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**Certainty, Soil And Sediment**

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## CERTAINTY, SOIL AND SEDIMENT<sup>i</sup>

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### 1. Primitive Certainty — Soils, Sands and Seas

Within the large family of

belief, judgement, acceptance, conviction, taking for granted, being under the impression that, certainty, acquaintance, apprehension (*Erkennen*), knowledge

one possibly fundamental category is that of primitive certainty. Ortega y Gasset says

I did not “notice” the seat or arm-chair I am sitting on ... In some way I was counting on (‘*contar con*’) the seat ... When we go down the stairs we are not properly speaking aware of every step, but we *count on all* of them; and in general we are not aware of most of the things which exist for us but we count on them. (ULM, 47)

Wittgenstein writes:

I believe that there is a chair over there ... But is my belief then *grounded*? (OC §173)  
I act with *complete* certainty. (OC §174)

I shall call the ‘basic beliefs’ (*creencias*) of which Ortega says that ‘we count on them – always, without interruption’ (VLI 43) and the ‘propositions’ which, according to Wittgenstein, ‘stand fast for me’ (OC §152) *primitive certainties* (a term used by Russell and Husserl).

Many twentieth century Austro-German philosophers were convinced that primitive certainty provides a foundation for most human activity, including cognitive enterprises, and knowledge. The philosophers in question are Husserl and his heirs, in particular the realist phenomenologists – Leyendecker and Scheler – as well as philosophers heavily influenced by these such as Ortega y Gasset, Reiner and Gehlen – and, of course, Wittgenstein. The first three high points of twentieth century philosophy of primitive certainty occupy a period of 40 years – 1911-13 (Leyendecker, Husserl, Scheler), 1934-36 (Ortega) and 1950-51 (Wittgenstein). The foundations are laid in 1913. In his *Ideas* Husserl sketches an account of what he took to be the most primitive, theoretical attitude, ‘naïve certainty’. In his *Formalism* Scheler provides a dense, descriptive analysis of what he calls ‘practically counting on something’ (‘*rechnen mit*’). Scheler’s account of primitive, practical certainty provides Ortega with an analysis of what he calls ‘basic beliefs’ in publications in Spanish, English and German which appeared in 1936, 1937 and later. Searle’s later exploration of what he calls the ‘Background’ takes up

many of the problems isolated by these Austro-German philosophers.

Ortega's main account of his distinction between what he occasionally calls 'basic beliefs', 'certainty' and more often than not simply 'beliefs', on the one hand, and 'ideas' or 'adherence to ideas', on the other hand, is set out in his article, 'Ideas y Creencias', the first chapter of which appeared in German, 'Von der Lebensfunktion der Ideen' ('On the vital function of ideas'), in 1937. Ortega's terminology is in many ways unfortunate as his German translator, who translates 'creencia' as 'Glaubensgewißheit' or doxastic certainty, seems to have recognised. His account is anticipated in earlier writings, in which he speaks of 'convictions' (*En Torno a Galileo*) and developed in his paper 'Historia como sistema', which appeared for the first time in 1936, in English, as 'History as a System' and in 1943 in German<sup>ii</sup>.

Many names have been given to the primitive type of belief or certainty – 'simple or straightforward (schlicht), naive certainty' (Husserl), 'simple or straightforward belief' (Scheler), or simply 'belief' (Ortega) and 'unfounded belief' and 'certainty' (Ortega, Wittgenstein) – and to the less fundamental type of belief or certainty – 'critical belief' (Scheler), non-naive certainty, confirmed certainty (Husserl), 'adherence' (Ortega)<sup>iii</sup>. Primitive certainty, if we believe these philosophers, is everywhere. It is involved in perception, action, in one's relation to one's own mental states and in our relations to a great variety of contingent and non-contingent propositions or states of affairs, banal and exotic, of merely local and of global importance. It is sometimes solitary and usually collective. Thus Ortega says,

It is very difficult for a belief, in the precise sense I give to the word, to exist in the form of an individual belief or as the belief of a particular group. Belief ... is normally a collective fact ... [O]ne believes in common with others. Belief acts ... in the form of what 'binds collectively' ('en forma de vigencia colectiva') (Ortega 1985, 151)

The solid ground of primitive certainty, then, is to be distinguished from the shifting sands of competing hypotheses and also from a sea of doubts. According to some friends of primitive certainty, just as the solid ground of primitive certainty is to be distinguished from the shifting sands of critical certainty, so too seas of doubts come in two varieties – primitive uncertainty or doubt is to be distinguished from critical uncertainty or doubt.

The philosophers of primitive certainty like to describe the roles of primitive certainty by means of metaphors geological

soil, ground or rock-bottom (Boden),  
subsoil (subsuelo),  
firm (fest) ground, the ground beneath our feet,  
fundament (Fundament),  
earth, strata, continent, sediment

and architectural

scaffolding (Gerüst),  
 Grundpfeiler (keystone, foundation pillar)  
 built or constructed (montado, errichtet).  
 foundations

A fairly typical passage is:

There is no human life which does not rest from the start on certain basic beliefs, which is not so to speak built on these...These...do not occur at a moment in our life, we do not come to have them thanks to particular acts of thought, in a word they are not thoughts we have...or inferences ... They form the continent of our life and thus do not have the character of particular contents within life. They are not ideas we have but ideas that we are. (IC I i, 24; VLI, 42)

The geographical and architectural metaphors describe the relation between primitive certainties and the rest of our lives impersonally. But what is our personal relation to primitive certainties? As we have seen, both Ortega and Wittgenstein reply to this question with glosses each of which is the converse of the other. Ortega's gloss is that we count on ('contar con', 'rechnen mit') our primitive certainties, Wittgenstein's that they stand fast for us.

## 2. Critical Belief and Certainty vs Primitive Certainties – Phenomenological and Wittgensteinian

Many of the most important questions about primitive certainty have to do with the distinction between primitive certainty as a practical attitude or disposition and primitive certainty as a psychological attitude and with the distinction between these and primitive, objective certainty. In the case of primitive certainty as a psychological attitude we may further distinguish between certainty as a theoretical attitude and primitive affective certainty. I sketch first Scheler's account of practical counting on something, an account exploited to great effect by Ortega. I then turn to Husserl's account of primitive, theoretical certainty, set out some of the main claims made by Austro-German philosophers about primitive certainty, objective and non-objective, give the main putative examples of primitive certainty and consider the relations between the examples and the claims.

Scheler's account of what he calls 'practically counting on something'. ('praktisches Rechnungstragen', 'rechnen mit', F, 153ff., tr. 139ff.) is part of his account of the relation between a creature and its milieu or 'Umwelt'. Practical counting on is, with natural perception and natural language, one of three main components of the natural world-view. It is not a mere occurrence or a disposition but a practical attitude which has intentionality. (F 155, tr. 141) In particular, his description of practical counting on is part of the answer he gives to the following question: What is the relation between our actions, 'practical objects' and the situation they belong to? (F, 138, 137) Practical objects are goods or bearers of values (F, 148), they belong to a milieu (F, 153) and so to the natural world-view. A practical object is a 'milieu-thing' and so 'belongs to an *intermediate sphere* lying between our perceptual content and its objects on the one hand and...objectively thought objects on the other hand'. (F, 154, cf. tr. 139-40) The practical objects which help to make up a milieu, 'milieu things', are not the objects of science. The milieu sun is not the sun of astronomy, stolen meat is not a sum of cells. Practical

objects belong to the natural world view and are units of value. They belong to an intermediate realm in between the realms of perceived objects and thought objects since a change in the milieu can be experienced which cannot be traced back to any change in what is perceived. One practically counts on the existence or non-existence of things, on their being thus or so without the intervention of perception or thought. In other words, what we count on is the obtaining of states of affairs rather than the truth of propositions or thoughts. In 1926, in the course of arguing that there is no such thing as an absolutely constant natural world-view but many 'relative natural world-views', Scheler says that to such a relative world-view belongs everything that 'counts as unquestionably given', that is 'considered and felt neither to need nor to be capable of justification'. (WG, 61) As we shall see, Scheler employs his account of practical counting on in his analysis of perception and in his account of our relation to the rules we follow and break.

Husserl describes primitive theoretical certainty as something which stands outside all epistemic projects. Critical belief and certainty, on the other hand, are closely connected to epistemic projects. Clearly, then, in order to understand the relation between primitive certainty and critical belief we need to understand epistemic contact with the world. Husserl and his heirs distinguish four types of such epistemic contact: knowledge that, apprehension ('Erkennen'), acquaintance and coming to be acquainted with something ('Kenntnisnahme'). Apprehension and coming to be acquainted with something are episodes, knowledge that and acquaintance endure and are not episodes. Knowledge that and apprehension must be propositional, unlike acquaintance and coming to be acquainted with something.

Early and late, Husserl thinks that acts of meaning that p, judgements and critical, propositional beliefs are essentially bound up with cognising, they are essentially confirmable or falsifiable<sup>iv</sup>; judgements 'reach their goal' in confirmation and falsification. (LI VI §13) Verifiability, so understood as an essential possibility, is not restricted to what *we* are able to verify. Husserl's formulations often give the impression that he thinks that judgement and belief are independent components of apprehension and so of knowledge that. Thus he says that 'we prefer to speak of apprehension where an opinion, in the normal sense of a *belief*, has been confirmed'. (LI VI §16, EU § 68, 341) Such passages suggest that Husserl shares the view that knowledge is justified, true belief. Unlike some friends of this view he thinks that what justifies a belief in the simplest cases is a perception of the same state of affairs represented by the belief (LI VI §8) and that beliefs are essentially bound up with possible verifications. Nevertheless, beliefs, it seems, are more fundamental than and components of knowledge. But some formulations suggest that Husserl did not always accept this last claim. Thus, speaking of fulfilment (another name for apprehending (LI VI §8)) he says:

there is a peculiar principle to the effect that all inauthentic fulfilment implies authentic fulfilments, and indeed borrows its character of fulfilment from these authentic cases. (LI VI §20, 727)

And

The judgements... [investigated by the logician] occur as would-be pieces of knowledge (prätendierte Erkenntnisse). (EU §37)

.... *mere judging is an intentional modification of cognising judging (erkennendem Urteilen)*. (EU §3, 15)

Apprehension, the suggestion now seems to be, is complex, it involves a unity of fulfilment. But the unity is that of propositional thought and experience or intuition not a unity of belief and intuition. And the concept of apprehension is prior to that of mere belief or mere judgement.

Whether or not this conception of propositional belief is correct, 'believe' occurs in at least four quite distinct constructions: *believe that p*, *believe someone*, *believe in someone or something* (Scheler S, 96, Reiner 1934, 25) and *believe someone or something to be F*. Belief, certainty and conviction have all been called 'judgements' but are obviously different from episodic judgments and assertions, as Reinach points out in his classic account of (critical) conviction, belief and certainty. (ZtnU, 95) Assertion, Reinach thinks, is normally based on conviction or belief, which is an attitude or set ('Einstellung'). Conviction is an answer or response, typically to apprehension, and so is not part of apprehension. In this case, we have what Reinach calls 'cognitive convictions' ('Erkenntnisüberzeugungen'). Here conviction or belief comes after cognitive contact. Conviction and belief, unlike assertion, thinking, judgement or (the act of) meaning ('Meinen'), come in degrees:

Either something is asserted or it is not asserted; degrees of assertion simply do not exist...The situation is quite different in the case of conviction. Here there is indeed good sense to talk of levels or degrees. Alongside conviction there lie conjecture and doubt and with each of these the 'degree of certainty' sinks lower and lower. (ZtnU §2, 99)

Similarly, Wittgenstein thinks there are cases where 'complete certainty is the limit of a belief which differs by degrees'. (RPP II, 567, cf. BB, 111) 'I make assertions about reality, assertions which have different degrees of assurance'. (OC §66, cf §415)

Conviction, Reinach claims, is an attitude which is a state:

Conviction or belief, that which develops in us in the presence of a particular object, always involves some aspects which we may designate if not as feelings, at least ... as a state of consciousness. Assertion, on the other hand, does not 'develop' within us but is rather 'made' ('gefällt') by us, is totally different from every feeling, from every state, and is much rather to be characterised as a spontaneous act. (ZTnU, 99; cf. tr. 320)

Assertion, so understood, can also be called 'acceptance' ('Anerkennen' ZTnU, 98, tr. 318). Is belief or conviction a state only, or a disposition rather than a state, or both a state and a disposition? Wittgenstein sometimes endorses the latter view

Believing is a state of mind. It has duration; and that independently of the duration of its expression in a sentence, for example. So it is a kind of disposition of the believing person. (PI II x, cf. LW II, 9).

In 1900 Husserl distinguishes between 'convictions as psychic experiences' and as 'dispositions'. (LI I §3) But many phenomenologists and Husserl himself went on to argue that conviction and belief are states in a

sense narrower than that in which every disposition is a state. They argue that belief is a state which is not a disposition but a habitual (Husserl) or ‘inaktuell’ or ‘überaktuell’ (Reiner 1934 27f., cf. Scheler 1957, 240f) set or attitude, like the result of a decision, because once belief begins (once one comes to believe or know that p), once one has taken a decision, one can always come back to it (‘darauf zurück kommen’)<sup>v</sup>.

Long-lasting states or attitudes should be distinguished not only from such episodes as assertions and thinking but also from the episodes which mark the adoption or coming into being of an attitude, from taking a position:

From those acts, such as acts of presentation and meaning, in which we lay hold of something objectual (either by having it as our object or by being directed towards it), we have to distinguish experiences which, as in the case of conviction or belief, involve our taking a position with regard to something...striving after something, expecting something. There is an opposition running through this second class of acts – but not through the first – between positivity and negativity ... Now we find exactly the same in the case of conviction. (ZtnU, 109, tr. 332))

Wittgenstein makes a similar distinction

A proposition, and hence in another sense a thought, can be the ‘expression’ of belief, hope, expectation. But believing is not thinking ... The concepts of believing, expecting, hoping are less distantly related to one another than they are to the concept of thinking. (PI §574)

The relation, Reinach thinks, is that just as there is positive and negative striving and willing, so too, there is a positive and a negative conviction or belief. ‘Sam believes that not-p’ and ‘Sam disbelieves p’ are equivalent but do not mean the same thing. Polarly opposed attitudes and states are the hall-mark of affective and conative phenomena. So belief and disbelief are not, it seems, purely intellectual phenomena. But Reinach does not say they are affective or conative phenomena. We should not think of belief as feelings accompanying speaking or thinking (PI II, xi) although there is a tone of belief (PI §578). Belief is no Gemütsbewegung, there is no bodily expression typical of belief (RPP II §154); to believe is not to be occupied with belief’s object. (RPP II §155)

Judging, on the other hand, argue Husserl and Reinach, like Bolzano and Frege, has no polarly opposed counterpart. To deny that p is just to judge that not-p. Failure to grasp this point, Reinach says, is due to the confusion between judging that not-p and the activity of polemic negation. Nevertheless, Brentano’s view that judging does have a polarly opposed counterpart continues to find adherents. At bottom, the disagreement is perhaps due to the fact that Husserl and Reinach take seriously the point that in any account of what we know, in a text-book, for example we find no denials or at least no denials that are ineliminable. If we consider cognitive activity, on the other hand, we do find ineliminable denials<sup>vi</sup>.

Primitive certainty differs from both knowledge and from critical belief or certainty, its friends think, in the following way. If someone knows that p, then it is legitimate to ask *how* he knows that p and, in principle, there is an answer to the question. If someone believes that p, then the same is true of the question *why* he believes that p. If something is primitively certain, however, no justification can be given. Primitive certainties

are not justified. A further, more ambitious claim is that primitive certainties do not justify either<sup>vii</sup>. This claim is made by Scheler and Ortega.

### Subjective or Practical vs Objective Certainty

To the essence of doubt there belongs the possibility of a solution.

(Husserl EU §21 (d))

Where there's no logical method for finding a solution, the question doesn't make sense either. Only where there's a method of solution is there a problem

(Wittgenstein, PB, 172)

If we distinguish between primitive theoretical certainty and critical certainty or belief we should also distinguish, in each case, between subjective certainty and objective certainty. On this point Husserl and Wittgenstein agree. Husserl's account of the distinction between subjective and objective certainty is the starting point for his explorations, in *Ideas, Analysen zur passiven Synthesis* and *Experience and Judgement* of the relation between types of mental modes, acts or attitudes, on the one hand, and a variety of formal concepts and properties, on the other hand. To the mental state of doubt corresponds the functor 'It is doubtful whether p'. To the propositional state of sadness there corresponds the axiological functor 'It is sad that p'. To the mental act of judging that p corresponds 'the state of affairs that p obtains'. To each of the psychological modes on the left-hand side there corresponds on the right-hand side a 'correlate' which can be expressed with the help of a functor:

naive certainty	reality/certain
non-naïve certainty	really so/really certain
doubt	doubtful
suggestion ('anmuten')	real possibility
presumption, surmise ('vermuten') probability	
inquiring (interrogative) attitude	questionable
empty certainty	open possibility (EU §21(c))

What does 'correspond' mean? Husserl seems to have thought that the attitudes of doubt or sadness are intentionally directed towards, but do not represent, the doubtfulness or sadness of propositions or states of affairs. He also points out that a state of doubt or sadness is right or correct if and only if the state of affairs represented by the attitude is doubtful or sad. Similarly, like other phenomenologists, he sometimes thinks that judgement aims at truth and is directed towards the obtaining of a state of affairs although it need not represent either truth or states of affairs and is right if and only if the state of affairs obtains.

In the different subjective-objective couples, certainty occupies a privileged position<sup>viii</sup>. Certainty, Husserl (I §§103-7, EU §21) points out, comes in two kinds. The most basic variety is 'simple, naive certainty'

which is illustrated by much ordinary perception. But there is also the certainty which, for example, emerges out of doubt or hesitation and subsequent confirmation or disconfirmation, ‘confirmed certainty’ (AzpS §9). Doubt and confirmed certainty, for example, are modalisations of certainty. But there are two ways of drawing the line between what is and is not modified (or modalised or modal). We may say that doubt, surmise or presumption (‘Vermutung’), the interrogative attitude, suggestion (‘Anmutung’) and non-naïve certainties are all modifications or modalisations of naïve certainty. Or we may say that certainties, naïve or not, are the unmodalised starting points for the other attitudes. Husserl endorses the former view. All doxastic modalisations refer back to simple, naïve ‘Glaubensgewissheit’, ‘Urdoxa’. As Husserl points out, his analysis entails that the theory according to which belief merely differentiates itself into certainty, surmise etc is ‘grundfalsch’ (I §104). Subjective, unmodalised certainty, Husserl repeats on many occasions, ‘is not only the foundation of every individual cognitive act ... and judgement about what there is but also of every individual evaluation and practical action ...’ (EU §12, 53)

The different modalisations of naïve certainty mentioned all pertain to cognitive activities whereas naïve certainty itself is what underpins all theoretical activity. But Husserl also argues that all affective and conative intentional phenomena manifest either naïve certainty or one of its modalisations. There is naïvely certain being pleased by, wishing and willing and also *Wunschanmutungen*, *Wunschvermutungen*, *Wunschzweifeln* etc.. (VEW, 325-327, cf. I, 116-117) This is, arguably, required if primitive certainty is to play the foundational role Husserl wants to ascribe to it and is anyway a plausible and important generalisation.

Thus the phenomenologists have identified three distinct types of primitive, non-objective certainty: (a) the naïve certainty, modalisations of which belong to theoretical activity, (b) naïve affective and conative certainty and (c) practical counting on. To each type of non-objective certainty there correspond different types of objective certainty.

Husserl’s account of the distinction between subjective and objective certainty suggests three natural developments. First, since non-naïve or confirmed certainty exhibits degrees it may seem natural to claim that primitive certainty manifests no degrees. This is not a claim explicitly made by Husserl, as far as I can see. Reiner (1934, 101) argues that in the case of the most basic type of belief ‘differences of certainty of belief play no role’. But his claim is embedded in a series of heideggeresque elucubrations which make it difficult to evaluate. Thus he claims that the most fundamental type of belief has grounds or credentials, but these are not ‘critical’, involve no weighing of grounds. Newman, (1956 ch. 6, cf. Price 1996, 133ff.), followed by other Oxford philosophers, argues that taking for granted does not admit of degrees. Secondly, a difference which is more than merely verbal, between belief and knowledge, on the one hand, and certainty, on the other hand, is suggested by perusal of Husserl’s list of subjective-objective couples. The ‘correlate’ of subjective certainty is ‘that p is certain’. We use the same term to describe the subjective state and its objective counterpart (cf. ‘sad’, ‘question’, ‘shame’). But the correlates of belief and the objects of knowledge are not described using these words – belief and knowledge are only mental states.

Thirdly, this difference between knowledge and belief, on the one hand, and certainty, on the other hand, does not presuppose that objective certainty cannot be analysed in subjective terms. Meinong, like Husserl much concerned with subjective-objective couples, coined the expression ‘recessive account’ for analyses of apparently non-psychological concepts or properties in psychological terms. For example, a recessive account of objective sadness would be the claim that for it to be sad that p is just for a psychological state of sadness that p

to be appropriate. Two more recent names for recessive accounts of value are ‘buck-passing accounts’ and ‘neo-sentimentalism’. Meinong himself endorses a recessive account of objective certainty:

[T]hat 3 is greater than 2 is ... certain. Yet certainty and uncertainty are without any doubt first of all properties of judgement-experiences ... But what ... has the intensity of human judgements to do with a relation between numbers? Clearly only that this relation is so constituted that its obtaining can correctly be affirmed in a judgement of certainty ... In this way the property of being certain is transferred to the objective grasped insofar as one also calls the suitability for being judged with certainty in a justified way certainty ... What holds for certainty holds of course also for uncertainty ... . (UMW §6)<sup>ix</sup>

Even if Meinong is right, it would not follow that ‘It is certain that p’ is a derelativisation of ‘someone is certain that p’, as ‘It is known/believed that p’ certainly is a derelativisation of ‘someone knows/believes that p’.

Two of the more striking ‘theoretical’ distinctions in *On Certainty* are the distinction between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ certainty and the apparent distinction between two types of objective certainty:

With the word ‘certain’ we express complete conviction, the total absence of doubt, and thereby we seek to convince other people. That is *subjective* certainty.

But when is something objectively certain? When a mistake is not possible. But what kind of possibility is that? Mustn’t mistake be *logically* excluded? (OC §194)

A second type of objective certainty seems to be mentioned at §273:

But when does one say of something that it is certain?

For there can be dispute whether something *is* certain; I mean, when something is *objectively* certain.

There are countless general empirical propositions that count as certain for us.

Subjective certainty is an attitude. And Wittgenstein seems to suggest that it always admits of degrees. But does he think that ‘counting as certain’ always admits of degrees? Objective certainty of each kind involves the attribution of a predicate to a proposition. Objective certainty of the first kind logically excludes error. Objective certainty of the second kind is the result of debate or the possible object of debate, debates in which compelling (zwingende) ‘telling’ (‘triftige’, OC §§271-2) grounds are adduced.

What is the nature of our relation to objective, primitive certainties? Husserl’s answer, as we have seen, is that primitive, subjective certainty is intentionally directed towards objective certainties but does not represent these as certain. Since the latter but not the former are factive his view seems to be that in very many cases of primitive, subjective certainty it is *also* the case that primitive objective certainties obtain.

The answers given by Scheler, Ortega and Wittgenstein to our question are contained in the claims that we count on primitive, objective certainties or that these stand fast for us, that certain propositions or states of

affairs count as certain. Our relations to primitive certainties involve dispositions, behavioural dispositions. But if we think that such dispositions are also states then a merely dispositional account is incomplete.

Do some primitive certainties emerge from epistemic projects? From past epistemic projects of the person for whom such certainties are primitive? Of the community he belongs to? Can a primitive certainty become the object of critical inquiry? If so, can the very same proposition be at one time primitively certain and, at another, the object of epistemic evaluation? Suppose that Pierre in his youth is a devout Christian to whom it has never occurred to wonder whether his God exists. He then stumbles on a defence of atheism. Is the proposition or state of affairs which enjoyed primitive certainty during his youth the very same proposition or state of affairs discussed in the defence of atheism?

All basic beliefs were once ideas, Ortega (IC II, iii) suggests at one point and denies elsewhere, although most of my basic beliefs were never ideas of mine:

The person who believes possesses certitude ('certidumbre') precisely because he has not forged it for himself. Belief is a certitude in which we find ourselves without knowing how or where we entered into it. (IC II, iv)

Beliefs, he says, are inherited backgrounds (VLI, 51, OC §94). And Wittgenstein famously says:

We don't, for example, arrive at any of them [hinge propositions] as a result of investigation. (OC §138)

Husserl likes to talk of the sedimentation ('Sedimentierung', 'Niederschlag') and 'tradionalisation' of beliefs (K, 52), including scientific beliefs (K, §36)<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein imagines describing some empirical propositions as 'erstarrt', 'hardened'. (OC §96) He mentions the possibility that 'hardened' experiential propositions become fluid and vice-versa (OC §96) and the possibility that all beliefs were once critical beliefs but does not endorse it:

Much seems to be fixed, and it is removed from the traffic (OC §210). Perhaps it was once disputed. But perhaps, for unthinkable ages, it has belonged to the *scaffolding* of our thoughts. (OC §211)

I believe that I had great-grandparents. ... This belief may never have been expressed; even the thought that it was so, never thought. (OC §159, cf. §87)

If someone believes something, we needn't always be able to answer the question "why he believes it"; but if he knows something, then the question "how does he know?" must be capable of being answered. (OC §550)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Follesdal's (1988, 126-128) excellent account.

Primitive certainty does not belong to any cognitive enterprise. Reality, Ortega says, is made up of primitive certainties but

What is evident...is not reality for us. (VLI, 46)

Belief is what is not disputable. ('das Unbestreitbare' - Ortega 1943, 36)

(As we shall see, for Ortega, what we believe stands outside every cognitive enterprise simply because it is not an object). Similarly, for Wittgenstein

At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded. (OC §253, cf. §175, §504)

In the case of critical belief and of knowledge, it is always legitimate to ask 'How does x know that p?', 'Why does x believe that p?' But not in the case of primitive certainty:

'Knowledge' and 'certainty' belong to different *categories*. (OC §308).

In her discussion of the problem posed by examples such as that of Pierre, Danièle Moyal (2003) argues that the sentence 'God exists' expresses one proposition in Pierre's primitively certain youth and a different proposition, an *Ersatz* proposition, when he comes upon it in his doubting adolescence. An alternative view, the disappearing functor view, is that in his youth Pierre counts on

It is primitively certain that God exists

but later the object of his inquiries is simply what is expressed by the embedded clause.

Wittgenstein grapples inconclusively with the relation between objective and non-objective certainty. On the one hand, 'all psychological terms merely lead us away from the main thing'. (OC § 459) On the other hand, many objective certainties count as certain for us. ('gelten uns als gewiß', OC §273) But how should such 'Geltung' *for us* be understood? A reply in the spirit of the phenomenologists might run as follows: Primitive certainty is really primitive when there is primitive theoretical certainty or primitive practical certainty and the proposition or state of affairs which is certain is also objectively certain.

But then why is the combination of primitive psychological certainty that p and the primitively certain fact that p not simply a type of knowledge, primitive knowledge? This is an important objection to Husserl since, as far as I can see, he does not allow for primitive practical certainty as described by Scheler. On Husserl's view of coming to know that p or coming to be acquainted with an object such episodes consist of an act of identification, in the simplest case, of an identifying of what is seen with what is thought where the seeing grounds the thinking. If knowledge involves identification, then primitive certainty is never knowledge. (Husserl occasionally refers to primitive cognition (EU §12, 53) but does not make clear its relation to identification). A second possible difficulty for Husserl's account stems from the claim that primitive certainties are not and cannot be justified. For what cannot be justified cannot have intentionality. But Husserl seems to think that

primitive certainty does enjoy intentionality. These difficulties may be thought to provide ammunition for Scheler's view that primitive certainty is practical. There is, however, an alternative. When Husserl talks of justification he often has in mind what we might call more or less direct justification - an internal relation of defeasible or non-defeasible justification between acts and their contents or the objective counterpart of this relation, objective grounding ('subjective' vs "objective" 'motives' or reasons). But, as Follesdal has shown, there is much to be said for the view that Husserl's epistemology is anti-foundationalist and accords an important role to justification which arises from coherence, what one might call more or less indirect justification. If this is right, then Husserl could say that, although primitive certainties are not directly justified by any particular acts and contents, they are indeed indirectly justified by the way they cohere with other certainties, primitive and critical, and knowledge<sup>x</sup>.

### **Primitive Certainties are not Doubles**

What is the relation between primitive beliefs and what is believed? The thesis that certainties are not doubles of what is believed is attributed to Wittgenstein, without references, by Brand (1975), who perhaps only has in mind Wittgenstein's hostility to propositions and other shadows. Ortega's beliefs, however, unlike episodic thoughts, are not any sort of double of reality:

... precisely because they are so radical, they are indistinguishable for us from reality itself – they are our world and being –, thus they lose the character of ideas, of thoughts which might not have occurred to us. (IC I i, 24, VLI, 42)

[Ideas] always already presuppose our life. But our life rests on ideas as beliefs which we do not create. (VLI, 43)

As we have seen, Ortega says that we are our beliefs. He also says that we are in our beliefs and mentions the idiom 'to be in the belief that'. (IC I, i, HS I, HaS, 283f.) Just what the relation between being in beliefs and being made of beliefs is supposed to be – doubtless a problem of existential mereology – is not clear.

There is a certainty ('Sicherheit') which Wittgenstein regards as '(a) form of life'. (OC §358) But, since he is not happy with this way of putting things, it is his description of the foundation (Fundament) of our language-game, the language-game of which he says 'It is there – like our life' (OC §559) which resembles most closely Ortega's description of our beliefs as 'our world and our being'. Of the fact that water boils and does not freeze under such and such circumstances Wittgenstein says that it is

fused ('eingegossen') into the foundations ('Fundament') of our language-game. (OC §558)

[The language-game] stands there – like our life. (OC §559)

As Ortega says,

[Beliefs are] silently included ('eingeschlossen') in our consciousness or thinking (VLI, 44)  
 ... they form the foundation ('Fundament') of our life... (VLI, 45)

To be an object is to be an object of, for example, a thought or of some act of meaning that p. Thoughts are doubles of their objects. What we believe, Ortega says, is no object of our thought:

What we believe is not the object of reflection. (VLI, 43)

These ... beliefs are not thoughts we have about something. (VLI, 42)

We are not explicitly aware of them ... we have no idea ('Vorstellung') of them ... (VLI, 45)

Primitive beliefs lack objects, says Ortega, in the sense that 'everything we reflect about is ipso facto for us a problematic reality' (VLI, 43).

Beliefs are not what we come to have in the course of trying to obtain insight, rather they are at work in us when we begin to reflect about something. That is why we do not tend to express them as propositions but content ourselves with alluding to them ('anzuspielen') as something which is simply real for us. (VLI, 43)

Husserl also points out the peculiarity of verbal expressions of naïve certainties but neither he nor Ortega are as fascinated by this phenomenon as Wittgenstein is in his discussions of Moore.

### **Systems of Primitive Certainties vs Systems of Critical Certainties**

What relations hold between primitive certainties? In the answers given by the phenomenologists and Wittgenstein to this question the notion of a system looms large. Self-evidence, knowledge and systems are inseparable according to the argument set out by Husserl in the prolegomena to the *Logical Investigations* (Prolegomena, ch. 11, 182ff.). As one of his commentators puts it, 'self-evidence is completely determined only in the context of a system' (Reimer 1919, 291). Another commentator notes the tension within phenomenology between its account of knowledge and the requirement of systematicity, in particular of relations of justification between parts of a system: the first leads to realism, the second to idealism (Winkler 1921, 76ff.). The 'Systemgedanke' is also omnipresent in Wittgenstein's reflections (cf. Lange 1992) and there undergoes many developments.

According to Ortega, our primitive certainties form systems and our non-primitive certainties, the ideas we adhere to, also form systems. But in each case 'system' means something very different. In the first case, the systems are formed of non-logical relations and the relevant systems are not doubles of reality. In the second case, the system is made up of logical relations and stands over against the world as its constructed double:

The truth of ideas presupposes their being the object of questions; truth comes about thanks to the proof we try to give. Ideas need criticism as lungs need oxygen. Ideas last and establish themselves because of

the support they receive from other ideas, which in turn rest on other ideas, in such a way that they all come together in the unity of a system. They set up a world distinct from and next to the real world. (VLI, 46)

In the sense in which ideas or critical beliefs form a system, primitive beliefs do not form systems:

I have spoken of [beliefs] as a repertory to indicate that the plurality of beliefs on which an individual, a people or an age is grounded<sup>xi</sup> never possesses a completely logical articulation, that is to say, does not form a system of ideas...The beliefs that coexist in any human life, sustaining, impelling and directing it, are on occasion incongruous, contradictory, at least confused. (HaS, 284, HS, 10)

The last three predicates in the last sentence pertain to what is believed, its content. The first three predicates pertain to belief's function. From this functional point of view, primitive certainties do indeed form a system, 'the system of our real beliefs' (VLI, 45):

... beliefs, a mere incoherent repertory in so far as they are merely ideas, always constitute a system in so far as they are effective beliefs; in other words ... while lacking articulation from the logical or strictly intellectual point of view, they do none the less possess a vital articulation, they *function* as beliefs resting on one another, combining with one another to form a whole ... they always present themselves as members of an organism, of a structure. This causes them among other things always to possess their own architecture and to function as a hierarchy. In every human life there are beliefs that are basic, fundamental, radical, and there are others derived from these, upheld by them and secondary to them. (HaS, 284, HS, 11)

Why this order?

[S]hould the beliefs by which one lives lack structure, since their number in each individual life is legion there must result a mere pullulation hostile to all idea of order and incomprehensible in consequence. (HaS, 284, HS, 11)

Wittgenstein, too, thinks of unfounded beliefs as forming a system - the last avatar of the concept of system in his thought:

Not that I could describe the system of these convictions. Yet my convictions do form a system, a structure. (OC §102)

All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life. (OC §105, cf. §603).

When Moore says he knows such and such, he is really enumerating a lot of empirical propositions which we affirm without special testing; propositions, that is, which have a peculiar logical role in the system of our empirical propositions. (OC §136)

they all have a similar role in the system of our empirical judgements. (OC §137, cf. OC §83, §136, §213)

When a child acquires a 'system of what is believed' the part that 'stands unshakeably fast' 'is held fast by what lies around it'. (OC §144)

What, then, is the type of structure peculiar to systems of primitive certainties? In some cases, the relations between primitive certainties are mereological: my certainty that I have two hands is a part of my certainty that I have a body which in turn is part of my certainty that the world exists. But this is at best part of the right answer to the question.

### **Primitive Doubts and Holes in Systems**

The opposite of belief is disbelief, the opposite of certainty that *p* is uncertainty whether *p*. Thus the opposite of primitive certainty is primitive uncertainty, a phenomenon at the centre of Ortega's analysis. Unfortunately, just as Ortega misleadingly often calls primitive certainties 'beliefs', he also typically calls primitive uncertainties 'doubts'. But doubt, as normally understood, is a phenomenon on the continuum between critical belief and critical disbelief. Occasionally, Ortega is slightly more careful and distinguishes between 'true doubt' and intellectual doubt.

Primitive uncertainties, like primitive certainties, form a system, for they are holes in systems of beliefs:

The most basic stratum of our life, that which supports and carries all the others is formed by beliefs. These are, then, the firm ground on the basis of which we work...But in this basic area of our beliefs, here and there, enormous holes ('agujeros') of doubt open up, like trap-doors. This is the moment to point out that doubt, real doubt, not merely methodical or intellectual doubt, is a mode of belief and belongs to the same stratum as this in the architecture of life. One is also *in* doubt...The gaps ('huecos') in our beliefs are, then, the vital place where ... ideas intervene ... the substitution for the unstable, ambiguous world of doubt of a world in which ambiguity disappears. (IC I, iii)

Wittgenstein does not consider the distinction between critical and unfounded doubt or uncertainty except en passant. He is perhaps thinking of the latter when he writes '(My) doubts form a system' (OC §126). In the *Investigations* he writes

It may easily look as if every doubt merely revealed an existing gap ('Lücke') in the foundations; so that secure understanding is only possible if we first doubt everything that can be doubted, and then remove all these doubts. (PI §87)

The point here may simply be that critical doubts rely on primitive or non-primitive certainties. At one point Wittgenstein says that philosophy produces ‘general uncertainty’. (BB, 45) Perhaps in 1950 he might have been prepared to say that this is not critical uncertainty<sup>xii</sup>.

Although there is primitive doubt or uncertainty and primitive certainty, there is an asymmetry between them, according to Ortega. Doubt leads to cognitive activity but doubt, critical or primitive, cannot be the starting point for cognitive activity in general:

Man cannot begin by doubting (IC II, iv)

Husserl and Wittgenstein agree:

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)<sup>xiii</sup>.

In the year in which Husserl first set out his account of primitive certainty, his pupil Reinach briefly indicated that there is a primitive uncertainty:

Every perplexity (‘speechlessness’, ‘Fassungslosigkeit’) involves an uncertainty about the relevant thought-content. One should beware of confusing this uncertainty with doubt or another position one may adopt (‘Stellungnahme’). A doubt can be as certain as a conviction and a conviction as uncertain as a doubt. Uncertainty is a peculiar feature which can occur both as the coloration of a position one adopts and as an independent attitude (‘Einstellung’) of a subject before all positions, whether of doubt or not. (Ü, 282)

It is perhaps because the principal philosophers of primitive certainty paid so little attention to the opposed phenomenon of primitive uncertainty that they failed to raise the possibility that of the two, primitive certainty and primitive uncertainty (whether subjective, practical or objective), it is primitive uncertainty which wears the trousers in the couple. On this view, primitive certainty is the absence of primitive uncertainty, as freedom is the absence of constraint, health the absence of illness and grammaticality the absence of ungrammaticality<sup>xiv</sup>. Such a view is suggested by the plausibility of a similar account of a phenomenon closely related to primitive certainty: familiarity is the absence of surprise and strangeness. (cf. PI I §596, IC I)<sup>xv</sup>.

### **3. Examples: perceptual, psychological, worldly, earthy, normative and political**

Even if the above elements of an account of primitive certainty add up to a coherent account, a further distinct question is whether there are actually any primitive certainties. I consider the main candidates advanced by the philosophers of primitive certainty. Each candidate suggests modifications of the general account given so far.

### Primitive Perceptual Certainties

Leyendecker (1913) argues that my relation to the perceptual background of what I perceive and the objects in the background is a type of certainty which does not involve any ‘Kenntnisnehmen’ or cognising nor any type of discovery (31). I ‘have’ a background and the objects in it - they are ‘mitgehabt’ - in much the same way in which I have a body, without any discovery or any other sort of cognitive relation thereto. On all these counts, my perceptual relation to the background of what I see differs from my relation to what I see, to what occupies the foreground.

In his first full accounts of primitive certainty, Husserl concentrates on primitive perceptual certainty (external perception, what is called at AzpS, 47 ‘empirical, primitive certainty’). The transitions noted above from naïve certainty to doubt or presumption or non-naïve certainty all typically occur within perceptual experience. These transitions all have counterparts, he thinks, in the sphere of judgement and of other thought-involving attitudes<sup>xvi</sup>. Whereas Leyendecker had insisted on primitive certainty in background perception, Husserl argues that perception itself is the basic form of naïve certainty. To see is normally to be naively certain.

Husserl thinks that perceptual experience has a non-conceptual content. From the point of view of later terminologies, it is perhaps unfortunate that he often refers to pre-predicative perception as perceptual belief and perceptual meaning (‘Meinen’, but not as perceptual judgement). Non-conceptual perceptual contents are in part constituted by the primitive relations of actual and possible fulfilment and conflict in which they stand<sup>xvii</sup>. This strand in Husserl’s account of perception may be thought to be difficult to reconcile with his claim that visual perception is often a case of primitive certainty. Indeed it might be thought that endorsement of perceptual certainty is best combined with the view that visual perception involves no sort of content, conceptual or non-conceptual, a view defended by Linke.

Primitive certainty looms large in Scheler’s analysis of pre-predicative perception and intuition although, as we have seen, according to his account, practical counting on lies in between perception and thought and so perception is not a type of practical counting on. In every act of external intuition ‘the existence of nature as a sphere is certain’ (S, 253). Scheler makes a similar claim about the relation between different act-types, on the one hand, and the spheres of the external world, of the inner world and of the body, on the other hand. This makes possible an interesting account of perceptual illusions and hallucinations. In illusions the subject assigns a mental object to the wrong sphere, although no conceptual misattribution is involved.

One of the clearest examples of counting on given by Scheler concerns the background of perception:

There belongs to the momentary “milieu” not only the series of objects that I perceive (either through sense or representation), while I am walking in the street or sitting in my room, but also everything on whose *existence or absence*, on whose being so or otherwise, I simply *practically count*, e.g. the cars and people that I avoid (when I am lost in thought or when I fix my sight on a man far away)...In all areas in which we grasp objects (in the perception of present and past objects) we possess the ability to *take practical account*’ of things, which implies an experience of their efficacy and changes in it that is *independent* of the *perceptual* sphere. It is this same “practical accounting” which experientially

determines our acting in this or another way, and which is itself “given” only in such experienced changes of determination - but not before, as a “reason” for them. (F, 154-155, cf. tr 140)

Many of the empirical propositions which enjoy primitive certainty in *On Certainty* are expressed by perception-based utterances dealing with parts of the immediate environment, in particular demonstrative and indexical sentences (cf. Beermann 1999, 122f.):

Here is a hand (§1).

That is a book (§17).

There is a chair over there (§173).

I am sitting in my room (§195).

It is presumably part of Husserl’s view that visual perception, although often naïve and primitive, is often interrupted by critical and cognitive episodes in which we wonder whether what looks like a rabbit really is a rabbit and so begin to think and evaluate hypotheses. But even a friend of the view that the most basic kinds of visual perception is simple and concept-free may jibe at the claim that simple seeing is a kind of certainty. After all, ‘certain’, unlike ‘see’, must take a sentence as its complement. On the other hand, some contemporary philosophers, such as Ruth Marcus, have argued that (critical) belief is a relation to states of affairs, existential and non-existential, that is to say, entities containing objects, properties and relations but no concepts. Similarly, phenomenologists such as Husserl, Reinach and Scheler, clearly think that ‘Erkennen’ has a state of affairs as its object and need involve no thought. It is then a type of intuition in which both sensory properties, constancies of different kinds and formal relations (numerical difference, similarity, parthood) as well as aspects of organization are directly given. If this view is plausible, then so too is the view that primitive certainty is directed towards states of affairs and need not involve any conceptualisation of these. As Husserl puts it, ‘external perceptions, before all complications with conceptualisations and predication, are.. perceptual certainties and that which is certain in them is a...state of affairs’ (EP, 364).

### Primitive Certainty in Action

Primitive certainty is manifested most tangibly in the relations to contingent propositions or states of affairs which go to make up action<sup>xviii</sup>. As Ortega says:

The reader is at home and decides to go out into the street for one or another reason. What in such behaviour can be called thinking? ... In the most favourable case he is aware of his motives, the decision he has taken, the execution of the movements involved in walking, opening the door, going down the stairs. But even in this case he will look in vain for any thought to the effect that the street exists. There is no question for the reader at any moment about whether there is or is not a street. Why? It cannot be denied that in order to decide to go out into the street it is of some importance whether the street exists. This is indeed more important than anything else, the presupposition of everything else...The reader was counting on the street although he was not thinking of it and because he was not thinking of it. (IC I, i, 27-8, VLI, 44)

Beliefs are all those things that we absolutely take for granted even though we don't think about them ... but instead take them automatically into account in our behaviour. When we go down the street we never try to walk through the walls of buildings; we immediately avoid bumping into them without ever having to think: 'walls are impenetrable'. At each moment, our life is supported by a vast repertoire of such beliefs. (IC II I, 42, as tr. in HR, 19).

As Wittgenstein puts it,

One cannot make experiments if there are not some things that one does not doubt. But that does not mean that one takes certain presuppositions on trust. When I write a letter and post it, I take it for granted that it will arrive—I expect this.

If I make an experiment I do not doubt the existence of the apparatus before my eyes. I have plenty of doubts, but not that. If I do a calculation I believe, without any doubts, that the figures on the paper aren't switching of their own accord, and I also trust my memory the whole time, and trust it without any reservation. The certainty here is the same as that of my never having been on the moon. (OC §337)

Are the primitive certainties of perception and of action independent of each other? Critical realism inclines philosophers to assume that perception is independent of action for it is awareness at a moment of sense-data. The view that to see is always to think and conceptualise also inclines philosophers this way. Both critical realism and the view that to see is to think are rejected by the phenomenologists and by Wittgenstein (PI II, xi, OC §90). If visual perception is typically direct and thoughtless, 'quick, stupid and reliable' as Bühler's pupil Brunswik puts it, then it is plausible to say that the primitive certainties of perception and of action are inseparable. Thus when Ortega says that counting on is

... the decisive presupposition of our acting and so to speak its fundamental support. ('Grundpfeiler', 'básico supuesto', VLI, 44)

and Wittgenstein that

I act with complete certainty. (OC §174)

'action' should be taken to mean the action-perception couple.

### **My Primitive Certainties about my Mental States**

What is my relation to my mental ('seelische') and spiritual ('geistige') states, acts and activities? Ortega thinks that a person's relations to his episodic thoughts, feelings and perceptions typically amount to counting on them. In such cases the relation is not any sort of cognitive relation nor does it involve any sort of critical belief, although counting on may give way to knowledge. This claim is set out in articles published in Spanish in 1931 and republished as *Qué es conocimiento?* (QC 54ff.), perhaps Ortega's first application of his views about primitive certainty, and in *Unas Lecciones de Metafísica*, which was written in 1932/3 and first published in 1966:

When my teeth hurt the fact that they hurt is no knowledge ('saber'), knowledge is not pain, although the fact of pain doubtless implies an ingredient which is the existence of the pain for me, my realising ('darme cuenta') that I am in pain in the sense of having to count on ('contar con') this. In addition to this simple and primary realising without which the pain in my teeth would not hurt I can observe or pay attention to this pain...in sum, know it sensu strictu ... . It is always possible for me to convert this 'counting on' into a real observation. (ULM III, 51)

Similarly, my self is not typically an object of knowledge or acquaintance for me but something I count on (QC, 54).

Ortega's claim about mental states had been made by Leyendecker in 1913:

... in thousands of cases in which our attitude is cognitive or behavioural ... we are quite immediately certain that we are perceiving and not merely imagining or dreaming without any reflexion. (Leyendecker 1913, 42-3)

Leyendecker thinks that this is shown by a well-known feature of 'psychological judgements':

e.g. "I remember he had a beard", "I am thinking about what I should write to him", "I can hear the clock strike". All judgements whose psychological content is not by any means *judged* but rather merely *expressed*. The sense of these judgements is not at all "that I have just remembered" that he had

a beard but that he had a beard. In order to express the fact that I have just remembered this .... no reflexion about my conscious state .... is necessary at all. (Leyendecker 1913, 43)<sup>xix</sup>

The claim, then, is that psychological utterances express psychological states which enjoy primitive certainty. This claim goes beyond the claim that I typically express my mental states and do not have private knowledge about these.

The view of Leyendecker and Ortega belongs to a complicated and unfamiliar philosophical context. It will help to understand Ortega's claim about the primitive certainty of toothache if we contrast it with a number of rivals. Primitive certainty is not any sort of epistemic contact. So it is not any private, incorrigible, cognitive access to a private mental state. Nor is it the sort of corrigible but private mode of access to private objects described by Husserl in the *Logical Investigations*. Ortega's view is also distinct from Scheler's claim that to be an object is, essentially, to be a public object and from Scheler's further claim that only certain types of my and your physical and non-physical states, the 'seelische' or psychological ones, can be objects and so directly known. Although to be an object is to be a public object, Scheler argues, not every feature of a person can be given as an object as opposed to being merely described. Psychological states are public objects, geistige or spiritual 'acts' and attitudes are not public objects because they are not objects. Your meaning (Meinen) that it rains by saying 'Es regnet' is, for example, not a possible object of my direct cognition. Rather, I understand what you mean by co-accomplishing ('mitvollziehen', 'mitmeinen') your act of meaning. My most immediate contact with your meaning that p, your loving, hating, despair and willing is through collective intentionality or participation. Finally, Ortega's view differs from the idea that there is 'knowledge without observation' of psychological states. According to the phenomenologists, as we have noted, knowledge always involves the identification of what is thought and what is perceived (or something that plays the same role as what is perceived). Knowledge without observation involves no identification.

In his first description of counting on one's mental states Ortega attempts to say what it is to count on something:

"Counting on" is an acting, a "doing", a dynamic character which consciousness *sensu stricto*, noticing, never has. (QC §55)

Wittgenstein, too, likes to stress the dynamic nature of primitive certainty: primitive certainties do not merely stand fast for one, it is as though there were an immediate grasping or taking-hold of something, which corresponds to a sureness, not to any knowing (OC §§510-11)

Brand (1975 §17, cf. §34, §95, §268) attributes to Wittgenstein the view that each of us stands in the relation of primitive certainty to his mental states and episodes. But it might be more exact to say that this view is compatible with much that Wittgenstein says before *On Certainty* about our relation to our mental states. Wittgenstein did not live to say more about the relation between first-person psychological utterances and his new account of primitive certainty. Suppose there are  $n$  Wittgensteins, two, three or four Wittgensteins corresponding to the major transitions in his thought. Then there is, of course, Wittgenstein  $n + 1$ . This is the possible Wittgenstein who reworked some of his earlier views in the light of his account of groundless belief. The view Brand attributes to Wittgenstein ought rather to be attributed to Wittgenstein  $n + 1$ .

Before OC Wittgenstein writes:

“I have consciousness” – that is a statement about which no doubt is possible.’ Why should that not say the same as: “ “I have consciousness” is not a proposition”? (Z §401)

“Nothing is so certain as that I possess consciousness.” In that case, why shouldn't I let the matter rest? This certainty is like a mighty force whose point of application does not move, and so no work is accomplished by it. (Z §402)

The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself. (PI §246)

He also writes

“But can you doubt that you meant this?” –No; but neither can I be certain of it, know it. (PI §679)

Perhaps in 1952 he would have said that I typically enjoy primitive certainty about what I mean or suffer and about what you mean or suffer.

### **Earthy and worldly certainties**

There can be no stronger realism than this, if by this word nothing more is meant than: “I am certain of being a human being who lives in this world, etc., and I doubt it not in the least”. But the great problem is precisely to *understand* what is here so “obvious”.

(Husserl, C, 187)

And what we expect with certainty is essential to our whole life.

(Wittgenstein, RFM, IV, §52)<sup>xx</sup>

The certainties of perception and action and the certainties based thereon should be distinguished from the certainties which take the certainties of perception as their model, for example propositions belonging to a *Weltbild* or *Weltanschauung*. Wittgenstein says

... [M]y picture of the world ... is the inherited background. (OC §94)

and Ortega says

In large measure [man] has inherited [the world] from his ancestors and it continues to work in the form of a system of certain beliefs. (VLI, 51)

Husserl compares the function of ‘sedimentations’ which are not ‘dead’ to the way the back-ground functions in perception (K §40, 152). Ortega notes that when he says that beliefs form the most fundamental stratum of our lives and are the ‘firm earth’ underlying our activities the metaphor has its origin in one of the most fundamental beliefs, that the earth is firm (IC, 34). Wittgenstein writes:

The existence of the earth is rather part of the whole *picture* which forms the starting-point of belief for me. (OC §209)

And at this stage in his thought to say that ‘a system is so to speak a world’ (PB, 178) would be to make a claim about systems of primitive certainties.

The claim that the world is a background throws light on the claim that there are no doubles in the case of primitive certainties. Even in the case of critical perceptual beliefs the perceptual background is not something which allows us to distinguish between reality and appearance. The reality-appearance distinction applies primarily to what we (seem to) see in the foreground.

The primordial belief in the world (‘Welt-Glaube als Urdoxa’) is presupposed by all doubts and denials, says Husserl. In the case of ordinary beliefs we know how to distinguish between appearance and reality. But not in the case of our belief in the world (EP, 54). ‘The world is not a hypothesis’ in the way in which scientific hypotheses are hypotheses (K, 265).<sup>xxi</sup> The Lebenswelt is the ‘ground’ or ‘Boden’ for all theoretical and extratheoretical praxis. And ‘to live is to live continuously in the certainty that the world exists (“In-Welt-Gewissheit-Leben”)(K §37).

As we have seen, the minimal claim to which a friend of primitive certainty is committed is that primitive certainties are not directly justified by other mental states or attitudes and their contents (as opposed to indirect justification through coherence). This leaves open the question whether what is primitively certain for someone at a time is the result or sedimentation of past cognitive achievements. Unlike Ortega, Husserl typically rejects the stronger claim that primitive certainties cannot justify. Thus he calls for investigation of

the way the Lebenswelt functions continuously as a subsoil, how its varied pre-logical validities *ground* logical, theoretical truths. (K, 127, my emphasis; cf. EU §10)<sup>xxii</sup>

But it is not clear whether Husserl is here thinking of direct or of indirect justification in virtue of coherence.

If naïve, visual certainties are not justified and do not justify, what account should be given of the case where, when asked whether it is raining outside on returning from a walk, I reply in the affirmative, and to the question ‘How do you know?’ I reply ‘I saw that it was raining?’ Presumably, the naïve visual certainties I enjoyed in the rain become critical certainties when I reply to the question. The only alternative is to drop the claim that primitive visual certainties cannot justify.

Husserl says that his account of naïve perceptual certainty needs to be completed by accounts of other types of naïve, non-perceptual certainty – for example, memory and judgement, both empirical and essential (EU §66, §76, I, 214, AzpS, 48). It would perhaps be in the spirit of his account to say that all primitive certainty is either perceptual or intuitive or inherits some of the features of perceptual or intuitive certainty. Part of Husserl’s

program was carried out in some detail by Ortega, who considers a number of primitive normative and axiological certainties but, as we have seen, does not understand primitive certainty in just the way Husserl understands it.

### **Normative and Axiological Certainties vs the Normativity of Certainties**

The putative examples of primitive certainties considered so far are certainties about what is non-normative and non-axiological. This is true also of Scheler's practical certainties even though, as we have seen, these concern states of affairs containing goods, to the extent that the states of affairs themselves are not 'Wertverhalte'. But there are also, Ortega thinks, primitive certainties concerning what is normative and axiological.

It has been argued that wittgensteinian primitive certainties are normative<sup>xxiii</sup>. Is this view compatible with the apparently well-founded distinction between certainties about what is not normative and certainties about what is normative, between Pierre's certainty that God exists and his certainty that he ought to go to Mass on Sunday or that 'transubstantiation' may be used to refer to transubstantiation? It is a view which is perhaps encouraged by the absence of any discussion by Wittgenstein of certainties of the political or ethical varieties. Wittgenstein is tempted by the idea that empirical propositions can be transformed into norms of representation (OC §319) but, given his views about norms and values, it is not clear what it would mean to transform an ethical or political normative proposition into a norm of representation. There at least three objections to the view that primitive certainties are norms. First, no psychological attitude is a norm, nor is the attitude or disposition of practically counting on something. Secondly, propositions dominated by the functors of objective certainty and uncertainty do not exhibit the same logical multiplicity as propositions dominated by deontic and axiological functors and predicates. Friends of the view will doubtless reply that hinge-propositions function like or are treated as norms or have the status of norms, epistemic norms or norms of representation. But none of this, a realist claims, entails that such propositions are normative or express norms. Finally, our relation to political, ethical and aesthetic norms does not resemble at all our relation to epistemic norms. Reactions to a crumbling primitive political certainty tend to be much stronger than reactions to the breakdown of a primitive, syntactic, semantic or epistemological certainty.

Throughout his later writings Ortega discusses a number of historical examples of basic beliefs about what is normative and axiological, such as the history of the belief in reason, of the belief in science and of the death of Roman belief in the law ('Un capítulo sobre la cuestión de como muere una creencia', Ortega 1985; 'Sobre la volatilización de una fe', Ortega 1986, 134ff). His account of the role of cognitive values and norms as primitive certainties is at the origin of the analyses of foolishness in his most popular writings<sup>xxiv</sup>. His interest in these matters was in large measure due to his conviction that history and sociology should begin by studying primitive certainties. It is doubtless this aspect of Ortega's work which Collingwood (1937, 145) had in mind in applauding Ortega's 'strikingly original' 'History as System'. Like Ortega, Collingwood thinks historians systematically neglect the presuppositions which constitute world-views.

Rules and norms, cognitive, conventional, social, ethical and political are not, Ortega argues, typically the objects of epistemic enterprises. Customs and what Ortega calls 'uses' ('usos'), linguistic and non-linguistic, have invariably been misunderstood, he thinks, because the fact that they are primitive certainties has been

overlooked. If correct, Ortega's claim is of great importance for any account of rule-following and rule-breaking and also for any account of what he calls the 'binding nature' or 'vigencia' of rules and uses. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to by talking of the ways in which rules compel compliance, push and pull us, enjoy normative force. If there are rules which enjoy the status of primitive certainties then it is wrong to say that these rules are known and scepticism in this respect, although true, can be completed by a positive account of our relation to rules.

Rules, norms and customs are not merely primitively certain but also enjoy *collective* primitive certainty and so constitute social power (Ortega 1985a, 105ff.; HS, HG). 'Every use ... is essentially old' and 'consists in a form of life' (HG, 215). It is fundamentally wrong to understand uses, in particular the 'immense system of verbal uses' which is a language (HG, 194) in terms of behavioural regularities or frequencies. There are many types of movement which are very frequent but do not correspond to uses (HG, 198):

... something is not a use because it is frequent, rather we do it frequently because it is a use. (HG, 200)

Ortega's rejection here of what has been called 'regulism' about rules is combined with a rejection of the view that what makes rules binding is the adherence of a community, of what has been called 'communitarianism'. The binding nature of uses

does not consist in the adhesion of individuals, however numerous ... [S]omething is a use because it imposes itself on individuals ... The socially binding character [of uses] does not present itself to us as something which depends on our individual adhesion, on the contrary it is indifferent to our adhesion, it is there, we have to *count on* it. (HG, 267, 268; cf. HaS 289)

Since uses are primitively certain we do not understand them, they are unintelligible, although we understand what we have to do, we comply with a use because the use is what *one* does. (HG, 192)

In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein seems to accept that semantic relations are primitively certain (cf. OC §369, §446, §455, §456, §506, §515, §519). But linguistic rules other than semantic rules – such as 'It is wrong to call a duck a 'rabbit'' – for example syntactic rules and pragmatic rules concerning what entitles one to assert what are even more plausible candidates for the role of primitive certainties, if only because they are much more difficult to formulate for the ordinary speaker than semantic rules. Perhaps Wittgenstein n + 1 would have endorsed the view that linguistic rules are typically primitively certain. In the tradition that goes back to Brentano and Marty, it is above all Ahlman (1926) who develops the idea that semantic, syntactic and pragmatic relations are normative:

... the symbol relation between sign and object is, from the logical point of view, always normative. (Ahlman 1934, 259)<sup>xxv</sup>

Ortega's innovation within this tradition is to argue that linguistic norms are primitive certainties.

One of the examples given by Scheler in 1913 of what we practically count on is laws, in the sense of rules rather than of laws of nature. We obey and disobey rules, legal, ethical and aesthetic, although we have no

perception or knowledge of them we practically recognise them. Our (dis)obedience is a ‘practical obeying’ and ‘disobeying’ of rules. Such rules are ‘*experienced* as fulfilled or broken *in* the execution of acting. And it is only in these experiences that they are given’ (F 155, tr. 141; cf. F, 565). As he later puts it,

Whenever we for example infer according to a law of inference, without inferring “from” it, obey an aesthetic rule (like the productive artist), without in any way having this rule as a formulated proposition in mind, then essential insights come into play (‘in Funktion’) without thereby standing explicitly before the mind. It is only in the experience of incorrectness, of deviation from a law, which we are not conscious of as a law, that we have a dawning awareness that some insight was leading and guiding us. (VW, 446)

Wittgenstein, of course, agrees with Scheler’s negative claim that we typically have a non-cognitive grasp of the rules we follow and break. In a central passage from the *Investigations* he says

that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation* (*Deutung*) but which is exhibited (sich äußert) in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases of application (Anwendung). (PI §201)

Wittgenstein does not, like Scheler, say that this way of grasping a rule is given or experienced but that it is exhibited. But they agree that grasp of a rule is exhibited or given only in particular instances of rule-following and rule-breaking. Perhaps by 1951 Wittgenstein might have agreed with Scheler that this grasp is a type of practical counting on.

Scheler gives the following example of counting on rules:

[I]t belongs to the essence of “crime” that he who breaks laws experiences himself as breaking them while acting; these are laws with which he reckons in *practise*, in his own case and in that of others, without having to have the slightest *knowledge* of such laws, and without having to have “thought” about them. On the other hand, one who knows the laws and still breaks them is definitely not a “criminal”. The mere “breaker” or “enemy” of a legal system is no “criminal” for he accords it no practical recognition. The criminal, although he does not necessarily have to recognise laws in a special act of “recognition”, nevertheless *experiences* laws as *effective* in his willing and acting, and thus “*recognises them practically*” (thus he expects others to follow the law “as a matter of course”, not in a particular, experienced act of “expectation”). He is a criminal because he rises against that whose domination he experiences as effective, and it is this *experienced conflict* that makes him different from a mere law-“breaker”. (F, 156, cf. tr. 142)<sup>xxvi</sup>.

‘There is an aspect of *blindness*’, Scheler thinks, ‘in the compulsion (‘Nötigung’) of duty, an aspect which belongs essentially to it’. (F, 201) And what is true of duty is true, too, he says, of norms in general (F, 202). They also display a moment of blindness. It would, then, be in the spirit of Scheler’s account to say that we follow rules blindly because and to the extent that we practically count on them.

Norms and rules about what we ought and ought not to do, the phenomenologists think, are partially grounded in values, if they have grounds at all. And to the extent that they are so grounded they are not blind. Thus the essential insights Scheler refers to in the last but one passage quoted (VW, 446) are supposed to be insights into relations amongst values. What values, if any, might underlie linguistic rules and norms? Perhaps the value we attach to the form of life of which a language is a part. Scheler's much stronger version of this view has it that

wherever there is a community, *forms* of life have an intrinsic value (UW, 141)  
and that 'reverence' is the appropriate attitude towards such values (UW, 141). But primitive certainties are not grounded. Nevertheless, if primitive certainties form systems, it is possible to argue that the primitively certain rules and norms depend on but are not justified by axiological certainties or even that they are indirectly justified through their coherence with what they make possible.

We have already noted that Husserl thinks that some essential truths may be primitively certain. Many of the sentences which, according to Husserl, express essential truths, analytic and synthetic, are treated as grammatical propositions or expressions of rules by Wittgenstein. On both views, primitive certainty about what is not contingent turns out to be 'gappy'. Suppose the rule for addition is primitively certain for Pierre with respect to a range of numbers. If a situation arises in which he must apply the rule to new numbers he may well find himself in a state of primitive uncertainty. If Ortega is right to say that there are holes in systems of certainties about what is contingent, it is equally plausible to expect holes in systems of primitive certainties about what is not contingent.

One primitive axiological certainty discussed by Ortega is the value of political legitimacy. (IHU, 139ff., 174; RM; Ortega 1998, 111-118) When the 'collective belief' that a form of political organisation is legitimate 'cracks, then legitimacy weakens or disintegrates'. (IHU, 147) The content of beliefs about legitimacy have the form

the authority of x is legitimate because x is monarchic/liberal democratic/aristocratic etc because p.

The content of 'p' is, of course, variable and may refer to input, procedures, God, élites, history, output and much else beside. Ortega's claim might, then, be formulated as follows:

the authority of x is legitimate only if it is primitively certain that (x is legitimate because x is monarchic/liberal democratic/aristocratic etc because p).

Ortega comes close to saying just this:

Something is legally legitimate – the king, the Senate, the consul – if its exercise of Power is founded on the compact belief which protects every nation that it does in fact have the right to exercise that power. (IHU, 147)

Understood in this fashion Ortega's claim appears to express an idea often defended in the tradition of political thought running from Burke through to the Austrian economist and philosopher Hayek. Indeed Ortega takes himself to be developing

Hume's acute suggestion that the theme of history consists in demonstrating how the sovereignty of public opinion, far from being a Utopian aspiration, [and] is what has actually happened everywhere and always in human societies. (Revolt, 97; RM, 145)<sup>xxvii</sup>

This tradition is opposed to the much more popular rationalist or 'constructivist' (Hayek's term) view that political legitimacy should and therefore can be the object of widespread and permanent critical discussion. Constant once said that 'there is something miraculous in the awareness of legitimacy' (*De l'esprit de conquête*). If Ortega is right, the mystery disappears once we see that legitimacy must be primitively certain. The 'great fears' described by historians of illegitimacy such as Guglielmo Ferrero and by Ortega then look like very good examples of primitive uncertainty. And primitive political certainty appears to be one of the more plausible illustrations of the view that primitive certainty is just the absence of primitive uncertainty. Ortega understands primitive political certainty in terms of counting on. But we may think that it also involves an affective element, for example, trust. If so, then it is also a good example of Husserl's category of primitive affective certainties<sup>xxviii</sup>.

The deepest stratum the philosopher can lay bare, Husserl thinks, is pure consciousness. As Winkler puts it, for Husserl pure consciousness is something "final" that "cannot be shattered". "Here is hard ground that provides all digging down beneath the surface with a goal" (Winkler 1921, 6). Ortega, as we have seen, disagrees: what we count on, in particular rules, "constitutes the basic stratum, that which lies deepest in the architecture of our life" (HaS 288). Perhaps Wittgenstein would have agreed that the bedrock which turns the philosopher's spade (PI §217) is what we count on<sup>xxix</sup>.

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<sup>ii</sup> M. van den Hoven pointed out some of the most important similarities between the analyses of certainty in Ortega and Wittgenstein in his 1990 paper.

<sup>iii</sup> Scheler 1957, 241f., cf. Scheler 1982, 133f..

<sup>iv</sup> On Husserl on justification and evidence, cf. Follesdal 1988

<sup>v</sup> Reiner 1934, 27f., cf. Bassenge 1930 on hexis as disposition vs hexis as 'actual having'.

<sup>vi</sup> Against the idea that belief is any sort of affective or conative phenomenon, cf. Scheler 1957, 240f.. A recent defence of the nineteenth century view of belief as a matter of 'credal feelings' and as a passive disposition is Cohen 1992 (cf. Engel 2000). Cohen contrasts belief and what he calls 'acceptance'. His account of episodic acceptance has much in common with that given by Reinach, his account of acceptance as an enduring policy resembles Husserl's account of the results of spontaneous judging and decision. Although Husserl argues that judging has no polar opposite outside pragmatic contexts, his 1896 version of the propositional calculus contains a rejection operator.

<sup>vii</sup> Clearly, friends of primitive certainty owe us an account of justification. For many of them, I suspect, admissible answers to the how and why questions must be internally related to what they justify or ground.

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. Ni 1999.

<sup>ix</sup> On 'recessive' accounts, see Meinong 1968, 596. Marty 1908 §63 rejects Meinong's claim that certainty and uncertainty may be properties of objectives.

<sup>x</sup> Cf. Follesdal 1988.

<sup>xi</sup> The Spanish is more accurately translated as: 'the plurality of beliefs in which an individual, a people or an age is/finds itself' (HcS, 10)

<sup>xii</sup> Other examples of primitive uncertainties are the uncanniness described by Freud and many states described by Gogol and Kafka.

<sup>xiii</sup> Wittgenstein's remark, "The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief" (OC §160), suggests that his earlier investigations into the conceptual connexions between learning and meaning might be usefully revised by taking into account the distinction between founded and unfounded beliefs. The same is true of the

philosophical parts of Bühler's even earlier account of the relation between child psychology and the theory of language and mind.

<sup>xiv</sup> Claims to the effect that an apparently positive property does not wear the trousers are often extremely vague. A table is not ill, nor is it healthy. Perhaps we should say that for something to be healthy is for it to be possibly ill, in virtue of its nature, and for it not to be ill.

<sup>xv</sup> Ortega's remarkable account of primitive certainty doubtless owes much to Husserl and the other phenomenologists already mentioned or to be mentioned below. But Ortega seems to have developed the main features of his account of primitive certainty above all by reflecting on the historical works of Dilthey. In a paper published in 1933 and 1934, "William Dilthey and the Idea of Life" (D) Ortega sets out to formulate what he takes to be Dilthey's most important ideas. The task is, he points out, a difficult one since Dilthey himself never managed to formulate these ideas (D, 152). It is perhaps because of this that Ortega's reconstruction rarely quotes or gives precise references to Dilthey's writings. Dilthey saw, dimly, Ortega thinks, that if we take a belief or thought and reconstruct all the chains of motivation which lead someone to believe that something is the case we will eventually come across

a repertory of basic convictions (convicciones elementales) ... For example, all my claims to knowledge about material objects bear in themselves, as ingredients, the conviction that the external world exists (D, 173-4)

These basic convictions are threads in a texture which forms all my concrete pieces of knowledge but they themselves have no motivation. They are not conditions of possibility of knowledge and belief but conditions of their actuality (D, 173). They are rooted in sentiments and the will (D, 176). They are "the deepest stratum of our subjectivity", a "mental soil" (D, 195). A further stimulus for Ortega's reflections on belief was perhaps Fustel de Coulanges' classic study of ancient beliefs, *La Cité antique : étude sur le culte, le droit, les institutions de la Grèce et de Rome*, a work he knew well.

<sup>xvi</sup> On non-judgmental perceptual conviction, see Hazay 1913, a development of Meinong's views.

<sup>xvii</sup> Cf. Mulligan 1995.

<sup>xviii</sup> Perhaps the earliest discussion of certainty in action by one of Brentano's heirs is Scheler (1899) 1971, 110ff..

<sup>xix</sup> Cf. Husserl on "inaktuell" or pre-reflective awareness of one's mental states as belonging to a background, which is neither perception nor reflection nor knowledge (I, 95)

<sup>xx</sup> Hartmann (1931, 20; 1935, 30 b) describes the feature common to such future-directed "acts" as expecting, intimation, presentiment, readiness, rejoicing as a counting on, and as a special type of certainty.

<sup>xxi</sup> Transcendental phenomenology is not Cartesian foundationalism (K, 193)

<sup>xxii</sup> Cf. Follesdal 1988 126f..

<sup>xxiii</sup> Cf. Wright 1985, III; Wright, 2004; Kober 1993, 198ff.. Kober argues that Wittgensteinian certainties are not prescriptive but are nevertheless 'epistemic norms' (208). Gehlen 1940 §36 distinguishes between normative and non-normative 'irrational certainties'.

<sup>xxiv</sup> In this connexion he distinguishes between beliefs and pseudo-beliefs (HaS, IX) and between dead and living beliefs, a distinction he traces back to Mill *On Liberty*, ch. li. Cf. HS I 1936 287, HcS I-VII; *Unas Lecciones de Metafísica* IV, V, VIII, XIV; *Qué es Filosofía ?* III, VI

<sup>xxv</sup> Cf. Mulligan 2002

<sup>xxvi</sup> Scheler notes that the story of the hero of Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* is that of his transition from being an apparent criminal to being an enemy of the legal system.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Like Hayek, Ortega attaches great importance to English legal gradualism and common law (IHU, 182f., 284f..)

<sup>xxviii</sup> All friends of primitive certainty tend to slip into talking about trust, belief in and even faith while describing certainty. But trust and mistrust are affective attitudes towards people and other animate beings and attitudes towards states such as memory. They are forms of belief in. But one can believe in both people and non-people, for example, a state, the American Way of Life, deconstructionism and science. Just as to believe someone is to believe him to be trustworthy, so too, to believe in something, where it is not simply a belief that it exists, is to believe it to have some positive value. On trust and belief in cf. Reiner 1934, Schottländer 1957, Mulligan 2003.

<sup>xxix</sup> Winkler goes on to reject the comparison with digging down as inappropriate to Husserl's views. The philosopher must rather try to get into focus what is in fact close at hand, to which he has become blind (Winkler 1921 6). Ortega sometimes agrees (HaS 285). And so does Wittgenstein; if nothing is hidden, spades are superfluous (cf. Mulligan 1993).