong" as moral certainties. While it is the case, as Hermann's approach suggests, that the anti-racist need not attempt to justify the wrongness of racism before attempting to combat racism, it is also the case that a person holding racist attitudes will often *agree* that *there is nothing to think but that* "Racism is wrong", and simply claim that a certain act or judgement that has been flagged as racist or potentially racist is *not* racist. In other words, a disagreement over race and racism may occur between two people who agree, at least in some form, that "Racism is wrong", while disagreeing on whether a particular act or judgement is considered to be racist. This is a disagreement not over the permissibility of racism, but over what one understands racism to be. That is, a difference might occur between two or more people such that "they cannot even agree in their descriptions of the situation and in their account of the issues raised by it" (Winch 1972b, p. 178).

It doesn't seem difficult to imagine a situation in which a person responds to a charge of racism by saying, "Of course "Racism is wrong", but that [where "that" is an act or judgement] is not racist". A similar, unprovoked remark may begin with, "I'm not racist, but…" where what follows "but" is something that is potentially or explicitly seen throughout one's community as racist. Another familiar form involves a person claiming that they are not racist against a particular group of people because they know one or more members of that group. A white person might say, "I couldn't be racist against black people because I have a friend who is black". The particular content of these claims and

what they come to in a particular situation will vary, depending on the people involved. However, I would argue that the form remarks like this take is relatively easy to recognise in many everyday discussions and debates concerning race and racism. So common are they, that one might respond by rolling one's eyes, and thinking, "Here we go again".

Importantly, the result of this form of defence against oneself being seen as in some sense racist often leads to a form of a moral deadlock that, among other things, blunts the other's aim to combat racism where they see it. The first person says, "X is racist"; the second person responds that, "X is *not* racist"; the first person responds, "Yes it is. You are a racist"; the second person responds, "No it isn't. *You* are the racist!", *ad infinitum*. Often enough, the first person becomes frustrated with a lack of action on minimising what they see as a form of racism, while the second person becomes frustrated at being accused of being racist.

The frustration involved in this kind of moral deadlock can be seen in hip hop artist Joyner Lucas' (2017b) description of the current racial climate in the United States. In an interview with *Genius*, in which he discusses what led him to write the song and create the music video for 'I'm Not Racist' (2017a), he outlines the issue as follows:

> There's no resolution. It's just, "Fuck you." "Fuck me? Fuck you!" "Aight [alright], bye". And it's like, "C'mon bro." That's what's wrong with the world (Lucas 2017b).

Here, Lucas is referring to, among other things, the competing arguments of the Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter protest movements, who accuse each other's attitudes towards race and racism of being the view that is, ultimately, shaped by racist thinking.[31] To attempt to make the claim that *there is nothing to*

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[31] I discuss these protest movements in detail below. Briefly, Black Lives Matter is a movement that protests against what they claim are the racially motivated shootings and killings of black Americans by mostly white police officers, while All Lives Matter is a

think but that "Racism is wrong" in this context is pointless, because both sides of the clash agree that there is no doubt that "Racism is wrong". However, they are nevertheless *not* in agreement with one another, as they disagree over what counts as racism. On the dominant view, this might be seen as a kind of tension between holding a moral certainty and what counts as the kind of act the moral certainty evaluates as wrong. It is as if one were to say, "Of course it is impossible to doubt that "Racism is wrong". Now, if only we could agree on what racism is?"

Importantly though, the kind of deadlock Lucas sees is not one in which we are doomed to simply shout at one another our competing convictions over what counts as racism, as Hermann's conceptualisation of moral certainty seems to suggest. After diagnosing the deadlock as "what's wrong with the world", Lucas (2017b) asks, "How do we create a resolution?" Part of his answer is the song and the music video for 'I'm Not Racist' (Lucas 2017a).

In this chapter, my claim is that the way that Hermann draws on Wittgenstein's remarks on the limits of justification gives the impression that this is all there is to say about what we do at the limits of justification. Hermann's claim that all we can do when moral justification makes no sense is to repeat, though perhaps more firmly, moral convictions we simply cannot doubt, risks resulting, at a conceptual level, in the kind of moral deadlock Lucas diagnoses in the clash between the Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter movements. While Hermann's claim may blunt the force of the moral sceptic who asks for a moral justification for a moral conviction that acts as a hinge for "proper ethical enquiry", I argue that the way that Wittgenstein talks about the limits of justification at certain points in *On Certainty*, in which he speaks about persuading others to take on one's own picture of the world, is also relevant for the kinds of things we do to try to avoid moral deadlocks in everyday life. To this end, I argue that the song and music video for Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist' present us

counter-movement that denies the shootings and killings are racially motivated, and argues that Black Lives Matter is itself a racist group.

with a picture of how an attempt to morally persuade other human beings along the lines of Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* might proceed. Central to this is what I call the invitational nature of Wittgenstein's conceptualisation of persuasion. I argue further that Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist' does more than shed light on what a moral form of Wittgensteinian persuasion might look like. In a similar way to how Hermann draws on the notion of moral justification to shape her conceptualisation of moral certainty, my claim is that Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist' may present us with an example of a form of moral persuasion that helps us to shape the notion of moral certainty in relation to racism in a way that is closer to what everyday life shows us than the approach of the dominant view allows for.

The introduction of the notion of moral persuasion in our everyday lives to appeal to the hearts of our moral opponents supports my main claim in this thesis that in attempting to fully understand what our everyday lives have to show us about the Wittgenstein inspired notion of moral certainty, we must give up more fully than the dominant view (Pleasants 2008; 2009; 2015, Hermann 2015, O'Hara 2018) allows for, the philosophical pseudo-propositions on which current analyses hinge.

Hermann on Moral Justification and its Limits

Hermann presents an account of moral justification so as to become clear on when a moral justification does and does not make sense. Where moral justification does not make sense – that is, when doubt over the permissibility of a particular kind of act is impossible – we have found a moral conviction so fundamental that it is to be treated as a moral certainty. Where moral justification *does* make sense – where doubt over the permissibility of a particular kind of act *is* possible – we have found a moral conviction that constitutes an object of "proper ethical enquiry".

Our practices of moral justification, as Hermann outlines them, have

> a variety of functions, such as legitimising actions, attitudes, institutions, and practices, avoiding blame, demonstrating one's innocence, reaching agreement on binding rules, convincing dissenters, and achieving moral progress (p. 84).

From amongst these various functions, Hermann seeks to present an account of the grammar of the moral justification of both moral actions and judgements. She first considers "[t]he classical case of an action which requires moral justification" as "one that constitutes the violation of a moral rule" like "Keep your promises" or "Do not lie" (p. 68). An example is given in which Susan is required to provide a moral justification to her friend Sarah for disclosing a secret Sarah had trusted her with, as well as a situation in which the citizens of a country require a moral justification from their government for governmental corruption that has come to light (p. 69). It is not said what the secret was that Susan disclosed, or to whom it was disclosed. Nor is it said what act of corruption was perpetrated by the government, or who the citizens of the country were. In the case of the latter, it would be a rather audacious member of government that attempts to justify the receiving of bribes for political favour, perhaps preferring to deny all charges until found guilty, and pleading for forgiveness for being led astray afterwards. Nevertheless, Hermann draws on these generalised types of moral rule violation to outline what she sees as "the grammar of the game of morally justifying actions" (p. 69) in "classical" cases as follows:

> (1) what raises the demand for justification is a morally objectionable action[32], (2) success in providing a justification for the respective action is not ruled out from the start, (3) each party believes that a number of moral beliefs are shared with the other (that is an agreement over

[32] Or at least, it could be suggested, an action that is suspected of being morally objectionable.

> judgements is assumed), and (4) the success or failure of the justificatory attempt has important consequences for the persons involved (p. 69).[33]

Hermann then compares the practice of the moral justification of actions with the practice of the moral justification of "attitudes, forms of reasoning, and judgements". Here, she considers on the one hand, a person being confronted with someone holding the conviction that "Blacks are inferior to whites", and on the other hand, a discussion between two men, Bill and Simon, concerning "the legitimacy of abortion" (p. 70). The disagreement over the act of abortion is taken as the paradigm example, and the form such a disagreement takes is described by Hermann as follows:

> Bill holds that the unborn life may under no circumstances be sacrificed. Simon disagrees with that and tries to convince him that the life of the embryo has to be weighed against the life of its mother. He defends the view that if the mother's life is in danger or if her having the child would result in psychological disturbance, then having an abortion is justified. Simon provides reasons for his view, which would be pointless if there were no alternative to it.
>
> It is characteristic of such a debate that reasons can be given to support the respective standpoints. Whether Simon succeeds in convincing Bill depends on whether the reasons he provides involve more basic moral beliefs, whether they are non-rejectable for Bill, and whether or not Bill can accept them and at the same time reject Simon's judgement about abortion. Justification goes from what is less certain to what is more certain (p. 70).

Here, Bill takes Simon's conviction to be morally objectionable, and in presenting moral justifications for the conviction that "the unborn life may under no

[33] As I understand Hermann's fourth characteristic, she means that the matter is of real concern for the people involved, rather than a merely theoretical matter they are engaging in.

circumstances be sacrificed", he takes it that Simon might find his reasoning convincing, and thus abandon his own claim that "the life of the embryo has to be weighed against the life of its mother". However, this is also the case in the other direction: Simon takes Bill's conviction to be morally objectionable, and in presenting moral justifications for the conviction that "the life of the embryo has to be weighed against the life of its mother", he takes it that Bill might find his reasoning convincing, and thus abandon his own claim that "the unborn life may under no circumstances be sacrificed". Bill and Simon may argue for and against whether the act of abortion is an act of murder, but what is never questioned by either person is whether "Murder is wrong".

With the abortion case in mind, Hermann concludes that "the grammar of the game of justifying general moral judgements is similar to that of the game of morally justifying actions" (p. 72). She provides four grammatical characteristics in line with her account of the grammar of the moral justification of actions as follows:

> (a) what raises the demand for justification is a morally objectionable view, that is it is assumed that there are moral reasons that count against adopting the position concerned, (b) it is supposed that there are reasons in favour of it, that is the success of the justificatory attempt is not thought to be ruled out from the start, (c) it is assumed that there are shared moral beliefs which serve as common ground (agreement in judgements), and (d) the success of the justificatory attempt has important consequences (p. 72).[34]

However, Hermann qualifies the second characteristic in relation to her example of confrontations with people who think that "Blacks are inferior to whites". Here, Hermann claims that the grammatical characteristic "(b) does not apply to all cases". In the case of the conviction that "blacks are inferior to whites", "we

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[34] An almost identical list of these four characteristics is also presented on pp. 84-85.

exclude the possibility that he may come up with sufficient reasons in support of his belief" (p. 72).[35] In other words, when we ask someone "Why do you say that blacks are inferior to whites?" we are not implying that we are actually open to being moved to thinking that "Blacks are inferior to whites" ourselves. The possibility of a change in *our* attitude is not part of the grammatical form of our request. This is because, for Hermann, "Racism is wrong" is a moral certainty that is logically impossible to doubt. When we ask for a moral justification for the conviction that "Blacks are inferior to whites", Hermann argues, we do so with "the aim of bringing that person to abandon his belief by forcing him to reflect upon it" (p. 73). The racist might come to see that they hold a racist attitude and attempt to abandon it. However, it seems just as likely that the person retains their racist attitude in the face of a total absence of supporting facts. Such a person might be unable to doubt that "Blacks just *are* inferior to whites". In the latter case, I take it that Hermann would deem such a person not to be mistaken, but to be judging outside of morality (see for example OC 156). In other words, we take a person's conviction that "Blacks just *are* inferior to whites" to be an abhorrent, racist judgement.

If we seek a moral justification from the person who holds the conviction that "Blacks just *are* inferior to whites" and they do not abandon this conviction, then on Hermann's view, it seems that all we can do is repeat moral convictions like "Blacks are *not* inferior to whites", or "All human beings are created equal", while judging the person before us to hold abhorrently racist attitudes. On this view, there appears to be a conceptual gulf between ourselves and such a person that cannot be overcome unless they abandon their conviction. However, on Hermann's view, it seems there is nothing more we can do to this end but simply repeat our moral convictions.

[35] Notice here that Hermann is essentially talking about arguing against arguments that don't exist.

One of the reasons Hermann seems conceptually fixed at such a point, it seems to me, is because in following Pleasants, she holds that the subject of abortion, like "humanitarian interventions, homosexuality, cloning, euthanasia, vivisection, the use and killing of animals, duties to distant people in need, and many other issues" (p. 73) is taken as one of the "proper objects of practical ethical enquiry" (Pleasants quoted in Hermann 2015, p. 73), while the subject of racism is not. Part of what constitutes a moral certainty, on this view, is that it is necessarily *not* an object of ethical enquiry, because to doubt it would be to be already on the path towards judging outside of morality. Moral justification makes sense in relation to the "proper objects of practical ethical enquiry", but not in relation to what is morally certain.

The consequence is that the abortion case is taken as a paradigm example of moral justification, while the case of racism becomes an exception. It might be thought that we need not worry because we do not tend to take people that explicitly argue that "Blacks are inferior to whites" seriously. Someone with such an explicitly racist conviction might be simply dismissed as a member of a modern day fringe group, or a relic of past thinking that is no longer tolerated. However, I would suggest that racist convictions are often not necessarily this explicit in our everyday lives in 2020, as the clashes over race and racism in the United States between the Black Lives Matter movement and the All Lives Matter movement suggests.

It should also be noted that though Hermann makes a distinction between abortion and racism in relation to (b), it could be argued that her description of the distinction is not as clear as it may first appear. Though we may not like it, though we may find it abhorrent, we currently live in a world in which there are recognisable attitudes that oppose one another on abortion. Some people hold the moral conviction that "Abortion is permissible", while others hold the moral conviction that "Abortion is impermissible". There are also a variety of attitudes between these extremes that are recognisable, such as when someone says, "I am

generally against abortion, but in cases of rape or incest, I think it is permissible", or "I am generally okay with abortion, but it should not be used as a careless form of birth control".

This much should be uncontroversial: the abortion debate is shaped by competing viewpoints on the permissibility of abortion. What is questionable, however, is whether Hermann presents an accurate picture of how the disagreement goes on, as we engage with one another. Though Hermann presents the situation between Bill and Simon as a calm discussion between two men with competing viewpoints on the subject, there is nothing to say that the discussion will not break down to the point of, or move away from initially being, a situation in which Bill says "Abortion just is *not* permissible", while Simon says "Abortion just *is* permissible", with neither willing to budge. In other words, we should take the possibility that Bill and Simon may end up simply shouting their opposing moral convictions at one another, *ad infinitum*, seriously. If moral justification arises here, it could suggest that this is closer to Hermann's description of the racism case than she sees, where neither Bill nor Simon leave it open to the other to provide a successful moral justification for their respective viewpoints, while attempting to force the other to reflect on what they perceive as a morally abhorrent attitude.

Another issue seems to appear for Hermann when she claims in the racism case that though we exclude the possibility of a moral justification for the conviction that "Blacks are inferior to whites", we have "an idea of what a justification could look like" (p. 72). Hermann can imagine, as we ourselves can imagine, a racist arguing that "due to a lack of certain capacities which whites have, blacks do not have the same moral status as whites" (p. 73). And here, I agree with Hermann.

However, as Andrew Gleeson (2017) suggests in his review of Hermann's monograph, we should

> … ask Hermann why anti-racists need an idea of what a justification could look like if they are just trying to get racists to “reflect on [their] prejudices” (p. 85).

Another question is how one is to have an idea of something that has been conceptualised as non-existent or nonsensical?

Gleeson’s suggestion is that Hermann’s understanding of justification at this point is still shaped – as I outlined in Hermann’s description of the abortion case – by what he calls

> … the standard model: moral conclusions are reached by applying moral principles to non-moral facts, and one justifies a position to an opponent by appealing to a principle they share with you (or that any rational being is obliged to share) and correcting any mistakes of fact (p. 83).

On the standard model, that “Blacks lack certain capacities that whites have” is ruled out by there being no facts corresponding to the claim. This would mean that once we have proven to the racist that the claim that blacks lack “certain capacities which whites have” is false, they will give up their conviction that “blacks do not have the same moral status as whites” (p. 73). However, as Gleeson notes, “for Wittgenstein the justification of certainties is not merely *unavailable in fact*; it *makes no sense*” (p. 83, original emphasis). The argument is that though racists will sometimes attempt to rationalise their racist attitudes by appealing to such claims, practices of racism are not really about determining the truth or falsity of claims like “Blacks lack certain capacities whites have”. This can be seen, for example, in the tendency of racists to change their arguments, or attempt to point to other “facts”, in order to maintain their initial, racist attitudes towards black people.

On Soul-Blindness

Historical cases aside, it is also the case that racism in more modern times rarely shows itself in explicit convictions like “Blacks are inferior to whites”. Rather, it is often more hidden and difficult to detect. That is, we can imagine situations in which two or more people have a disagreement over racism in a way that doesn’t involve explicit talk of differing capacities. We could imagine, for example, two or more people watching a news report stating that another black American citizen has been killed by police in the United States (a common report in 2020/2021). One person might remark, “Well, they shouldn’t have been resisting arrest, and then they wouldn’t have been shot”. This might even be an *assumption* that the black person *must* have been refusing to comply with police directions at the time of their death. The report might be updated as new information comes in to the news room, and it might then be discovered that the man that had been killed had not resisted arrest, and was unarmed at the time of his death. The person might respond by saying “Well, okay that shouldn’t have happened. That’s clearly a case of murder”. However, the same person may just as well respond by saying “Well, I don’t care, I still think the shooting was justified. Even though the guy was unarmed, the officer may still have thought his life was in danger. The guy shouldn’t have been in a situation where he appeared to be a threat. There’s nothing racist about that”. A response like this might suggest two things: on the one hand, it might be the case that the disagreement stems more from a conceptual disagreement over the difficulties police officers face throughout the various situations they might be faced with. A person’s response here might suggest that while they are not saying that it is *good* that a citizen has died, *that* a citizen was killed in a confrontation with police officers had nothing to do with the citizen being *black*. On the other hand, it might be the case that the response suggests something more akin to a form of “soul-blindness” – a difference in how they see black people, and respond to reports of their deaths at the hands of police officers (discussed below).

Whether the person's remarks were shaped by a racist attitude would require further investigation. We might ask "How can you say that?" with the hope not of offering the opportunity for them to successfully justify why the act *wasn't* racist, but to have them reflect in a way that allows them to come to see that racism may have had a part to play in the shooting, and in their own initial denial of that racism.

This seems to suggest the importance of keeping in mind who we are speaking to when we claim, philosophically, that there is *nothing to think* but that "Racism is wrong". A person focused on whether there is a moral justification for the claim that "Racism is wrong" may be concerned with a philosophical sceptic or a philosopher concerned with overcoming "the problem of the justificatory regress", which is the problem that inspired Hermann to write her monograph (p. 8). However, our everyday practices seem to reveal that much of our "sensible" discussions of racism involve disagreements not over whether or not the conviction that "Racism is wrong" is morally justifiable, but whether a certain act or judgement is considered to be racist.

If the disagreement concerning racism really does stem from a difference in how people see black people, then, as mentioned above, it might be the case that one is confronted with a person that is in some sense "soul-blind". I take this term from Stanley Cavell's (1979) well-known discussion in *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* of how we might describe the way a slave owner understands those he has taken as slaves. Cavell claims that

> [w]hat he really believes is not that slaves are not human beings, but that some human beings are slaves […] this man *sees* certain human beings *as* slaves, takes them for slaves. He need not claim that all such persons ought to be in slavery, merely that it is all right if some are (p. 375, original emphasis).

Concerning the description of those we take to see certain human beings as slaves, Cavell suggests that

> [i]f it makes sense to speak of seeing human beings as human beings, then it makes sense to imagine that a human being may lack the capacity to see human beings as human beings. It would make sense to ask whether someone may be soul-blind (p. 378).

What is important here is the claim of what a particular person *sees* when looking at a person from a different racial background to one's own. What one sees is not a fellow human being, but a human being of an inferior kind.

More recent examples of soul blindness "out in the open", so to speak, may be seen in Raimond Gaita's (1998) discussion of the remarks of James Isdell, the Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as those of a friend Gaita refers to simply as M. In relation to the forced separation of Aboriginal children from their parents in the first half of the twentieth century (the Stolen Generations), Isdell says that he "would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its Aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. *They* soon forget *their* offspring" (Isdell quoted in Gaita 1998, p. 57, my emphasis). Similarly, despite grieving over the loss of her own child, in relation to a Vietnamese woman in a documentary film grieving over the deaths of her children during recent bombing raids, M remarks that "it is different for *them*. *They* can simply have more" (M quoted in Gaita 1998, p. 57, my emphasis). The failure here to see Aboriginal Australian mothers, or Vietnamese mothers here as capable of the same kind of grief oneself, it should be stressed, is not a failure to see an empirical property of a person, such as their height or their weight. Rather, the soul-blind person might be said to see the looks of grief on these women's faces, and understand that these looks of grief use the same facial muscles as they themselves use when they grieve. Nevertheless, the soul-blind person does not take these expressions of grief as "genuine" expressions of grief, but something

along the lines of melodrama or histrionics. They take these mothers to be incapable of grieving as oneself grieves. The important point here is that this difference in seeing here is not something that a presentation of scientific facts about human beings could alleviate. It has to do with who Aboriginal Australian mothers, or Vietnamese others are taken to be in the soul-blind person's picture of the world.

Seeing other human beings as different from ourselves in this way often leads one to respond differently than one would in situations where we see other human beings as like ourselves. Forcefully separating children from their mothers, or a mother grieving over the death of her child is unspeakably tragic. But this is only if it were one of *our* children taken or killed, and one of *our* mothers grieving. It is not such a tragedy for *them*, and we need not treat it the same. As Gaita argues,

> [i]f 'they' can 'simply have more', then if we rape them or kill their children or forcibly take their children from them, we cannot wrong them in the way we wrong one another (pp. 59-60).

It is a similar form of soul-blindness, I suggest, that may at times present itself throughout responses to police shootings of black Americans in 2020/2021, whether they are claiming that "The shooting was justified", or that "All lives matter, not just black lives". Nothing about these remarks is in themselves inherently racist, but in various familiar situations in our everyday lives they are often used in such a way to deny the legitimacy of black American calls for justice. Rather than responding to the killings by explicitly saying that "*they* soon forget" or that "*they* can simply have more", certain remarks and the defence of certain actions may nevertheless suggest that a person sees certain human beings as a different kind of human being to themselves, even if they are at pains to deny this. In the case of the two people watching the news report, the response that "The unarmed black victim shouldn't have put himself in a situation in which he appeared to be a threat to the police officer" may suggest that such a judgement

is shaped by a form of soul-blindness.[36] The kind of racism seen in Cavell's example of the slaveowner, and Gaita's examples of the lack of sympathy for grieving Aboriginal Australian or Vietnamese women, concerns holding that an essential property of "humanness", is missing from a group one is prejudiced against.

However, the essential property that is missing, as Cavell (1979) explains, concerns oneself, rather than those one is prejudiced against. What such people are missing, Cavell argues, is not something about black Americans (or Aboriginal Australians, or Vietnamese) exactly,

> … and not exactly about human beings. He is rather missing something about himself, or rather something about his connection with these people, his internal relation to them, so to speak (p. 376).

The missing connection presents itself as a blindness to the full humanity of the other person. They cannot *see* people with skin colour different to their own as human beings in the same sense as they *see* people with the same skin colour as themselves.

But *this* kind of picture of the terrain surrounding fundamental human attitudes towards racism is much different to the terrain presented by Hermann when she remarks on what "[o]ur everyday practices reveal" (pp. 2-3). When Herman says that "at some point we cannot do more than repeat – though this time with stronger emphasis – a moral conviction the truth of which seems most obvious to us" (p. 3), this is in opposition to the claim that "we need to know what it is that makes wrongful acts wrong in order to be able to judge cases in which the wrongness of killing is subject to doubt (for example abortion or euthanasia)" (p.

[36] There are other possibilities of course. It might be the case, for example, that the prejudice is more sociological, such that though one does not take black Americans to be inferior per se, due to the historical and social situation – perhaps through no fault of their own – that black Americans are involved in more violent, criminal, or antisocial behaviour than white Americans, police officers are seen as merely operating within this context, in a way that maintains their own safety.

2). For Hermann, while we disagree over whether or not acts like euthanasia and abortion are acts of murder, that "Murder is wrong" is impossible to doubt. To the moral sceptic that claims that we cannot talk about euthanasia or abortion without first determining why "Murder is wrong", Hermann's (and Pleasants') response is that our everyday practices reveal that there is no conceptual space for a justification or explanation of the wrongness of murder. Murder just *is* wrong. All we can do is simply repeat, perhaps with more force, that "Murder just *is* wrong", to any moral sceptic attempting to lead us to think of murder in any other way than as an act for which it is impossible to doubt that it is wrong. However, Hermann's remark about what our everyday practices reveal does not seem to be as easily captured in relation to the form of moral soul-blindness concerning racism suggested above.

One reason for this, I suggest, is Hermann's emphasis on the sceptical antagonist Wittgenstein considers and returns to throughout *On Certainty*. This focus on the philosophical sceptic continues on from Moore's concerns in 'A Defence of Common Sense' (1959a) and 'Proof of an External world' (1959b), where Moore is concerned with responding to scepticism about knowledge and scepticism of the external world, respectively.

Amongst a series of remarks beginning with the question of what it means to say that "the truth of a proposition is *certain*" (OC 193, original emphasis), as Moore attempts to argue, Wittgenstein claims that

> [g]iving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; - but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game (OC 204, original emphasis).

Wittgenstein's key insight here is to emphasise the everyday ways in which we unthinkingly act that Moore mistakenly attempts to present in propositional form as a kind of unprovable knowledge. It is not the content of the proposition

that is certain, Wittgenstein is claiming, but the ways in which we act without doubt or the need for prior justification that are certain. Moore's mistake was to attempt to fit what our everyday practices reveal into pre-existing philosophical forms of thinking.

For Hermann, this thought of Wittgenstein's (OC 204) "sets the stage for the reflections contained in" her study of moral certainty, which is guided by Wittgenstein's "powerful remarks about the limits of justification and the primacy of acting" (p. 4). When exploring "their significance for the practice of justifying moral judgements" (p. 4) and actions, Hermann also draws on two remarks from *Philosophical Investigations* (2009):

> "No matter how you instruct him in continuing the ornamental pattern, how can he *know* how he is to continue it by himself?" – Well, how do *I* know? – If that means "Have I reasons?", the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons (PI 211, original emphases).
>
> "How am I able to follow a rule?" – If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my acting in *this* way in complying with the rule.
>
> Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do."
>
> (Remember that we sometimes demand explanations for the sake not of their content, but of their form. Our requirement is an architectural one; the explanation a kind of sham corbel that supports nothing.) (PI 217, original emphasis)

In these two remarks, Wittgenstein considers the question of how one can be said to "know" how to go on with an ornamental pattern (PI 211), or be able to follow a rule more generally (OC 217), once one has been shown how to go on

with a task. In both cases, he remarks that sooner or later, the practice of justification seems to lose sense: "my reasons will soon give out" (PI 211); "Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned" (OC 217). At this point, there is nothing more one can do, according to Wittgenstein, than to say that "This is simply what I do" (OC 217), and to concede that one acts "without reasons" (PI 211) at this point. In this way, one might respond to a guide's question of "Are you sure you *know* how to go on from here?" by saying, "Watch me do it, and then you will see."

A crucial point to make is that Hermann's emphasis on these remarks concerning the justification of going on with a pattern, or following a rule, seems to lead her to miss the importance of Wittgenstein's remarks on the possibility of encountering antagonists other than the philosophical sceptic at the limits of justification, and on what one may do in such a situation. For example, in *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein makes three brief remarks on our practices of persuasion in contexts in which the practice of justification has reached its limits (OC 262, 612, and 669). My suggestion is that in drawing out Wittgenstein's remarks on persuasion and reflecting on them in relation to everyday experiences of racism, pressure is put on Hermann's approach to moral justification and her conceptualisation of moral certainty, as they cannot account for much of what our everyday practices reveal in this context.

Persuasion: Attempts to Resolve Deadlocks in *On Certainty*

As Luigi Perissinotto (2016) notes in 'How Long Has the Earth Existed? Persuasion and World-Picture in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*', the notions of conversion and persuasion appear not only when Wittgenstein is concerned with a philosophical sceptic, but with "someone who, for example, believes that the

earth did not exist long before his birth because that’s what he has been told or has been taught to believe” (p. 156).

Such a confrontation is presented by Wittgenstein at OC 92, when he imagines a scene in which Moore is confronted with a king for whom part of his world picture is constituted by the certainty that “The Earth began with my birth”:

> ... we can ask: May someone have telling grounds for believing that the earth has only existed for a short time, say since his own birth? – Suppose he has always been told that, – would he have any good reason to doubt it? Men have believed that they could make rain; why should not a king be brought up in the belief that the world began with him? And if Moore and this king were to meet and discuss, could Moore really prove his belief to be the right one? I do not say that Moore could not convert the king to his view, but it would be a conversion of a special kind; the king would be brought to look at the world in a different way.
>
> Remember that one is sometimes convinced of the *correctness* of a view by its *simplicity* or *symmetry*, i.e, these are what induce one to go over to this point of view. One then simply says something like: “*That’s* how it must be.” (OC 92, original emphases)

The confrontation with a person such as the king may appear strange, but it is certainly not unprecedented in human history. There is no reason here for such a person to doubt their conviction in the face of a form of reasoning from outside their own form of life, and further, such a person may have no interest in the kinds of questions philosophy is concerned with.

As Tove Österman (2007) notes in her monograph *Rationality and Cultural Understanding*, the anthropologist Evans-Pritchard was confronted with just such a disagreement when his own scientific understanding of biological heredity and that of the Azande people he was researching resulted in a kind of fundamental disagreement over world-pictures:

> Potential witches are for the Azande any adult man or woman, and witchcraft is an inherited trait transmitted from parent to child. The sons of a male witch are all witches, as are the daughters of a female witch (p. 104).

> You would think, as Evans-Pritchard points out, that when one man has been proven a witch, then the whole of his clan would be considered witches (a clan being a group of persons related biologically to one another through the male line), but this is not the conclusion drawn by the Azande. If it was, it would lead to whole communities of witches. In practice, only close paternal kinsmen of a witch are assumed to be witches. Evans-Pritchard comments: "Azande do not perceive the contradiction as we perceive it because they have no theoretical interest in the subject, and those situations in which they express their beliefs in witchcraft do not force the problem upon them" (p. 105).

If one wished to change the Azande's or the king's world picture to one's own, such a change would not happen through standard argumentation involving the presentation of facts. This is because what we take to count as facts on the roughly scientific picture of the world we see ourselves as operating within do not count as facts in the world pictures of either the Azande or the king.[37]

> The reason why the use of the expression "true or false" has something misleading about it is that it is like saying "it tallies with the facts or it doesn't", and the very thing that is in question is what "tallying" is here (OC 199).

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[37] This is not to say that within our own roughly scientific picture of the world that the presentation of facts is immediately taken in and accepted as *the* state of affairs. Contemporary resistance by very many governments to the risks of climate change, and the resistance of very many Americans, including the outgoing President Trump, to the results of the 2020 election suggest that facts, and the presentation of facts, do not have the force within one's world picture that one might assume.

Wittgenstein reflects on how one might then go on to change such peoples' beliefs to that of one's own via "a conversion of a special kind" (OC 92) three times in *On Certainty*. At OC 262, Wittgenstein is confronted with an antagonist for whom "the earth came into being 50 years ago", while OC 612 and OC 669 are responses to antagonists that consult oracles rather than physicists (OC 609) and "believed that people were taken to the moon in dreams" (OC 667) respectively.

In each case (OC 262, 612 and 669) Wittgenstein uses the notion of "persuasion" to describe an attempt to change the respective antagonists' (OC 262, 609, and 667) picture of the world:

> I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being 50 years ago, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long … etc. – We should be trying to give him our picture of the world.
>
> This would happen through a kind of *persuasion* (OC 262, original emphasis).

> I said I would 'combat' the other man, - but wouldn't I give him *reasons*? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.) (OC 612, original emphasis)

> The sentence "I can't be making a mistake" is certainly used in practice. But we may question whether it is then to be taken in a perfectly rigorous sense, or is rather a kind of exaggeration which perhaps is used only with a view of persuasion (OC 669).

In the second remark, Wittgenstein invites the reader to "[t]hink what happens when missionaries convert natives" (OC 612), which along with OC 92 is the second time he mentions an act of "conversion" in relation to attempting to change the world-pictures of those with beliefs alien to one's own.

Perissinotto presents a picture of "what happens when missionaries convert natives" (OC 612) as follows:

> What the missionary will do or will have to do is to enter into the life of the natives, living among them, sharing their joys and sufferings, treating their sicknesses or relieving their pain, helping them in times of famine or other calamities, etc. At a certain point, it may happen, then, that the natives begin to pray with the missionary, that they ask him the name of that being to whom they are praying and whom they are thanking, that they want to hear and repeat the stories about him, that they carefully conserve his image, etc. At a certain point they may even accuse the old priests of imposture and brand the old beliefs, rites and practices as nothing but superstition. It is at this point that we may, perhaps, speak of "conversion" (Perissinotto 2016, p. 167).

The first thing to note is that when missionaries attempt to convert a people to their own religious world picture, the missionaries (whether they see themselves as such or not) are part of a dominating culture, while the people they attempt to convert are the culture that is being dominated. The two groups are therefore not in an equal relation to one another, and this inequality may largely shape the nature of the interaction between them. For example, the dominated culture may resent the interference of the missionaries in their everyday lives, but claim to be converted to their world-picture simply in an attempt to survive an invasion. Of course, it might also be the case that they see the missionaries as representing a successful form of life (economically, technically, militarily, etc.) that holds various appeals, or a mixture of both.

The second thing to note, as Perissinotto does, is that though the changing of world-pictures described here is a religious form of transformation, Wittgenstein's use of the notion of persuasion at OC 262, 612, and 669 to go on to describe such transformations suggests he is not limiting the idea to religious conversion. In using the notion of "what happens when missionaries convert

natives" (OC 612) "as an object of comparison - as a sort of yardstick" (Wittgenstein quoted in Perissinotto 2016, p. 166), Wittgenstein appears to suggest that a similar transformation between what one's world-picture *was,* and what one's world-picture now *is*, takes place in both religious and non-religious cases. We can imagine a person simply aiming to convince the king to give up his picture of a world in which the world began with his birth, rather than attempting to have him embrace a particular religion.

What appears to me the most important aspect of Wittgenstein's approach to persuasion, however, is what I would call its seemingly invitational nature in contrast to the largely involuntary nature of historical cases of religious conversion. One does not persuade another by calling them "primitive" (OC 609), or accusing them of a world-picture containing "pieces of stupidity" (RFGB, p. 119). This route may lead to the kinds of deadlocks discussed above where one is likely to resist reflecting on one's own world picture, rather than defending it against accusations of "racism". No one likes to be called, or seen to be, "primitive" or "stupid", and thus a world picture in which one is taken as such might be seen by one as dehumanising, backwards, or "savage" (RFGB, p. 131). When one persuades another, as I understand Wittgenstein's remarks about giving another "our picture of the world" (OC 262), one does so in an invitational manner, and as an interlocutor's equal.

Peter Winch (1992) provides a helpful example of the invitational nature of persuasion I have in mind in his paper titled 'Persuasion'. Winch describes a conceptual deadlock between Wittgenstein and Alan Turing over the "differences between mathematical calculations and experiments" where Turing argues that "the difference between Wittgenstein and himself lay in the fact that they were using the word "experiment" in two different ways" (p. 130). Resisting this diagnosis, Winch highlights the persuasive nature of Wittgenstein's alternative approach: "if I could make myself quite clear, then Turing would give

up saying that in mathematics we make experiments" (Wittgenstein quoted in Winch 1992, p. 130).

Wittgenstein elaborates on the persuasive approach he would take to encourage Turing to see things as he does by comparing the issue with how he himself would respond to David Hilbert's attitude towards Cantor's paradise. The paradise is Georg Ferdinand Ludwig Philipp Cantor's development of set theory and infinite cardinal numbers, which Hilbert claims are a paradise he could not be driven from. Wittgenstein responds:

> I would say, "I wouldn't dream of trying to drive anyone out of this paradise." I would try to do something quite different: I would try to show you that it is not a paradise - so that you'll leave of your own accord. I would say, "You're welcome to this; just look about you" (Wittgenstein quoted in Winch 1992, p. 130).

In other words, Wittgenstein is not presenting Turing or Hilbert with an argument, the logic of which they must accept, nor is he dominating them in a way in which they feel they must go over to Wittgenstein's way of thinking or perish. Rather, he is presenting an invitation to see the same state of affairs in a different light.[38]

Wittgenstein's description of what may happen at the end of justification in these situations, and the invitational nature in which one my approach such situations, appears to stand in contrast to what Hermann claims happens, and what she claims we can do, at the limits of justification. In focusing on the limits of justification in relation to the philosophical sceptic's requests for justification, as well as the limits of justification in relation to the following of rules or patterns,

[38] A similar approach may even be read into Wittgenstein's remark at the end of the *Tractatus* that if one understands *Wittgenstein*, then one will come to see that though it might be tempting to take them otherwise, that his propositions throughout the *Tractatus* are nonsensical (TLP 6.54).

while missing Wittgenstein's remarks on its role in the contexts of those with attitudes fundamentally opposed to our own, Hermann seems to miss important aspects of the philosophical notion of moral justification and its relation to moral certainty. As Hermann uses the notion of moral justification to help shape her notion of moral certainty, I argue that this leads her to present a distorted picture of the notion of moral certainty that misses much of the complexity that might be seen in it if we look more closely.

On the Possibility of Wittgensteinian Moral Persuasion

What I have just attempted to outline is the general form of what I am calling Wittgenstein's invitational approach to the notion of persuasion in relation to forms of certainty that are not explicitly "moral" in content. In the context of *On Certainty*, on the dominant view, the form of words "The Earth existed since long before my birth" is a non-moral, or empirical certainty. This is because the pseudo-proposition philosophers use to express it contains no moral judgements via ethical terms like "right", "wrong", "good", "bad", "ought", etc., nor actions such judgements are directed towards. As discussed in Chapter 1, accounts of moral certainty put forward by the dominant view develop moral certainty as an analogy to Wittgenstein's discussion of so-called empirical certainty by swapping what they take to be the non-moral content of such pseudo-propositions to those they see to contain moral content. So while the pseudo-proposition "The Earth existed since long before my birth" is not treated as a *moral* certainty, the pseudo-proposition "Racism is wrong" is treated as such. Thus I turn to this particular pseudo-proposition – "Racism is wrong" – to shape my answer to the question: what would a Wittgensteinian approach to moral persuasion that is invitational in nature look like?

It seems to me that the dominant view's position on this invitational notion of moral persuasion would ultimately be one of a charge of irrationality. Granted,

the dominant view allows for the possibility of moral change in the case of racism, its proponents arguing that the moral certainty "Racism is wrong" is one that, like the moral certainty that "Slavery is wrong", did not, at some previous point, go without saying. Hermann argues in relation to a similar sentiment that

> [w]hat now serves as an axis of moral reasoning for a large group of people, the requirement that all human beings be respected, used to be a contested claim. There have been times and places where it was not made at all (p. 188).

However, this brings me back to my claim that the grammar of our everyday fundamental moral disagreements over racism appears to concern what does and doesn't count *as* racism, rather than whether or not "Racism is wrong" is to be treated as a form of words we can doubt. One way to understand what is happening here is to say that in emphasising the word "racism", a kind of distancing between a situation in which a person is being dehumanised in some way because of their race, and the words we gravitate towards in attempting to respond to such situations, don't seem to track with one another. This suggests the issue is not whether or not racism is permissible, but whether "racism" is a word in one's vocabulary, (and if it is, what kinds of things one sees as instances of racism).

One way of thinking about a Wittgensteinian approach to moral persuasion that is invitational in nature might be seen in Cora Diamond's defence of ways of changing another's perspective that don't involve explicit argumentation in her papers 'Anything but Argument?' (1991b) and 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy' (2008). In both instances, Diamond draws on examples of literature to raise our awareness (one might say in an invitational manner) that moral thought is far more complex than standard argumentation allows for. In 'Anything but Argument?' Diamond is responding to Onora O'Neill's criticism of Stephen Clark's approach to changing the way we think about animals. Diamond focuses on the following sentence of O'Neill's:

> *… if the appeal on behalf of animals is to convince those whose hearts do not already so incline them, it must, like appeals on behalf of dependent human beings, reach beyond assertion to argument* (O'Neill quoted in Diamond 1991, p. 292, original emphasis).

Diamond's response is, "Why?" (p. 293). Why *must* it "*reach beyond assertion to argument*" to appeal to *"those whose hearts do not already incline them*"? To support her challenge to O'Neill's claim about how convincing *must* go on, Diamond considers what some authors do with their writing:

> Let me take the case […] of someone who writes a novel with the aim of convincing those whose hearts are not already inclined in some direction. Must we say: either he is not going in for convincing – not really – or he is producing arguments? Is there nothing that is an attempt to enlarge the moral imagination? […] Some hearts are not 'already inclined' some ways because their possessors have no exercised their imaginations in certain directions, have not been led to do so. [Charles] Dickens aims at the heart, and there is serious thought in what he does; he aims to convince and not simply to bring it about that the heart goes from bad state 1 to good state 2. He does not aim at *mere* conversion (p. 294, original emphasis).

What Diamond is doing here, in response to O'Neill's criticism of Clark, is distinguishing between two legitimate forms of convincing an opponent. On the one hand is standard argumentation, which, if the deductive reasoning is followed, leads one to accept a conclusion, the truth of which shifts one's head "from bad state 1 to good state 2" (p. 294). On the other hand are direct appeals to the heart so as to enlarge an opponent's moral imagination. While O'Neill claims that convincing an opponent of a moral position *must* occur through the former approach, Diamond argues that there is no reason to hold that the latter approach is 1) not available to novelists like Dickens, and 2) not also available to philosophers like Clark.

But what does it mean to make an appeal to another's heart that seeks to enlarge their moral imagination of a particular situation? One way to shed light on this is to consider a similar approach by Diamond in 'The Difficulty of Philosophy and the Difficulty of Reality' (2008) to the question of changing another's attitude towards animals with what she takes to be an explicit avoidance of standard argumentation. In this paper, Diamond is responding to various critiques of J. M. Coetzee's presentation in *The Lives of Animals* (1999) of the fictional lecturer Elizabeth Costello and her attempts to be understood by her audience. Costello is horrified by what we do to animals, and in attempting to be understood by the audience members, many of whom are meat eaters, Costello hopes that such understanding of herself will lead her audience to change their attitudes towards animals. In this way, they are being invited to see a way in which they may regard the world.

Diamond presents Coetzee's Costello as follows:

> She is a woman haunted by the horror of what we do to animals. We see her as wounded by this knowledge, this horror, and by the knowledge of how unhaunted others are. The wound marks her and isolates her (p. 46).
>
> What wounds this woman, what haunts her mind, is what we do to animals. This, in all its horror, is there, in our world [...] She describes herself as an animal exhibiting but not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound which her clothes cover up, but which is touched on in every word she speaks. So the life of this speaking and wounded and clothed animal is one of the 'lives of animals' that the story is about; if it is true that we generally remain unaware of the lives of other animals, it is also true that, as readers of this story, we may remain unaware, as her audience does, of the life of the speaking animal at its center (p. 47).

Here, Diamond focuses on Costello's attempt to present to others a view of how she sees herself in relation to them, where the focus is on seeing the moral

wounds at the core of Costello's suffering as she herself sees and experiences them. On the other hand, as Diamond notes, Costello's presentation is seen by Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, Amy Gutnam and Barbarba Smuts as "centrally concerned with the presenting of a position on the issue of how we should treat animals" (p. 49). One way of putting this difference might be to say that Diamond sees Costello as presenting herself as someone trying to be understood, while Singer, et al. sees Costello as presenting arguments about the treatment of animals with which they may agree or disagree. One cannot disagree with how Costello presents herself, however. Rather, they either see her as she presents herself to be seen, or they don't. What differentiates the former from the latter is the purported object of understanding. In the former case, the object is Costello herself, in the latter case, the object is an argument for or against a position on eating animals.

However, to try to understand Costello in the way Singer et al attempt to, Diamond argues, is to fail to see that

> [i]n the life of the animal she [Costello] is, argument does not have the weight we may take it to have in the life of the kind of animal we think of ourselves as being. She sees our reliance on argumentation as a way we may make unavailable to ourselves our own sense of what it is to be a living animal. (Another way of trying to confront the issues here: to think of Coetzee's lectures as contributing to the 'debate' on how to treat animals is to fail to see how 'debate' as we understand it may have built into it a distancing of ourselves from our sense of our own bodily life and our capacity to respond to and to imagine the bodily life of others.) (p. 53)[39]

[39] One could draw a link here between Diamond's discussion of a sense of "bodily life" and Moore's (1959a) remarks on the common sense shared by very many human beings concerning their bodies, and the bodies of other human beings (pp. 33-34).

In other words, neither Costello, nor Coetzee through Costello are attempting to present a series of arguments for the reader on how animals ought to be treated. Rather, Costello is seen by Diamond to be presenting a way of seeing the world that presently her audience is blind to. To attempt to extrapolate an argument from Costello's presentation of herself as a wounded animal, for Diamond, is already to have missed the point of Costello's presentation. It's what Diamond calls, following Cavell, a "deflection" linked to a form of scepticism. As Diamond (2008) notes,

> Cavell writes about the philosopher who beings (we imagine) from an appreciation of something appalling: that I may be suffering, and my suffering be utterly unknown or uncared about [see Cavell 1969, p. 228]; "and that others may be suffering and I not know" […] But the philosopher's understanding is *deflected*; the issue becomes deflected, as the philosopher thinks it or rethinks it in the language of philosophical scepticism (p. 57, original emphasis).

In this way, as Cavell (1969) remarks, "[t]he skeptic comes up with his scary conclusion […] and we are shocked (p. 228). Diamond uses Cavell's term "for describing what happens when we are moved from the appreciation, or attempt at appreciation, of a difficulty of reality to a philosophical or moral problem apparently in the vicinity" (p. 57). In this way, the approach of Singer et al is described by Diamond to be a case of "deflection" when, rather than appreciating the difficulty Costello wrestles with in her reality, and the way in which she attempts to get her audience to see this difficulty, they siphon her attitude regarding animals into philosophical arguments of animal ethics they are already familiar with.

What Costello is horrified by might be described as the blindness of her audience to the souls of animals. Blind in such a way that her audience doesn't take animals to be something like what Diamond refers to in 'Eating Meat and Eating People' (1991c) as a "fellow creature" (p. 328). According to Diamond, we are not fellow

creatures in the sense that we as animals share certain biological characteristics with other kinds of animals (birth, death, sexual relations). Rather, to be a "fellow creature"

> … means being in a certain boat, as it were, of whom it makes sense to say, among other things, that it goes off into Time's enormous Nought, and which may be sought as *company* (p. 329, original emphasis).

To take animals as those which one may seek company with in "Time's enormous Nought" is to take "animals as our fellows in mortality, in life on this earth" (p. 329). Part of the horror that Costello experiences could be suggested to be the horror of witnessing other human beings treating animals as food and clothing without a second thought, and without any thought of the significance of their lives as our fellow travellers in mortality. If they are able to see her as the suffering animal that she sees herself to be, if they are to understand her as she presents herself, then they may come to see this possible picture of the world as one that they are drawn to take on themselves.

Two things are important to note: first, in Diamond's descriptions of Clark and Costello, neither Clark nor Costello are putting forward attempts to persuade or convince their opponents in that, if they are understood, compel them to also take on their pictures of the world. Neither presents a logic, the acceptance of which forces their opponents to embrace it, lest they risk distorting their capacities for rational thinking. Rather, in each case, what Clark and Costello are doing in attempting to be understood, is to present their opponents with a possible picture of the world. "Here is my picture of the world", one in such a position might say, "I hope that you understand me, but if you do come to understand me, what you do from then on is up to you". Whether or not their opponents take these respective pictures of the world on as their own is a matter for those individuals. Second, in inviting their opponents to see the world as they do, they are appealing to their opponents as fellow human beings, as equals in humanity.

What I have tried to do in this section is to create a conceptual space in which Wittgenstein's remarks on persuasion might be thought of in relation to morality. Diamond's descriptions of what Clark and Costello do here serve as rough guides to what I have in mind when I speak of the invitational nature of a Wittgensteinian approach to moral persuasion. My claim is that this notion adds an important dimension to our philosophical enquiry into the notion of moral certainty. I next turn to what such a notion might look like in the current discussion of race and racism seen in the disagreement between the Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter movements, and argue that what this ultimately presents us with, is a clearer notion of moral certainty to work with than is available on the dominant view.

The Moral Deadlock between Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter

Before I turn to Lucas' approach to attempting come to present a picture of a way to resolving issues of race and racism in his song and music video for 'I'm Not Racist' (2017a), I will briefly outline in more detail the situation he is responding to. This will help to bring out the meaning of much that is said by the two antagonists in 'I'm Not Racist', whose remarks to one another constitute the lyrics of the song, as what they say appears to rely on recognisable remarks and gestures encountered in everyday life for their impact.

Founded in 2013 after the failure to convict neighbourhood watch coordinator George Zimmerman of the 2012 shooting of unarmed black seventeen year old Trayvon Martin, the Black Lives Matter movement's website states that it is

> … a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence

> inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes ('About'[a] (n.d.)).

The Black Lives Matter movement understands itself as responding to what it sees as racially motivated shootings and killings of black American citizens by police officers, or vigilante citizens. They stress that "Black lives matter", because it appears to them that in too many instances, they often appear not to, or at least appear to matter less than the lives of non-black American citizens:

Image removed due to copyright permissions

[Photograph of two women with Black Lives Matter/anti-racism signs] (n.d.)

Along with the familiar claim that "BLACK LIVES MATTER", as seen in the image above, similar messages can often be quite abrasive, as in the form of the second sign in the image above that instructs the reader to "TEACH YOUR CHILDREN HOW VILE RACISM IS". Though such a sentiment may on the surface appear beyond doubt – that "Racism is vile" – the spirit in which it is conveyed – as a remark that makes sense to say, and ought to be taught to children – may also be seen as an accusation that attitudes of racism prevail despite the vileness of racism being impossible to doubt.

In contrast to the Black Lives Matter movement, a website purporting to speak for the All Lives Matter counter-movement claims that they

> … are activists who fight against the reverse racism that BLM [Black Lives Matter] uses to accomplish their goals ('Blog' (n.d.)).
>
> All men and women are born equal, and the Black Lives Matter organization uses their prominence in the liberal media outlets to exploit

> the lives and minds of American people. We will not be left silent while others tolerate the existence of their violent tendencies, which resemble that of domestic terrorism ('About' [b] (n.d.)).

In direct response to the Black Lives Matter movement's claim, the All Lives Matter movement claims – in purported contrast – that not *just* black lives, but "*All* lives matter". The suggestion here is that the claim that "Black lives matter" is racist and divisive, as it emphasises one race above all other races. In this way, the Black Lives Matter movement is painted as a kind of black supremacist movement not unlike existing white supremacist movements like the Klu Klux Klan. Mention of "their violent tendencies, which resemble that of domestic terrorism" is most likely a reference to the looting and rioting seen – most notably in 2020 – at some Black Lives Matter protests in the United States.

Image removed due to copyright permissions

(Slusser 2020)

Along with the familiar claim that "ALL LIVES MATTER", as can be seen in one of the signs above, other similar messages claim that "Jesus Died for All Lives Everyone Matters", and "We Back and Honor Our Police Force". The suggestion is that not only is the Black Lives Matter movement racist, but that it is also anti-law enforcement, as it seeks to punish police officers for carrying out their duties of dealing with violent, life-threatening criminals. A similar sentiment is echoed in United States President Donald Trump's Twitter remark on 1 July 2020 that the statement "Black lives matter", planned to be painted in large yellow letters on Fifth Avenue, NYC, was a "symbol of hate". Trump suggests that

> [m]aybe our GREAT Police, who have been neutralized and scorned by a mayor who hates & disrespects them, won't let this *symbol of hate* be

> affixed to New York's greatest street. Spend this money fighting crime instead! (Trump 2020, my emphasis)

Though the disagreement *can* be read as the All Lives Matter movement making clear that it is not *only* black lives that matter, but *all* lives that matter equally, it can also be seen as a way of attempting to dissolve the force of the *meaning* of the claim that "Black lives matter", in the context in which the claim is used by the Black Lives Matter movement. This leads the Black Lives Matter movement to accuse the All Lives Matter movement itself as racist.

At this point, my suggestion is that the deadlock between Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter can be seen as constituting a similar grammar to the kind of moral deadlock I discussed above: Neither side explicitly challenges the claim that "Racism is wrong". Rather, each purport to be the side that takes seriously the abhorrence of racism, by accusing the opposing side of harbouring racist attitudes. Neither side attempts to respond by saying, "Even if we are racist, is that such a bad thing?", but "We are *not* the racists, *you* are the racists". What is undoubted here is the attitude of abhorrence towards particular acts and attitudes of racism – BLM pointing towards police killings of black Americans, ALM pointing towards anti-white and anti-police sentiments – while what is contested is what actions and attitudes are count as racist. Though this deadlock might appear at first as a kind of immovable symmetry, where all people can do is shout convictions of their opponents' racism at one another, a closer look suggests an asymmetry concerning convictions of anti-racism.

As David Theo Goldberg (2015) writes in a short article titled 'Why "Black Lives Matter" Because All Lives Don't Matter in America' for the *Huffpost*:

> "All lives matter" is a universal moral principle, a Kantian categorical imperative. Other things being equal, all lives matter, equally. Except when they don't. And they don't when other things are taken not to be equal. Like racial standing in a society such as ours.

> The universalizing politics of "All lives matter" is one of racial dismissal, ignoring, and denial.
>
> The insistence that Black lives matter accordingly is necessary only because, unlike "all lives," in this society, black lives are too often taken not to matter. Black lives are presumed too readily in the U.S. not to inhabit the universal.

In other words, it is because all lives are *not* taken to matter, that the claim that "Black lives matter" in the context of protest makes sense. If black lives *were* perceived as being of equal value to non-black lives, then to claim that "Black lives matter" would be similar to claiming, while standing in front of someone, that "I am here" (OC 10) in an attempt to inform that person of one's location.

This sentiment is also reflected in various Black Lives Matter movement signs that respond directly to the All Lives Matter movement. The following, for example, posted on Twitter by numerous people:

Image removed due to copyright permissions

[Photograph of girl with Black Lives Matter explanation sign] (n.d.)

What is crucial to note, however, is that though a person sympathetic to the Black Lives Matter movement may agree with this description of the situation, presenting this sign to All Lives Matter supporters will not necessarily lead them to abandon their response to the Black Lives Matter movement. They are just as likely to claim that "Of course you would say that, but we know that you are lying and are a racist hate group, as President Trump has said. You just want to be violent while avoiding the consequences". The first thing to say is that this suggests that it is not through standard argumentation that misunderstandings

or dishonest claims can be overcome in connection to this issue. If it were the case, then the sharing of the above image of the girl with the sign on social media clarifying the Black Lives Matter movement's message would dissolve the All Lives Matter movement's resistance to it.

This suggests the clash is a clash over a fundamental disagreement over what counts and what does not count as a racist act or thought. The result in this particular situation being Lucas' description of the ""Fuck you." "Fuck me? Fuck you!" "Aight [alright], bye" (Lucas 2017b) form of moral deadlock, where nothing is resolved. That this kind of moral deadlock *is* something to worry about can be seen in the sense it makes for Lucas to seek ways to move beyond it. I mean that it "makes sense" here in the sense that we are not driven by logical compulsion to claim that Lucas (2017b) has lost his mind when he asks, "How do we create a resolution?" Part of that answer, for Lucas, is a presentation of what he takes to be both sides of the conflict in the song and music video for 'I'm Not Racist' (2017a), and of how he sees both sides overcoming their differences to reach an understanding of one another.

A Brief Outline of Black American Songs of Protest Over Racism

Before outlining the content of audio and visual aspects of Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist' (2017a), it is important to first note that Lucas' song is certainly not the first time that a hip hop artist has focused lyrics and music video imagery on issues of race and racism in the United States, nor is hip hop the first genre to tackle such issues of race and racism from the perspective of black Americans.

As Tyina Steptoe (2020) notes in her article for *The Conversation* titled 'Hip-hop is the soundtrack to Black Lives Matter Protests, continuing a tradition that dates back to the blues', early versions of the late 1800s song 'Joe Turner Blues' was

used by "Black residents of the Mississippi Delta [...] to describe a white sheriff named Joe Turner who sent Black men to chain gangs or to work on building levees". In the song 'Strange Fruit' (1939), American jazz singer Billie Holiday sings about

> Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
>
> Strange fruit hanging from poplar trees

The "strange fruit" Holiday refers to are the bodies of black Americans, hung from poplar trees in reference to the practice of lynching during the Jim Crow Era of the Southern United States. In the song 'Mississippi Goddamn' (1964), jazz and blues singer Nina Simone sings that

> Alabama's gotten me so upset
>
> Tennessee made me lose my rest
>
> And everybody knows about Mississippi, goddamn

Here, Simone references the Alabama 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, the Tennessee resistance to desegregation, and the assassination of civil rights activist Medgar Evers at his home in Jackson, Mississippi.

While these examples describe more general forms of American racism, lyrics focusing on police violence against black Americans appear throughout the more recently established, lyrically charged genre of hip hop. An early example is found in NWA's song 'Fuck tha Police' (1988), which takes the form of a trial conducted by Judge Dre (NWA member Dr Dre) against the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Ice Cube (NWA member) outlines police discrimination of young black Americans in the opening lines of the first verse:

> Fuck the police comin' straight from the underground
>
> A young n***a got it bad 'cause I'm brown

And not the other color, so police think

They have the authority to kill a minority

A more recent example can be seen in Kendrick Lamar's song 'Alright' (2015b), where Lamar presents a similar sentiment when he says that "we hate the po-po [police]" because they "[w]anna kill us dead in the street fo sho' [for sure]". However, he goes on to sing repeatedly that despite this, "we gon' be alright". More recently, in the song '12 Problems' (2020), Rapsody brings Lamar's sentiments into question, when she sings that

I got 99 problems and 12 [police] still the biggest

I got 99 problems

Baton, bullets, triggers

Later in the same song, in a reference to the Black Lives Matter protests, Rapsody says that

All we see is murder, murder, murder, murder

And you wonder why we gotta disorder?[40]

For over three decades then, from the late 80s until 2020, the theme of police seeming to want to kill black American citizens has been a recurring theme in the genre of hip hop.

It is also important to note that aside from Rapsody's '12 Problems', a string of songs speaking directly to the aims and justifications of the Black Lives Matter movement have also been released in 2020. For the sake of brevity I will only refer to two: In well-known singer Stevie Wonder's song 'Can't Put it in the Hands

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[40] Here Rapsody might also be heard saying "And you wonder why we got a disorder", suggesting a reference to post traumatic stress related to the horrors her community experiences.

of Fate' (featuring hip hop artists Rapsody, Cordae, Chika & Busta Rhymes) (2020), Wonder sings that

> [y]ou say you're sick and tired of us protesting
>
> I say, "Not tired enough to make a change"
>
> [...]
>
> You say that you believe that all lives matter
>
> I say, "I don't believe the fuck you do"

Here, Wonder presents a reading in line with my discussion above of the All Lives Matter movement's claim that "All lives matter" as disingenuous. He speaks this directly to supporters of the All Lives Matter movement, and adds that Black Lives Matter will stop protesting when black Americans lives are seen to matter as much as other lives. In Salaam Remi's (2020) 'No Peace' (featuring hip hop artists Busta Rhymes, Black Thought, Doug E. Fresh & Mumu Fresh), which begins with a group of voices chanting repeatedly, "No justice, no peace", a similar sentiment is presented by guest rapper Fresh when she says that

> [i]f Breonna [Taylor] can't sleep and Ahmaud [Abery] can't run
>
> George [Floyd] can't breathe and Tamir [Rice] can't be young
>
> And Elijah [McClain] can't walk, Sandra [Bland] can't talk
>
> There won't be no fucking peace out on your sidewalks

Here, Fresh refers to six black Americans that have either been killed, suspected of being killed, or permanently maimed by American police officers in recent years.

What these songs have in common, it could be said, is the attempt to present a world picture shared by very many black Americans. Because of their black,

rather than white skin, they feel they are treated differently by police officers which, in many cases, results in their untimely deaths.

In one sense, these presentations are inward looking, speaking to other black Americans about what is assumed to be a relatively shared experience of various forms of racism. In another sense, they are outward looking, speaking to the white Americans in particular, and other Americans in general, that are seen as being either ignorant to or tolerant of various forms of racism that are often part of everyday black American life.

It could be argued that much of the force of the world pictures presented in these songs is diminished by the absence of the attitudes that they are railing against. In other words, Americans unsympathetic to the Black Lives Matter movement may simply take claims that the police are hated because they want to kill black Americans "in the street fo sho'" (Lamar 2015b), that all black Americans see in encounters with police is "murder, murder, murder, murder" (Rapsody 2020), or that black Americans don't believe Americans when they say that "All lives matter" (Wonder 2020), as attacks that they are unable to defend themselves against. Such Americans might understand such lines to be part of a narrative that has already been fixed into place by "the other side". Further, claims that "[t]here won't be no fucking peace out on your sidewalks" (Fresh 2020) until the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement are met might be taken to support the All Lives Matter movement's claim that the Black Lives Matter movement have "violent tendencies, which resemble that of domestic terrorism" ('About' [b] (n.d.)).

"I'm Not Racist, I Swear"

What make Lucas' song and video for 'I'm Not Racist' (2017a) somewhat unique in this context is the inclusion of the world-picture of a white American man (hence forth "white man"), completely unsympathetic to the calls for justice of

the Black Lives Matter movement. What this does, I suggest, is to force the supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement to confront the everyday human beings that perpetuate the attitudes they protest against, and to consider more carefully how they might communicate with and come to understand those they take to be their opponents. Second, the inclusion of the white man may also present All Lives Matter supporters with a chance to engage with the Black Lives Matter supporters that they oppose in the sense that they might agree with the sentiments of the white man while taking themselves as non-racists. In other words, Lucas' approach in 'I'm Not Racist' encourages opposite sides to come together in conversation in an attempt to find common ground on the topic of racism. The common ground in this context being the possibility of coming to understand one's opponent's point of view in a way that influences one's own point of view.

In the following, I will present a description of some of the lyrics and visuals that constitute and accompany the song, before outlining what I think are the philosophical implications for the present discussion of how our everyday practices of moral justification and moral persuasion may help to shape our philosophical conception of moral certainty.

The music video for 'I'm Not Racist' begins with a white man, bearded and wearing a red "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN" trucker cap, and a blue and white striped shirt with a collar. He looks directly into the camera lens, as if looking directly into the eyes of the viewer. Though an "unofficial" version of the highly recognisable red cap, its presence immediately identifies the white man as a supporter of the then (2017) United States President Donald Trump, who used the slogan in his successful 2016 presidential campaign. This suggests that the man is not necessarily to be seen as an extremist, but one of the many everyday Americans that voted for President Trump, and thus take the Black Lives Matter movement to be a "*symbol of hate*" (Trump 2020).

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A brief moment is allowed for the viewer to take in this image before the white man begins to speak:

> With all due respect
>
> I don't have pity for you black n***as, that's the way I feel
>
> Screamin', "Black Lives Matter"
>
> All the black guys'd rather be deadbeats than pay your bills
>
> Yellin', "N***a," this, and, "N***a," that
>
> Call everybody, "N***a," and get a n***a mad
>
> As soon as I say, "N***a," then everyone react
>
> And wanna swing at me and call me racist 'cause I ain't black
>
> Well pound [own] that, then
>
> Talkin' 'bout slavery like you was around back then
>
> Like you was pickin' cotton off the fuckin' ground back then
>
> Like you was on the plantation getting' down back then

It is not until midway through the final line of this section of the song that the camera switches to the viewpoint of the white man. The viewer is shown a young black American man (henceforth "black man"), with braided hairstyle, a loose fitting navy blue sports jersey, thin gold chain necklace, and an earring in his left ear. If the white man is a representation of an everyday white American man that supports the All Lives Matter movement, then this black man is a representation

of an everyday black American man that supports the Black Lives Matter movement.

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The presence of the white man and the words he is speaking to the black man are meant to shock the listener into paying attention in a way that might not occur if the song were to begin with the black man's picture of the world, or to only contain the black man's picture of the world. As Lucas (2017b) says in the *Genius* interview,

> As soon as the video opens immediately it's offensive, immediately offensive to everybody. Because you don't know my voice, because you've never heard me before you are going to think that this guy [is speaking his own opinion], and I think that's where the shock factor comes into play like, "Who is this motherfucker sitting here saying this shit?" And I knew that when writing it.

Though the black man, like the white man, is alone, the white man directs his remarks not at an individual "you", but at the collective "you black n***as". This suggests that the white man is generalising his remarks to not only the man he sees before him, but anyone that looks like him. The use of the word "n***a" by a white American is generally taken in contemporary American to be inappropriate and racist, because of the significance of the use of the word in American history when it ends with an "er" rather an "a". As Chiaku Hanson (2017) explains in her article 'N***er vs N***a', the word "N***er" "originated from the Spanish word "Niger" and "Negro" meaning Black", and "[b]y the late 1800's, particularly during the Atlantic slave trade, the word was used in a derogatory manner, and often used as a racial slur against Black people". The

word “N***a”, on the other hand, “is used in today’s slang, among African American groups predominantly and hip hop musicians”. Though the latter word remains controversial, it is generally understood that neither word is appropriate for a white person to use, because of its historical use.

The use of the term five more times by the white man suggests that he has no problem with referring to the black man and everyone that looks like the black man as a “n***a”, despite his awareness of the history of the word. Here, he suggests that it is a double standard for black Americans to use the term openly when addressing one another, or within the lyrics of hip hop, while becoming upset when referred to by the very same word by white Americans. This, for the white man, is a form of racism direct against white Americans.

Another alleged double standard is presented to the viewer through the eyes of the white man when he suggests that black Americans don’t really think that “Black Lives Matter”, though they scream this in the streets, because “[a]ll the black guys’d rather be deadbeats than pay your bills”. This remark draws on the “black deadbeat dad” stereotype which suggests that black American fathers are absent from their children’s lives, taking no responsibility for the black lives that they have helped to create, as well as taking no responsibility for the various household bills that they are required to pay. One way to read these remarks is that the white man is saying, “Why should I think that black lives matter, if you demonstrate by your actions that you yourself don’t think they do?”

This section finishes off with the suggestion that black Americans are attempting to identify themselves as victims in the present of past racism. The suggestion is that slavery is in the past, as is the racism that black Americans claim is perpetuated against them. However, this appears to be brought into question with the white man’s initial generalised reference to the black man as one of “you black n***as”, and his indignation at not being able to refer to them as such. In other words, he wants to deny that racism and slavery are still an issue for black

Americans, while signalling that he wishes to retain the term used to historically dehumanise black Americans.

As the song progresses, the camera changes to a scene from further away in which both men can be seen. They are shown sitting on chairs, across from one another at a small table in a relatively empty white room. The white man stands up and leans over the black man as the intensity of the music and his voice increases.

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As he begins to move around the black man, the white man continues to present his attitudes of black Americans to the lone black man. The views presented continue along the path already begun, with a series of stereotypes about black Americans in general, and black American men in particular. He speaks of what he sees as the tendency of black men to spend their time perpetrating gun violence, selling drugs, listening to rap music, and living on government handouts rather than looking for legitimate work, paying taxes, and raising their children to be respectable American citizens:

> I see a black man aimin' his gun
>
> But I'd rather see a black man claimin' his son
>
> […]
>
> And I work my ass off and pay my taxes for what?
>
> So you can keep livin' on free government assistance?
>
> […]

… you lazy as fuck

And you'd rather sell drugs than get a job and be straight

And then you turn around and complain about the poverty rate?

Fuck outta my face

[…]

And all you care about is rappin' and stuntin' and bein' ratchet [ghetto], and that's the n***a within you

Music rottin' your brain and slowly start to convince you

Then you let your kids listen and then the cycle continues

Blame it on everybody except for your own race

Blame it on white privileges, blame it on white kids

And just blame it on white citizens, aim at the vice president

Most notably, the white man dismisses claims of white privilege, and attributes the issues raised by black Americans as being solely the fault of "the n***a within you". The accusation could be summed up as, "You say that black lives matter, but your actions show that you don't really believe that". In other words, "It's your race's fault and no one else's that you are in the situations that you complain about, and you need to take responsibility for that rather than blaming white Americans".

While these stereotypes of black Americans have historical origins, the following lines focusing on black Americans kneeling during the national anthem and being shot and killed by police officers draws focus onto contemporary issues:

Bunch of class clowns

N***as kneelin’ on the field, that’s a flag down

How dare you try to make demands for this money?

You gon’ show us some respect, you gon’ stand up for this country, n***er

Here the white man refers to the practice of “taking a knee” during the United States national anthem. This began with Colin Kaepernick on September 1, 2016, during a preseason football game.

Also, the use of the word “field” for where the kneeling takes place, as well as the use of the n-word ending in “er” rather than “a” suggests that the white man is not only speaking about “taking a knee” when he talks about “N***as […] on the field”, but about black Americans as slaves. The white man’s indignation at the black man’s “demands for this money” within this context also suggest that the white man thinks that the black man should simply be happy with receiving money, because during the time of slavery black Americans did not.

If this is the case, then it also interesting to compare these lines to the white man’s earlier dismissal of slavery as a matter for the past, as the attitudes of slave holders appear to remain in his use of words. The way in which the man stands over the black man and shouts this directly into his ear also provides connotations of a slave owner chastising a slave for refusing to do what he is told.

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The second prominent aspect from recent discussions of racism is presented in the following, which concludes in a suggestion for how to avoid police brutality:

Pants hangin’ off your ass, you ain’t got no home trainin’?

Pull your fuckin’ pants up, n***a

Put that suit back on, take that durag[41] [a form of headwear for black hair care] off

Take that gold[42] out your mouth, quit the pitiful stuff

And then maybe police'd stop killin' you fucks, yo, what the fuck?

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As the white man talks about what the black man might need to do in order to avoid being shot and killed by police officers, he circles around behind the black man and begins gesturing in a way, with his hands serving as mock hand guns, that suggests he himself is repeatedly firing guns at an unarmed black man's back.

As Lucas (2017b) says in the *Genius* interview,

> [b]lack culture, I guess just being black is enough to die. You know what I'm saying? And that's what he [the white man] was saying. "Or maybe if you pull your pants up, maybe if you put the grills[43] out of your mouth." "Maybe if you just stop being black," pretty much.

Throughout the white man's remarks, he insists at various points that "I'm not racist". Roughly halfway through his lines, this becomes the main theme:

I'm not racist, my sister's boyfriend's black

[41] A form of headwear to keep black hair frizz-free that "took a giant leap forward in the '70s" (Garcia 2018).

[42] This is a reference to "grills", which are a form of jewellery popular in black hip hop culture that covers the teeth. Grills are often made from gold (or imitation gold).

[43] See previous footnote.

> I'm not racist, my sister-in-law's baby cousin Tracy got a brother and his girlfriend's black

The suggestion here is that his proximity to various black Americans in his own life means that he is not only not a racist, but can speak freely and openly about black Americans in general, because he knows what some of them are "like". This is meant to be met with the metaphorical rolling of eyes by the audience, as the claim that, "I'm not racist, but…" as I mentioned above, is typically followed by the presentation of a racist attitude. This is not to say though that the person necessarily thinks that what they are saying *is* racist, only that it is often taken as racist – perhaps by those overly politically correct.

As the white man sits back down in the chair in which he began, he finishes the presentation of his world-picture as follows:

> I'm not racist
>
> It's like we're livin' in the same building, but split into two floors
>
> I'm not racist
>
> But there's two sides to every story, I wish that I knew yours
>
> I wish that I knew yours
>
> I'm not racist, I swear

Lucas (2017b):

> He's saying all this fucked up shit, but then he goes, "Well, you know what? I'm open-minded enough to listen to you. I'm not gonna say all this fucked up shit and leave it at that. I want to know what you think about me."

This is not very realistic, as Lucas knows, but invites into the scene the willingness of the white man, though he presents potentially highly offensive and

racist attitudes, to be open enough to hear what the black man has to say in response. In saying that he wish he knew the black man's story, it could be suggested that he is signalling that he is open to being given the black man's picture of the world.

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The initial claims by the white man that he isn't racist because he is in some form of proximity to black people in his everyday life may represent a relatively insincere denial of one's suspected racist attitude. However, the mention of "livin' in the same building, but split into two floors", and the insistence that "I'm not racist, I swear" might suggest that the man is less sure than he initially was about whether he is racist or not. While the conversation may be one that appears to suggest that one either is or is not racist, and that there is a definite calculus that one can point to in order to determine this, I would suggest that this shows the man becoming less sure of what he first thought counted as racism. It is like he is first exclaiming that, "I'm not racist!" Though later with less sureness repeating, "I'm not racist", before asking, "Am I?" In presenting his picture of the world to the black man, he has also presented it to himself.

Thus, after a moment's pause, the camera changes to the view of the white man, with the black man now looking directly towards the camera. Just as the first verse was from the perspective of the white man, the second verse is from the perspective of the black man. As the black man begins to speak, though calm, his expression suggests that he is very resentful of the picture of himself that has just been given to him by the white man.

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This indignant attitude is also shown in the words he first responds to the white man with:

> With all disrespect
>
> I don't really like you white motherfuckers, that's just where I'm at
>
> Screaming, "All Lives Matter," as a protest to my protest, what kind of shit is that?

The black man's opening line "[w]ith all disrespect" could be taken as the negation of the white man's opening line "[w]ith all due respect". However, as the white man used this phrase immediately before referring to the black man as one of "you black n***as", it could be suggested that the meanings of both opening lines are much more in line with disrespectful attitudes towards a particular race, and that the black man is simply being more honest about this. Nevertheless, the use of the generalised term "you white motherfuckers" signals that, like the white man, the black man is speaking in generalised terms about not only the man who sits before him, but other white Americans like him.

What the black man is indignant about, countering the white man's remarks on the Black Lives Matter movement, is the All Lives Matter movement's protest against their protest. When he asks the white man, "what kind of shit is that?" he may at first appear to be inviting an explanation that he is open to. However, the remark appears in the same context in which he has just said that "I don't really like you white motherfuckers", suggesting that the indignation over All Lives Matter runs deep enough that there is no room here for an acceptable justification. Again, we are in the realm of a request for justification that is rather an invitation on the other to reflect on their attitude, rather than an invitation to present a justification, the success of which is presupposed. While this may bring the remark in line with Hermann's suggestion of what one does when requesting

a moral justification in the case of racism, I would argue that it is only one of a number of ways in which the black man attempts to get the white man to give up his protest against the Black Lives Matter movement.

Next, the black man turns to the use of the word "n***a", again responding to the white man's remarks:

> And that's one war you'll never win
>
> The power in the word, "N***a," is a different sin
>
> We shouldn't say it, but we do, and that's just what it is
>
> But that don't mean that you can say it just 'cause you got n***a friends
>
> N***a
>
> That word was originated for you to keep us under
>
> And when we use it, we know that's just how we greet each other
>
> And when you use it, we know there's a double meaning under
>
> And even if I wasn't picked cotton physically
>
> That don't mean I'm not affected by the history
>
> My grandmamma was a slave, that shit gets to me
>
> And you ain't got no motherfuckin' sympathy, you pussy n***a

Here, the black man says that it will never be the case that he would accept the use of the word "n***a" by the white man, when he says "that's one war you'll never win". He provides the context of this remark when he explains that black Americans use the word to greet each other, and not as the dehumanising slur it was historically used as, whereas when a white person uses the word in relation to a black person, "we know there's a double meaning under[neath]". The

suggestion is that in the white man's complaint about not being able to use the word "n***a", the white man's actual complaint is that he is unable to refer to black Americans by the dehumanising term that slave owners were able to without being morally reprehended for doing so.

As the black man begins to speak about his grandmamma being a slave in the second to last line, he rises from his seat and moves around the table towards the white man. As he comes to the end of the final line, and says that the white man "ain't got no motherfuckin' sympathy", he aggressively knocks the white man's "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN" hat from his head to the floor.

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This is the only time in the video in which one of the men comes into contact with the other man. While it could be argued that it is unhelpful to depict the black man as the one that stoops to the level of physical aggression in the encounter, thus leaving himself open to various stereotypes about violent black men, it could also be seen as a very human response to the indifference and lack of sympathy of a fellow human being to one's family's traumatic past. If the white man is thought to symbolise the attitude of "it's different for *them*", the black man's gesture here might symbolise the confrontational attitude of "it's no different for *us* than it is for *you*. *We* are the same".

Lucas (2017b) on the *Genius* website's page concerning the lyrics to 'I'm Not Racist':

> You got to understand our ancestors went through some shit, bro. I have a great, great, great grandmother that just passed away. She was a slave. Her mom was a slave, and I had to find some information about her being raped by a slave owner. All kinds of crazy shit.

He then goes on to describe the frustration of what he sees as the lack of sympathy in remarks like the white man's that black Americans talk "'bout slavery like you was around back then", while dismissing the connections past practices of slavery have to present black Americans. As Lucas (2017b) sees it, it's

> [b]ecause they haven't been through it, they can't identify with those feelings, it didn't happen to them. They were the owners. It didn't happen to them. When I go into detail with that, I'm trying to get that person to understand. Bro, you got to have more sympathy than that.

In an attempt to elicit the kind of sympathy that Lucas describes here, the black man presented more detail of his picture of the world:

> It's hard to elevate when this country's ran by whites
>
> Judging me by my skin color and my blackness,
>
> Tryna find a job but ain't nobody call me back yet
>
> Now I gotta sell drugs to put food in my cabinet
>
> You crackers ain't slick, this is all a part of your tactics
>
> Don't talk about no motherfuckin' taxes
>
> When I ain't makin' no dough
>
> You think you know everything, but you don't

Here the black man is rebutting the white man's claims that he would "rather sell drugs than get a job and be straight" because he is "lazy as fuck", and that he would rather the white man work and pay taxes, so he himself "can keep livin' on free government assistance". What the black man is saying, ultimately, is that it is by being seen a certain way simply because he is black that he fails to hear back

from jobs that he has applied for, and that if he sells drugs, it is to bring in money for his family when there are no other means available to him.

Soon after these remarks, the black man becomes frustrated:

> Fuck, I'm exhausted
>
> I can't even drive without the cops tryna start shit
>
> I'm tired of this systematic racism bullshit
>
> [...]
>
> You don't know what it's like to be in a frying pot
>
> You don't know what it's like to mind your business
>
> And get stopped by the cops and not know if you 'bout to die or not

At the moment that the black man says that he is "tired of this systematic racism bullshit", he places both hands under the table and flips it over while glaring at the white man.

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Along with knocking the white man's red cap to the floor earlier, this is the second time that the black man has lashed out in frustration at what he is speaking about. Immediately after this, he steps closer to the white man and speaks down to him from a position between the white man and the fallen table.

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One way of reading this scene, it might be suggested, is that the table is now turned (over). The safety of the structure of the table no longer stands between the men. The table in this sense may refer to the "proper channels" that are often mentioned in relation to the Black Lives Matter protests. It is often said that while every American has the right to protest, that protesting in *this* way – whether it is marching in the street or kneeling during a sporting event – is inappropriate. The black man's overthrowing of the table may represent his determination to conduct this discussion – like the protests that are often criticised – on his own terms. In other words, he is saying, "I will not remain at this table when discussing something so important and urgent as my life".

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It is also important to notice that the white man does not respond with aggression, but appears to be reflecting upon what the black man is saying. This may be taken to show viewers with similar sentiments to the white man that one possible way of approaching the Black Lives Matter protests is to listen more carefully to what the movement is saying, and what toll inaction has taken on black Americans. That is, this may be inviting such Americans to see that there are other possible ways of seeing the world.

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The black man describes his life – judged solely by his skin colour – as one in which he feels targeted by police to the extent that when being stopped by an

officer, he doesn't know if he's about to die. While the white man's picture of the world described the black man's situation as one that was solely due to "the n***a within you", the black man is at pains to show the white man how seeing someone *as* a "n***a" can shape and influence their options.

Through the eyes of the black man, it is white Americans – the "whites" and "crackers" (a black American term for "white people") – that are running the United States in such a way as to keep black Americans in a lower position. This is the "systematic racism bullshit" that the black man sees as holding him back from everything from finding a job to living a life free of the fear of being shot by police officers while going about his life. What is important to note here, is that though speaking of the way in which he is judged in a certain way simply for being a black American, his use of the term "[y]ou crackers" also suggests a generalised reference to all white Americans. Such racialised terminology is also seen in the following:

> And all you care about is money and power and being ugly and that's the cracker within you
>
> Hatred all in your brain, it slowly start to convince you
>
> And then you teach it to your children until the cycle continues

Again, what this shows is another glimpse of the racialised lens through which the black man sees the white man, even while he is calling out the white man for doing exactly this. The black man also mirrors the intergenerational line of the white man, where the latter said that (rap) music was rotting the brains of black Americans and convincing them that they are victims of oppression, and that this attitude of victimhood is perpetuated by letting their "kids listen and then the cycle continues". The contrasting picture is presented as the hatred (towards black Americans) convincing white Americans of the inferiority of black Americans in a way that is then taught to their "children until the cycle continues".

The remarks of both men about intergenerational attitudes is reminiscent of Cavell's (1979) remark that

> [i]n learning language, you do not merely learn the pronunciation of sounds, and their grammatical orders, but the "forms of life" which make those sounds the words they are, do what they do – e.g., name, call, point, express a with or affection, indicate a choice or an aversion, etc. (pp. 177-178).

Finally, the black man moves towards the second unrealistic, though important gesture in the song:

> You worry 'bout your life, so you take mine
>
> I love you, but I fuckin' hate you at the same time
>
> I wish we could trade shoes[44] then we could change lives
>
> So we could understand each other more, but that'd take time
>
> I'm not racist
>
> It's like we livin' in the same building, but split into both sides
>
> I'm not racist
>
> But there's two sides to every story and now you know mine

Here, the black man voices a frustration. He loves the white man as a human being, but hates him as someone who sees the black man's life as less valuable than his own. With a similar sentiment to the white man's closing lines, he acknowledges that "[i]t's like we livin' in the same building, but split into both sides", and that "there's two sides to every story". Where the white man had said of the black man's story that "I wish that I knew yours", the black man notes that

[44] A reference to the saying "To walk a mile in someone else's shoes".

“now you know mine”. However, simply knowing one’s story, as the black man stresses, is not enough. An awareness of another’s picture of the world is different to understanding that picture, which the black man notes would “take time”.

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As the black man finishes speaking, he is standing directly in front of the white man, who has remained in his seat while the black man spoke. The white man then stands up so that both men are looking across at each other, just as they had been when the white man began speaking at the beginning of the song. However, after a moment’s pause, the white man opens his arms in the offer of a hug to the black man.

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After a moment’s pause, the black man opens his arms, and steps forward into the white man’s arms, embracing him in a hug.

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As this scene takes place, Lucas, now speaks for himself, as opposed to the white man or the black man, in the closing lines of the song:

> Can’t erase the scars with a bandage

I'm hopin' maybe we can come to an understandin'

Agree to disagree, we could have an understandin'

I'm not racist

What Lucas does here, as I understand him, is to speak directly to the viewer, as they watch the two men hug, before engaging in relaxed conversation that cannot be heard. What Lucas has presented the viewer with is his picture of the clash between not only supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement and the All Lives Matter movement, but many of the attitudes that may shape one's pictures of white Americans and black Americans. He does this by presenting each of the opposing sides not as abstract ideas, but as the attitudes of human beings engaging with one another in a particular context. The remark that we "[c]an't erase the scars with a bandage" suggests the deep nature of the issue, which is not rectified by simply viewing the music video and engaging with the lyrics:

> No, I'm [not] going to drop this and we good and everybody let's all sing and dance and everything is good. America is great there is no more racism now. That wasn't my intention. Again, my attention [sic] was to create a resolution, to kind of get people to open up their minds a little bit and understand a little bit part of the reasons why certain people do certain things (Lucas 2017b).

Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist' and Moral Certainty

The clash between the Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter movements is a clash not over whether or not "Racism is wrong", but over what counts as racism. As such, the grammar of the disagreement is not one in which either side is attempting to claim that "Racism is wrong", but rather, to make claims about what counts as racism. This does not seem to be a disagreement over general claims of racist acts or thinking, but disagreement over concrete cases. That is,

BLM and ALM are not disagreeing over whether certain kinds of acts are racist, but over whether particular acts that have been carried out were shaped by some form of racist attitude. In the case of the death of George Floyd on 25 May 2020, for example, the question is not whether kneeling on an arrested citizen's neck for roughly ten minutes as he lay handcuffed and face down is racist, rather than just poor police practice, but whether, for example, Floyd's repeatedly ignored complaint about being unable to breathe in that situation was shaped by a picture of the world in which black American lives are seen as less valuable than white American lives. The disagreement between the white man and the black man in Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist' is constituted by a similar grammar to the clash between BLM and ALM, in that both opponents are concerned to show that they are not racist. During their discussion, each man repeatedly claims that, "I'm Not Racist", so as to avoid the charge that their thinking concerning members of a particular skin colour (white or black) is shaped by dehumanising attitudes.

This may tempt one to claim, in line with the dominant view, that "Racism is wrong" may be treated as a philosophical pseudo-proposition that puts into words what makes no sense to say but is shown in our everyday lives. It certainly seems, for example, that unlike my arguments against there being nothing to think but that "Death is bad", and that "Murder is wrong", where I presented counter-examples to these attitudes, that in the case of "Racism is wrong", we may finally have a case in which we have a pseudo-proposition that says (philosophically) what can only be shown in everyday life. That "Racism is wrong" appears to be impossible to doubt or to justify within the disagreement between BLM and ALM, and this may lead one to treat "Racism is wrong" as a pseudo-proposition on which the disagreement hinges.

However, my claim is that to conceptualise even this purported moral certainty in this way is to obscure much that is important about the notion of racism in relation to the notion of moral certainty. In the case of the purported moral certainty that "Racism is wrong", the tensions between the dominant view's

conceptualisation of moral certainty and what our everyday practices reveal about moral certainty appear at points distinct from the tensions highlighted in earlier chapters relating to "Death is bad" and "Murder is wrong" as moral certainties. My counter-examples to "Death is bad" and "Murder is wrong" as moral certainties involved presenting recognisable forms of human thinking that cannot be easily dismissed as judgements from outside of morality. In those counter-examples, there were instances of recognisable human thought about particular deaths and particular murders in which the person doing the thinking was clear about the object of their thoughts. That is, a particular person may say, "In these circumstances, death is not bad, but a release", or "In these circumstances, murder is not wrong, because I love my son, and he took him from me", we still don't (at least not necessarily) take their thoughts to be those of, say, a psychopath. By contrast, the counter-example to "Racism is wrong" as a moral certainty is the potential lack of clarity around what counts as racist thinking.

One thing that Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist' shows, I argue, is part of the difficultly one might have, in everyday life, in becoming clear on the notion of racism in one's own thinking. What Lucas shows us, it could be argued, is not whether racism is wrong, but the potentially differing sense that each of us puts into the word.

It seems to me there are at least three ways one might take the lack of clarity concerning the two men presented to the viewer in Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist':

First, if we take the white man to be racist and lying, and take the black man to abhor racism, then it could be suggested that the deadlock between the two men appears as a lack of clarity concerning how to go on from this point. The black man says "You are being racist", the white man says, "I am not being racist. You are being racist!", and the black man is at a loss as to how to proceed. In this situation, the white man's support of ALM is a purposeful attempt to minimise the force of the legitimate concerns of BLM. This would be to present the white man's support of ALM as support for a universalising politics constituted by

“racial dismissal, ignoring, and denial” (Goldberg 2015). Here, the invitation to hear the black man’s picture of the world, and the offering of a hug at the end, might be simply for the purposes of appearing to be the one, of the two, that is not racist, and the “better person”. “Even though you only think that *black* lives matter”, such an ALM supporter might claim, “I am committed to thinking of *all* lives as mattering, and so I embrace you”.

This scenario may lead us to a Hermann-like situation in which all the black man can do is to repeat “though this time with stronger emphasis” (Hermann 2015, p. 3), his claim that “You are being racist”, “the truth of which seems most obvious to” (p. 3) him. However, to claim that this is all there is to the scenario involving the two men in ‘I’m Not Racist’, or to the disagreement between BLM and ALM, is to simplify it in a way that much that might be important is invisible to us. If we take such a situation to be one in which the white man is racist but denying that he is racist, and the black man is not racist, we might be tempted to say that “Racism is wrong” is a moral certainty that shapes this disagreement, and that it is no threat to this moral certainty that the white man is knowingly denying that his own acts are racist. The white man is judging outside of humanity. However, though the black man might be seen in such a situation to be able to do nothing more than to repeat, “though this time with stronger emphasis” (p. 3), his conviction that, “You are a racist”, it does not seem to be the case that in such a situation there “is nothing to be worried about” (p. 3). Rather, such a situation may cause great distress.

Second, if we take the white man to be genuine about his abhorrence of racism, it might be the case that he comes to see that what he once thought of as harmless, like the use of the word “n***a”, is actually quite harmful and offensive to black Americans. In this case, both men are genuinely anti-racist, and after clarification on a particular point – the black man’s explanation of the inappropriateness of the white man using a word that he himself uses in the context of solidarity – the white man abandons further use of the harmful term.

In this scenario, forms of racism are understood as kinds of acts that are easily identified. Does this person use the term “n***a” to refer to black people? Yes. Is this person white? Yes. Well then, that is racist. Here, that “Racism is wrong” is also treated as a philosophical pseudo-proposition that cannot be said, but is shown in everyday life, and though one may be blind to what counts as racism, once this has been clarified, one sees that to call a black American a “n***a” is a clear case of racism.

Though this second scenario in relation to Lucas’ ‘I’m Not Racist’ may be more tempting to embrace than the first option, I suggest that it would still be a description of the scenario that leaves much out. For example, it misses the black man’s use of the word “n***a”, directed towards the white man as a harmful slur, rather than as a term of endearment, as well as the man’s use of the phrase “the cracker within you” to describe a general tendency he sees as characteristic of members of a white race. That is, it ignores the racially charged remarks of the man who is presented in the scenario as the victim of racism. While it might be objected that the black man too simply has to have pointed out to him that his use of the term in that way is also racist, this suggests that he is initially unaware of this. This would be to suggest that though he thinks that it is racist for the white man to use the dehumanising term in relation to him, that he mistakenly thinks that using the term in a dehumanising way towards the white man is somehow permissible.

A third option, which I am most inclined to support, is that while both men are genuinely concerned with the problem of racism as it presents itself in their community, both are nevertheless in some sense blind to racism within their own pictures of the world. That is, while both men could be said to abhor racism, they do not hold a clear picture of the many ways in which racist thought may present itself, or how it may shape one’s thoughts. Though similar to the second option, the third option is distinct in the complexity it suggests in the notion of racism, as well as the absence of a form or words or principle to steer one’s

thinking on it. It could be argued that not only are there aspects of the notion that each man is, in his own way, blind to, but there is a moment in the white man's picture when he seems to become less sure of his exclamation that, "I'm not racist". This presents itself at the end of his lines, when he says not only that he isn't racist, but that he *swears* that he isn't racist. While he may say this to assure the black man that he really doesn't see himself as racist, he may also be attempting to assure himself that he isn't. One way of understanding this, to my mind, is to say that while there may be a form of blindness involved in aspects of one's own racist thinking, some form of an awareness of the potential of this blindness may at times creep into one's thinking. The difference here between the second and third options is that in the second option, this realisation that one may be blind to racism may be part of the thinking that leads one to see a concrete case of racism where before one did not. However, what makes this third option distinct is the lack of a clear template with which to compare one's own thinking. In other words, the white man may in this moment be reflecting on what it means to be racist, or to hold racist attitudes, and thus be reflecting on the notion of racism itself.

In relation to the third option, one way of thinking about the title of the song – 'I'm Not Racist' – as well as its repetitive appearance throughout the song as words uttered by the white man and the black man respectively, is to think of the phrase as a form of deflection, in Diamond's use of the Cavellian term, away from a difficulty in reality towards a predetermined attitude in the vicinity. Here, the difficulty of reality is the situation in which the white man and the black man find themselves – a potentially uncomfortable discussion about a clash between two groups (BLM and ALM) over issues of race and racism. The deflection is their insistence throughout that despite what they're saying, and how it might sound to the other person, that they are not racist. Why this might be taken to be a kind of deflection is because it attempts to avoid the complexity of the issue by signposting at all times what one's attitude on the topic is. In a similar way, to claim that "Racism is wrong" is a moral certainty that cannot be doubted, nor

justified, but is shown in everyday life, may be seen as a deflection away from the complexities of what everyday life shows us towards a recognisable and safe moral claim. My suggestion here, is that at a philosophical level, the dominant view of moral certainty is itself an unwitting deflection away from the very concepts it seeks to understand.

Through looking closely at Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist', and seeing what it shows us about recognisable forms of human beings disagreeing over the notion of racism, we are able to better understand the fundamental level at which the notion of racism may shape one's picture of the world. In this way, one may maintain that the notion of racism and one's struggle with racism in everyday life may be related to the notion of moral certainty. But this complexity only properly shows itself if we do away with the philosophical pseudo-proposition of "Racism is wrong" as a predetermined starting point for what everyday life can show us about racism.

'I'm Not Racist' and Moral Persuasion

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the 'I'm Not Racist' example in the present discussion of moral certainty is the immediate and unthinking way in which viewers may take in the various attempts at persuasion contained within the song. A form of persuasion running through the song begins with the white man presenting his picture of the world, and the black man's place in that world, to the black man, before the black man in turn presents his own picture of the world, and the white man's place in that world, to the white man.

The first thing to note is that neither man is presenting a series of arguments the soundness of which will force their respective opponent to abandon their position on the question of racism. They are not, for instance, providing each other with reasons in support of their respective standpoints on the issue of racism by appealing to basic beliefs and contrasting these with their opponent's

attitudes towards racism. Though each man presents his opponent with moments in which an argument might appear to be the focal point – for example, the disagreement over the use of the word "n***a" – the intention of each man's claims seem better described as attempts to be understood as a human being by another human being. The white man says that it's unfair that the black man can use the word while he himself cannot, and suggests hypocrisy. The black man distinguishes between the use of the term by black Americans as a gesture of friendship, and the historical use of the term by white Americans to dehumanise black Americans. Each man's aim is to present to the other what the notion of racism looks like in their picture of the world.

This might be understood as the black man saying something like, "Whether you use the term or not is up to you. I cannot force you to stop using it. But just know that this is how your use of the term is understood from my perspective". Such an approach shapes not only each topic that is raised by the white man and responded to by the black man, but the exercise they are engaged in as a whole. That is, each man presents the other with their picture of the world in the following spirit: "Whether you embrace my picture of the world is up to you. I cannot force you to embrace it. But just know that this is how your words and actions are understood from my perspective". If this is the case, then the two men's presentations of their respective worlds could be described as concrete examples of a moral form of what I call Wittgenstein's invitational notion of persuasion. What each man is being presented with is a possible way in which to see the world, but whether they stretch their own picture of the world to incorporate such a picture of the world is a matter for them.

The second thing to note is that this approach is not explained by Lucas prior to the beginning of the white man's presentation. Lucas does not say, for example, "This song is not about arguments over which point of view is right and which is wrong, but about trying to understand one another's picture of the world". Rather, as the song progresses, and the viewer recovers from the potential shock

the white man's opening lines may cause, and sees the black man simply sitting there and listening, the viewer may come to see that this is what is occurring. It is only when the white man says, "there's two sides to every story, I wish that I knew yours", that a presentation of opposing world pictures becomes an explicit theme. Lucas appears to trust the viewer enough to simply take in from the beginning of the white man's remarks that this is the kind of procedure occurring within the song. In other words, that human beings sometimes interact with one another in this way is immediately taken in by the viewer, and relied upon by Lucas to engage the viewer in a possible way in which we might overcome everyday issues concerning racism.

As the video fades away, the observer is left with a new picture: a conversation – unheard by the observer – between two once hostile opponents as they begin to attempt to better understand one another. It is at this moment that the viewer may reflect upon the possibility of resolution suggested by this scene, as Lucas speaks of coming to an understanding. That is, the viewer may reflect on the possibility of coming to see the world in the way Lucas himself does, as one in which a resolution is possible and worth working towards.

Crucially, both aspects to the form of persuasion that occurs in Lucas' song take an invitational form. The white man invites the black man to respond to his tirade, the black man invites – though with hostility – the white man to see the world as he does. Lucas then invites the observer to consider the world in which these two characters exist – a world where once there was tension and now there is understanding.

For Lucas to approach the creation of a resolution in this way presupposes that human beings may be moved to change their picture of the world in this way. He attempts to overcome the deadlock of moral convictions being shouted at one another *ad infinitum* through the most human means he can think of: a presentation of alternative pictures of the world, and a plea, through his own

world picture, that we can move past this deadlock by trying to better understand one another.

My argument in this section has been that there are two ways in which Lucas' 'I'm Not Racist' may be described as depicting an example of a moral form of Wittgenstein's notion of persuasion.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my focus has been on Hermann's (2015) account of moral justification, and its connection to the moral certainty "Racism is wrong". Though Hermann doesn't explicitly mention this form of words, it seems inherent to her discussion of moral justification. A central position in Hermann's account of moral justification is that at some point, it no longer makes sense to justify our moral convictions, "the truth of which seems to be most obvious to us" (p. 3), and that this "is nothing to be worried about" (p. 3). Drawing on both what I called an invitational notion of moral persuasion, as well as Lucas' (Genius 2017) remarks on issues of racism, and the lyrics and music video for his song 'I'm Not Racist', I claimed that in the case of racism that 1) we may worry *a lot* about the moral deadlocks Hermann's account seems to lead us to, and 2) that in engaging in an invitational notion of moral persuasion, we are able to do more than simply "repeat – though this time with stronger emphasis – a moral conviction the truth of which seems to be most obvious to us" (p. 3).

Conclusion

In this thesis, my focus has been on a relatively recent body of literature concerned with the possibility of a Wittgensteinian form of moral certainty (Goodman 1982; Lichtenberg 1994; Kober 1997; Pleasants 2008; 2009; 2015; Burley 2021; Harré 2010; Christensen 2011; Brice 2013; Rummens 2013; Hermann 2015; O'Hara 2018). My argument was that this literature either explicitly or implicitly considers this possibility from an approach to Wittgenstein called a "standard" or "framework" reading. What this means, is that they consider the possibility of moral certainty via reflection on a series of forms of words, which are taken to be, by their form alone, to be "moral propositions". The three I focused on in my thesis were "Death is bad" (Chapter 2), "Murder is wrong" (Chapter 3), and "Racism is wrong" (Chapter 4). These came from a group of philosophers I referred to as representing "the dominant view of moral certainty". Pleasants' (2008; 2009; 2015) papers on the topic, though not the first attempts in the literature, solidified a particular approach to the topic that was developed by Hermann (2015) and O'Hara (2018) in the form of two monographs. My claim was that this view of certainty, dominant in the literature on the topic, faced certain issues because of its reliance on Moyal-Sharrock's (2004; 2005) framework reading of *On Certainty*. These issues concerned a disconnect between the philosophical propositions they took to express moral certainties ("Death is bad", "Murder is wrong", "Racism is wrong"), and what reflection on everyday life can show us, and remind of us of.

In Chapter 1, my aim was to outline what I took to be the origins of the dominant view of moral certainty's reading of Wittgenstein, which centred on a framework reading put forward by Moyal-Sharrock (2004). Roughly speaking, Moyal-Sharrock's framework reading of Wittgenstein takes it that at the moments in his early (TLP) and later (OC) remarks in which Wittgenstein refers to a form of words as "nonsense" (TLP 6.54; OC 10), he takes such words to nevertheless be able to show philosophers *something* about the logic of language, and therefore

our picture of certainty. What the dominant view, in drawing on Moyal-Sharrock's reading of Wittgenstein takes on board, is an understanding of meaning, such that a form of words can be recognised as intelligible, while lacking sense to say in an unsuitable situation. This leads to the claim that it makes no sense to say "Murder is wrong", because that "Murder is wrong" goes without saying. In doing so, "Murder is wrong" acts as a hinge on which moral thinking, and moral discourse turn. Drawing on Conant's (2004) criticism of what he refers to as McGinn's (1989) "standard" reading of Wittgenstein's OC 10, as well as Conant's and Diamond's (2004) general picture of what a "resolute" or "therapeutic" reading of Wittgenstein is committed to, I argued that one should read Wittgenstein at OC 501 and OC 402 as completely throwing away propositions like the one found at OC 10, so as to see the notion of "certainty" more clearly. From here, I argued that the dominant view's accounts of moral certainty can be criticised from a similar position. That is, by suggesting, in line with a broadly therapeutic/resolute reading of Wittgenstein, that propositions like "Murder is wrong" ought to be thrown away in our thinking about moral certainty. What would take its place, I suggested, was reflections on what people actually say about notions like "death", "murder", and "racism". If one wants to take a Wittgensteinian notion of moral certainty seriously enough, I argued, one "must look [directly] at the practice of language, then you will see it" (OC 501). Though Pleasants, Hermann, and O'Hara see the importance of Wittgenstein's quoting of Goethe's *Faust* at OC 402, when Faust exclaims "In the beginning was the deed" (Goethe quoted in OC 402), their failure to read OC 501 as insisting they throw away the propositions at the heart of his investigation into Moore's knowledge-claims leads them to distort their picture of moral certainty. The remainder of my thesis was an attempt to explain what I meant by "distort" here.

In Chapter 2, I focused on Pleasants' (2008; 2009) purported moral certainty that "Death is bad", outlining its connection in Pleasants' conceptualisation to the badness of death as the outcome of being killed. I considered Burley's (2010) argument that the Epicurean can accommodate Pleasants' account of moral

certainty in the quest of overcoming the fear of death. Though I agreed with Burley that Pleasants' conceptualisation of "Death is bad" and "Killing is wrong" is problematic as it stands, I disagreed with Burley's embrace of "Death is bad" as a moral certainty in its own right, and highlighted the limitations of the Epicurean's project of alleviating the fear of death. Drawing on Diamond's (1996) reading of Wittgenstein's view on ethics and ethical propositions, I considered the form of words "Death is bad" against the view that for Wittgenstein of both the *Tractatus* and *On Certainty*, there are no moral propositions, such that they can be identified solely by a form of words alone. In my first attempt to take OC 501 seriously enough, I considered various ways in which we might talk about death in everyday life that have nothing to do with "badness". My claim was that in taking "Death is bad" to be a form of words that can neither be doubted nor said, Pleasants conceptually blinds himself to much of what is said in everyday life.

In Chapter 3, I considered the second of Pleasants' (2008; 2009) initial moral certainties "Killing is wrong", and the connected certainty "Murder is wrong". I began with three challenges presented to Pleasants' universal account of this certainty posited by Rummens (2013). Rummens argues that 1) the Mayan practice of human sacrifice, and the Nazi Germany holocaust are examples of moral language games that deny the moral certainty that "Murder is wrong", 2) that the moral certainty "Murder is wrong" can be physically overcome (acts of murder), while empirical certainties like "Human beings can't cannot fly", and 3) that Pleasants fails to properly explain *why* the basic moral certainties he presents ("Death is bad", "Killing is wrong", "Murder is wrong") are beyond doubt.

I responded to the third challenge on behalf of Pleasants, by arguing that the inability to provide an explanation of why the wrongness of killing is beyond doubt is precisely what makes it a candidate for moral certainty, before turning to Pleasants' (2015), as well as Hermann's (2015) and O'Hara's (2018) responses

to Rummens. This enabled me to become clear on the kind of universal account of moral certainty the dominant view argues for. I took Pleasants et al. to argue for a universal account of moral certainty such that the certainty that "Murder is wrong" "transcends history and culture (and moral language-games)" (Pleasants 2015, p. 210). From here, I considered the context in which hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar (2017) discussed the notion of murder on his song 'XXX' against the claim that "There is nothing to think about murder but that "Murder is wrong"". Growing up surrounded by murder and death in gang-dominated Compton, LA, USA, Lamar's lyrics reflect on his violent life. Rather than glorifying gang life, as many hip hop artists do, Lamar uses his lyrics to both understand himself and to help his community to see the importance of respecting black lives, regardless of what gang colours they are affiliated with. In 'XXX' however, Lamar tells the story of receiving a phone call from a friend, whose son has just been murdered. Rather than advising his friend to overcome the urge to avenge his son's murder however, Lamar (2017) says "[i]f somebody kill my son, that mean somebody getting' killed", before adding "[t]ell me what you do for love". Later in the song, Lamar reflects on his attitude, and asks us to pray for him. I read the context of these lyrics in Lamar's song, in relation to his life, as a confrontation with a kind of difficulty of reality concerning his relation to the notion of "murder". Crucially, my claim was that, we may find ourselves sympathetic to Lamar's sentiment that one would find it morally impossible to live in a world in which the murderer of one's son remained alive and free. In doing so, we might take Lamar's remarks as coming from a place from *within* morality, rather than as the thoughts of a psychopath. Similar to my conclusion in Chapter 2, my argument was that the dominant view's approach to a universal account of moral certainty again conceptually blinds itself to what Lamar is saying. My argument was not that sometimes "Murder is right", but that there might be instances as the Lamar example shows, in which our relation to the notion of murder is more complicated than forms of words like "Murder is wrong" are capable of expressing. Though the dominant view is right to

emphasise the inability to put moral certainties into words, as they are only ever shown in deeds (OC 402), in taking these propositions to be part of their accounts of moral certainty, the notion of putting moral certainties into a form of words remains. The distortion here involves blinding oneself to what is there to see, before one has even thought to look.

In Chapter 4, I considered Hermann's (2015) account of moral justification, which she uses to help shape her account of moral certainty, and her response to the problem of moral justificatory regress. I took Hermann's claim that our request for a moral justification of "a person's conviction that blacks are inferior to whites [...] has the function of forcing someone to reflect on their prejudices" (p. 72), to leave the success of such justification conceptually closed, to mean that "Racism is wrong", along with "Slavery is wrong" (pp. 100-101), is a moral certainty. My aim in this chapter was to investigate the reading of Wittgenstein that led Hermann to claim that "[o]ur everyday practices reveal that in justifying our moral convictions we sooner or later run out of reasons" (pp. 2-3), and can "do no more than repeat – though this time with stronger emphasis – a moral conviction the truth of which seems to be most obvious to us" (p. 3). Hermann ultimately says that this situation, drawn from OC 204, is "nothing to be worried about" (p. 3) in the case of moral certainty.

Contrary to this, I claimed that our everyday life reveals that disagreements over racism rarely have the grammar of disagreements over whether "Racism is wrong". Rather, disagreements over racism are often disagreements over what counts as racism, where neither side wants to be seen defending racism. It would make no sense in these situations to appeal to moral certainties, such that one might repeat "a moral conviction the truth of which seems most obvious to us" (Hermann 2015, p. 3). I suggested that one of the prevalent forms of racism encountered in everyday life concerns a kind of soul-blindness (Cavell 1979, p. 378), such that human beings see differences in *kinds* of human beings, such that *their* pain, grief, and suffering, is not as severe one's own: "It is different for *them".*

This kind of racist blindness cannot be overcome through the presentation of facts contrary to the racist's beliefs, as they concern the racist's picture of the world, and of the people in that world. I suggested that aspects of the current disagreement between the Black Lives Matter protests against what are perceived to be racially motivated police shootings of black Americans, and the All Lives Matter protests that deny this racist element, might have to do with a form of soul-blindness.

By way of illustrating my point, I drew on what I refer to as Wittgenstein's "invitational approach" of persuasion (OC 262; 612; see also Winch 1992), as well as the music video to hip hop artist Joyner Lucas' (2017a) song 'I'm Not Racist', to emphasise the way in which we often try to give our opponent "our picture of the world" (OC 262), so as to persuade them into our way of thinking. Drawing on Diamond's (1991b; 2008) remarks on the limits of argumentation in appeals to the heart, I argued that Lucas presents us with a context in which it 1) makes sense to say that there *is* something to be worried about at the limits of justification in the case of disagreements over racism, and 2) that through what I suggested as an invitational form of moral persuasion, we might be able to overcome the differences between people that may at first appear to be unbreachable. I concluded that Hermann's approach to moral justification and moral certainty in relation to the moral certainty "Racism is wrong" distorts not only our picture of what is at the limits of justification, but what is possible when we are confronted with them.

The aim of Chapters 2-4 was twofold: First, my intention was to compare the dominant view's remarks on particular moral certainties with various examples of recognisably moral thinking on the other. I considered these limitations from the position of a broadly therapeutic/resolute reading of Wittgenstein. Second, by considering what everyday life shows us about the grammar of some of the most fundamental notions of morality, I was able to develop brief sketches of what an account of moral certainty developed from a therapeutic/resolute

reading of Wittgenstein might look like. In this way, as the title of my thesis suggests, I have attempted to unravel the limitations of the Moyal-Sharrock inspired accounts of moral certainty put forward by Pleasants, Hermann, and O'Hara, and in their place, to begin to develop the foundations for a more plausible approach to Wittgensteinian moral certainty, through a series of rough stories about the notions of "death", "murder", and "racism". In short, my thesis has been an attempt to highlight the benefits of attending to the fundamentals of morality by looking "at the practice of language" directly, rather than via a series of propositions that are taken to be meaningful outside of any particular context.

The significance of this for future research, I suggest, as quite broad. The approach focuses on contexts in which moral issues already exist, and seeks to develop a clear picture through looking and seeing what those issues are, rather than providing a template for how moral dilemmas are overcome. In this way, it aims to present the parties involved with a clearer picture of what the grammar of a particular moral disagreement looks like. This might be useful in disagreements over climate change, issues of social exclusion, domestic violence, and so on.

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