

WHAT THE LANGUAGE OF THE THIRD REICH – AS DESCRIBED BY KLEMPERER – CAN TEACH US ABOUT CERTAINTIES IN WITTGENSTEIN’S SENSE

[O QUE A LINGUAGEM DO TERCEIRO REICH – COMO DESCRITO POR KLEMPERER – PODE NOS ENSINAR SOBRE CERTEZAS NO SENTIDO DE WITTGENSTEIN]

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ABSTRACT: Victor Klemperer (1881-1960) was a German Professor of Romance Languages who became famous especially for the writings in which he related how the Nazis deformed the German language to the extent of developing what he called ‘the language of the Third Reich’. In this paper, I aim to explain what this language reveals about certainties understood in Wittgenstein’s sense, which in turn might also contribute to providing a more comprehensive view of the extent to which the language of the Third Reich was carefully designed to decisively influence Germans’ attitude and worldview. Specifically, I will address eight issues: the perversion of morality through a radically bipolarized message; the creation of a context in which all judgements should be given up; the use of two kinds of persuasion; the bias for overgeneralizing the spreading of certainties; the difficulty of assessing borderline cases of being certain; the propagandistic mistake of crying out alleged certainties; the emotional exclusion of doubt – paying particular attention to the realms of army and religion as well as to the use of slogans and superlatives; and the replacement of Nazi world-pictures.

KEYWORDS: Klemperer; Wittgenstein; certainty; language; persuasion; Third Reich

RESUMO: Victor Klemperer (1881-1960) foi um professor alemão de línguas românicas que ficou famoso especialmente pelos escritos em que ele relatou como os nazis deformaram a língua alemã ao ponto de desenvolver o que ele chamou de “a língua do Terceiro Reich”. Neste artigo, pretendo explicar o que esta língua revela sobre certezas, compreendidas no sentido de Wittgenstein, o que, por sua vez, também pode contribuir para fornecer uma visão mais abrangente da medida em que a língua do Terceiro Reich foi cuidadosamente projetada para influenciar decisivamente a atitude e a visão de mundo dos alemães. Especificamente, abordarei oito questões: a perversão da moralidade através de uma mensagem radicalmente bipolarizada; a criação de um contexto no qual todos os julgamentos devem ser abandonados; o uso de dois tipos de persuasão; o enviesamento para a generalização excessiva das certezas; a dificuldade de avaliar casos-limite de certeza; o erro propagandístico de gritar alegadas certezas; a exclusão emocional da dúvida - prestando especial atenção aos domínios do exército e da religião, bem como ao uso de slogans e superlativos; e a substituição de imagens do mundo nazis.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Klemperer; Wittgenstein; certeza; linguagem; persuasão; Terceiro Reich

INTRODUCTION

When the Nazis came into power in 1933, Victor Klemperer was a Professor of Romance Languages at the Technical University of Dresden. Although he was German, strongly identified with German culture, and had previously

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volunteered to serve in the First World War, where he earned the Bavarian cross of military merit, he started to suffer from the brutal restriction of fundamental rights and freedoms that Nazis imposed on Jewish citizens. In fact, Klemperer gradually lost his job, his car, his house, and his right not only to possess a number of things – such as appliances, pets or books, among many others – but also to have free access to food and money. Furthermore, he saved his life because he was married to Eva Schlemmer, an ‘Aryan’ German painter with whom he survived by an extraordinary stroke of luck the heavy Allied forces’ bombing of Dresden on 15 February 1945, the very day he was scheduled to be deported because the protection of marriage had just been stripped away.

As Klemperer was a philologist, he was particularly sensitive to the language used by the Third Reich to spread its heinous propaganda and, by extension, to manipulate the Germans’ mentality. As a result, Klemperer began to record in his diaries all those remarks on personal experiences, conversations, jokes, slogans, newspaper articles, radio broadcasts, and speeches by Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels that contributed to shed light on the language developed by the Third Reich. As he was gathering a large number of interesting remarks – which were carefully hidden because they placed his life at risk – he decided to write a book entitled *LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii: Notizbuch eines Philologen*, published in German in 1947, and later translated into English by Martin Brady as *The Language of the Third Reich*.¹ Although an attentive reader of this book may become distracted by its multiple errors in typography, orthography, punctuation and footnoting, it provides a sharp analysis of the language of the Third Reich – henceforth ‘LTI’ – “from a philological point of view” (HUNT, 2019, p. 267). Yet Klemperer (LTR, p. 13) admitted that there remains a lot of work to be done in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of LTI not only by philologists – i.e. “Germanists and scholars of the Romance languages, English specialists and Slavonicists” – but also by “historians and economists, lawyers and theologians, engineers and scientists”, thus without considering potential contributions from philosophers.² In this paper, however, I hope to show how philosophers can contribute to this task. Even though my main goal is to explain what LTI – as described by Klemperer – can teach us about certainties in Wittgenstein’s sense, I think that this task can also serve to reach a more comprehensive view of the extent to which LTI was carefully designed to modify the Germans’ certainties.³ As a matter of fact, I will start by noting that Klemperer’s description of the effects of LTI on the population can also be described as the collective acquisition of outrageous certainties, which will, incidentally, allow me to present the main traits of LTI and certainties. Subsequently, I will explain what LTI reveals about certainties. Specifically, I will address eight issues: the perversion of morality through a radically bipolarized message; the creation of a context in which all judgements should be given up; the use of two kinds of persuasion; the bias for overgeneralizing the spreading of certainties; the difficulty of assessing borderline cases of being certain; the propagandistic mistake of crying out alleged certainties; the emotional exclusion of doubt – paying particular attention to the realms of army and religion as well as to the use of slogans and superlatives; and the replacement of Nazi world-pictures.

WHAT LTI CAN TEACH US ABOUT CERTAINTIES

Wittgenstein’s later work is characterized by frequent descriptions of language-games (cf. PI §109; OC §189), understood as “the whole, consisting of language and the

actions into which it is woven” (PI §7). Bearing in mind that Klemperer’s descriptions of the LTI concern very diverse situations and contexts in which this language is used, it could be argued that, in a sense, he was describing language-games in order to achieve his goal: specifically, he aimed to establish the “spirit” of the Third Reich from its language, for this should yield its most general, infallible, and comprehensive description (Da, p. 491). Since Klemperer made reference to the ‘spirit’ of the Third Reich, we may think that he wanted somehow to unveil the very basis of the LTI’s language-games.⁴ And, according to Wittgenstein, what can be found at the bottom of our language-games is “an ungrounded way of acting” (OC §§204, 110), that is, a number of certainties or “attitudes” (OC §404) that are shown in what we say and do (cf. OC §431) in such a way that seeming doubts and mistakes about them are regarded as incomprehensible (cf. OC §§498, 572, 614, 674, etc.) The whole of the certainties shared by a community make up what Wittgenstein called its “world-picture” (OC §§93-95), which as long as it is shared cannot be corrected because it constitutes the “background” against which such community distinguishes between true and false (OC §94). Hence, Klemperer’s aim to unveil the spirit of the Third Reich might become more comprehensive if the world-picture of the Third Reich were exposed by revealing the certainties implicit in the LTI. But let us now see what Klemperer says about the dissemination procedure of the LTI in order to better understand its similarities with certainties:

No, the most powerful influence was exerted neither by individual speeches nor by articles or flyers, posters or flags; it was not achieved by things which one had to absorb by conscious thought or conscious emotions. (LTR, p. 15)

According to Wittgenstein, knowledge-statements require that “one is ready to give compelling grounds” that are surer than the assertion of what one believes (OC §243), but we cannot “consciously” arrive at a certainty “by following a particular line of thought” (OC §103). Indeed, he adds that certainty “is anchored in all my questions and answers, so anchored that I cannot touch it” (OC §103) through a conscious process such as thinking. After all, certainty is ungrounded (cf. OC §307), ineffable (cf. OC §§395, 466), and cannot be invalidated even when evidence seems to contradict it (cf. OC §§662-663). Therefore, both certainties and the LTI are disseminated through procedures, such as constant repetition, which do not require to follow any line of thought:

Instead Nazism permeated the flesh and blood of the people through single words, idioms and sentence structures which were imposed on them in a million repetitions and taken on board mechanically and unconsciously. (LTR, p. 15)

I will later consider the pernicious effect of the constant repetition of LTI on Germans. Now I want to draw attention to the scope of LTI. Ariso (2011) listed a number of close similarities between Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘certainty’ and the conception of ‘belief’ developed in 1934 by Ortega y Gasset (2007, p. 24), who remarked that we *are* our beliefs, which in turn constitute our very self. Similarly, it could be argued that our certainties make up our identity to a great extent. As Moyal-Sharrock (2004) pointed out, some certainties are shared by all normal human beings, while others are shown by a community at a given time; but certainties also concern linguistic rules and even one’s own biography, perceptions, states and spatiotemporal position. Meanwhile, Klemperer describes how a language such as LTI permeates people’s ‘flesh and blood’, thus deeply conditioning them:

But language does not simply write and think for me, it also increasingly dictates

my feelings and governs my entire spiritual being the more unquestioningly and unconsciously I abandon myself to it (LTR, p. 15).

If this remark is interpreted in terms of certainties, it should be noted that the certainties implicit in a language such as LTI indicate the bounds of sense for people who often and fluently speak it. Indeed, Wittgenstein states that the possibility of making a mistake about a certainty is “logically excluded” (OC §194). However, this logic is not the traditional one which is valid in all possible worlds, but a particular logic generated by the language-games in which a community takes part (cf. OC §628). Thus, when someone infringes a certainty, she may be regarded as mad by the community that shares such certainty (cf. OC §§281, 611). If someone put into question a certainty, we would not say that he was in error; instead, we should note that he was simply reacting in a different way. In Wittgenstein’s words, “[w]e rely on calculations, he doesn’t; we are sure, he isn’t” (OC §217). In this context, the madman appears as an individual who has unintentionally deviated from a community by becoming unable to keep sharing its common world-picture (cf. ARISO 2012). The madman thus illustrates the danger of sudden and unavoidable deviation from the common world-picture, which contributes to further strengthen the feeling of belonging to a group which was already characterized by the deep agreement of its members concerning countless certainties. Klemperer also stresses the significance of this sense of belonging to a group or, by extension, even to a nation:

Belonging to a nation depends less on blood than on language. [...] It is not being born into it that is decisive, but immersion as an infant, as ‘one who does not yet speak’. [...] But all the elements of culture, which one absorbs consciously or unconsciously, are carried along by the river of language. [...] If I have grown up in a language, then I am under its spell for ever, I can in no way, through no act of my will, withdraw from the nation whose spirit lives in it and no stranger’s command can detach me from it. (Db, pp. 238-239)

Klemperer’s claim “Language is more than blood!” (LTR, p. 210) might, in my view, be reformulated by saying that one can discontinue his relationship with immediate relatives, but no one can abandon a world-picture at will. Indeed, certainties can be neither lost (ARISO 2013) nor acquired (ARISO 2016) at will. Each child assimilates them through a lengthy immersion in a world-picture that parents and teachers convey to it even without being aware of such a continuous teaching process. Just as Klemperer says that the poisonous words characteristic of LTI are “swallowed unnoticed” (LTR, p. 15), Wittgenstein notes that the child “swallows” consequences down “together with what it learns” (OC §143), so that in both cases the individual remains unaware of what she is actually swallowing. Of course, it is much more difficult to acquire a world-picture when the individual already has a previous one. For, as Klemperer pointed out, the concerned individual’s will and the persuader’s intention are not in themselves sufficient to modify any certainty. This is why the Third Reich carried out an extremely intense campaign to disseminate LTI. And, unfortunately, many Germans ended up acquiring perfidious certainties even regardless of their will. It was not something they *did*, but something that *happened* to them.

After this brief presentation of the close relationship between the main traits of certainties and the LTI, I should like to address eight issues that will help me to shed more light on this relationship.

One of the keys to the success of Nazi propaganda could lie in the extreme simplicity of its message. In fact, this message was so simple that it hardly had any content. For its goal was to set critical thinking aside and, above all, to incite to action.

Klemperer himself stresses that the entire vocabulary of LTI “is dominated by the will to movement and to action” (LTR, p. 233). Since the LTI is aimed at triggering mass action, it constitutes “the language of mass fanaticism” (LTR, p. 23)⁵ based on “exhortation, invective”: the written LTI can be declaimed or, even better, screamed out because its style is “the style of the loud and vociferous rabble-rouser” (LTR, p. 22). Of course, mass action must be directed towards some goal. In Klemperer’s words, “the LTI particularly loathes neutrality, because it always has to have an adversary” (LTR, p. 76). It goes without saying that the chosen enemy was the Jew: “*the Jew* is in every respect the centre of the LTI” (Da, p. 410). Yet anti-Semitism became “something entirely new and unique” in the Third Reich because the Jews were no longer seen as a group alien to Christian faith and society, but as a different race (LTR, p. 137). This means that Jews previously could compensate such situation by adopting the country’s customs and religion; however, the fact that the Third Reich displaced the difference between Jews and non-Jews into the blood made any compensation impossible, thus perpetuating the division and legitimizing it “as willed by God” (LTR, p. 137). As a result, proclaimed the LTI, the Jew was to blame for everything, and had to be exterminated in Europe (Db, p. 285).⁶ However, the idea that Jews should be exterminated was not disseminated by the LTI as a knowledge-statement, but as if it were a certainty: hence, such an infamous certainty could not be grounded at all. As said above, the key was to incite to spontaneous action, which would have been hindered if Nazis had provided arguments that could be discussed and even refuted.

The anti-Semite certainty disseminated by the Third Reich was closely related to other certainties. To begin with, Hitler “turned all his enemies into Jews” (Da, p. 357), so that the adjective ‘Jewish’ had “the bracketing effect of binding together all adversaries into a single enemy” (LTR, p. 181). The fact of identifying a single and fearsome enemy facilitates that the allegedly threatened group develops the sense of belonging to a specific community: furthermore, such community often overestimates its own virtues while undervaluing the enemy’s ones. In this vein, Klemperer claims that, if Hitler had really exterminated all the Jews, he should have created new ones because “without the swarthy Jew there would never have been the radiant figure of the Nordic Teuton” (LTR, p. 181). According to the LTI, the origins of European culture stemmed from the Northern Teutons: if necessary, “the Hellenes and even Christ were of blond-haired-blue-eyed-Nordic-Teuton origin”, while all plagues and menaces came from Syria or Palestine (LTR, p. 165). Eventually, concludes Klemperer, “[t]he sense of a common bond linking humanity is entirely lost”, for all virtues and perfections were concentrated in Nazi Germany, whereas all vices and sins remained outside (LTR, p. 143). In short, the anti-Semite certainty and the certainty about the ‘Aryan’ virtue were mutually reinforcing.

This sinister context paved the way for the perversion of morality. Klemperer admitted that moral concepts had “become completely confused” (Da, p. 410). To give but one couple of examples, he recalls how two completely anti-Nazi girls thought that there was nothing at all wrong with the execution of two young aristocratic women in Berlin for espionage: these girls “did not ask questions about the difference between martial law and peacetime law, about the protection of a public trial etc.” (Da, pp. 138-139). Additionally, Klemperer recounts that a woman whose Jewish husband had been murdered by the Nazis claimed that the most terrible thing for her was that people *always* said: “But your husband *must* have done something, they don’t just kill someone for no reason!”. To this Klemperer added that in such a case even Jews said: “He must surely have done something, covered the star or been on the street after eight” (Db, p. 240). As we can see, even Jews themselves often did not consider the principle of

presumption of innocence when Nazis killed a Jew. Hence, the spontaneous reaction of admitting that the assassinated individual ‘must have done something’ indicates that they no longer shared the certainty according to which one must be deemed innocent until proven guilty.⁷

Wittgenstein claimed that each certainty stands fast “not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it” (OC §144). As certainties “form a system, a structure” (OC §102), we do not acquire isolated certainties, but a system or world-picture made up by certainties (cf. OC §§141, 225). As a result, if someone started doubting a certainty, there would be no judgement we could be certain of (cf. OC §§419, 490, 494), for the world-picture is not “more certain that a certainty within it” (OC §185). By way of example, if someone called into question that the Earth existed long before her birth, she should also doubt all other certainties (OC §234), including the meaning of the words she has used (cf. OC §456). Moreover, we could not understand this individual because we “would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not” (OC §231).

Let us now consider some examples about how basic certainties were put into question in Nazi Germany. It is expected that the most reliable information sources were the Government, the university, the academic journals, mass media, and intellectuals. However, German authorities often used the term ‘*Untermensch*’ to refer to ‘non-Aryan’ people they deemed as inferior, for example in a pamphlet edited by Himmler that said so: “Although it has features similar to a human, the subhuman is lower on the spiritual and psychological scale than any animal. [...] Mulattoes and Finn-Asian barbarians, Gypsies and black skin savages all make up this modern underworld of subhumans that is always headed by the appearance of the eternal Jew” (REICHSFÜHRER-SS 1942). Regarding the university, Klemperer made reference to the announcement ‘When a Jew writes German he lies’, which was “supposed to have been put up on all German university noticeboards” (LTR, p. 29). Concerning academic journals, Klemperer reports that “[t]he philological journals, the journal of the university association have adopted the opinions and jargon of the Third Reich to such an extent that every page makes one feel sick” (Da, p. 46). Meanwhile, newspapers printed slogans of the kind of ‘Who fights the Jew, wrestles with the devil’ (Da, p. 227). Lastly, many intellectuals expressed their firm belief in Hitler and also encouraged other people to have faith in him, to which Klemperer added that he “unfortunately never had any reason to doubt that as well as coming from the lips”, the intellectuals’ profession of faith “also came from the heart” (LTR, p. 113). This profession of faith, as such, does not violate any certainty; yet it reveals that a number of intellectuals supported – or maybe even shared – Hitler’s convictions and, by extension, Nazi certainties.⁸ As if this was not enough, it should also be kept in mind that these messages were repeated *ad nauseam* in press and radio, to the extent that even Jews often “repeat the nonsense which is hammered into everyone” (Da, p. 203). Indeed, empirical research on the illusory truth effect has proved that repeated statements are perceived to be more truthful not only than new statements (SILVA ET AL. 2017; UNKELBACH ET AL. 2019), but also than stored knowledge (FAZIO ET AL. 2015). Proof of this is that even Klemperer recognized the impact of the constant repetition of slogans on him because of their being repeated “so brazenly and impudently” (Db, 423).

Concerning all these blatant violations of certainties, we should conclude that no one could understand those people who proclaimed them. By way of example, we would not accept any evidence to prove that Jews are subhumans – admittedly, I do not even know what such evidence could look like – but a recalcitrant Nazi might argue that he would not consider any evidence against Jews’ alleged subhumanity either. Despite

everything, Nazi certainties largely spread in Germany. According to Klemperer, the LTI “became the language of the people, i.e. it seized hold of all realms of public and private life: politics, the administration of justice, the economy, the arts, the sciences, schools, sport, the family, playschools and nurseries” (LTR, p. 19). In this vein, Klemperer noted that if he, a professor schooled in thinking all his life, could hardly guard against believing Nazi propaganda, “how shall millions of naive people guard against it?” (Da, p. 51). In line with this, and concerning Wittgenstein’s claim according to which someone could not be certain of any judgement if he started doubting a certainty (cf. OC §§419, 490, 494), I would like to stress that such uncertainty is not shown in what people say and do: indeed, no one seemed to wonder in Nazi Germany how she could be certain of something after having put a basic certainty into doubt. Instead, one can only become aware of the mentioned uncertainty by considering philosophical arguments, which explains why the Nazis’ capacity for judgement seemed to remain intact.

Wittgenstein used the term ‘persuasion’ in two different ways. Regarding the *strong* sense of ‘persuasion’, Persichetti (2021, p. 5) claimed that a child is persuaded in Wittgenstein’s sense (cf. OC §§262, 612) when he “acquires a world-picture for the first time”; yet Ariso (2022a, p. 1624) pointed out that “Wittgenstein’s examples of persuasion concern people who *already* have different world-pictures, or rather, different certainties about the particular point on which they disagree”. Indeed, certainties are initially acquired through a lengthy process of immersion in a world-picture – usually during childhood – while persuasion is aimed at correcting those persuadee’s certainties that do not fit the ones expected by the persuader. Thus, it could be said that the Third Reich carried out an attempt at collective persuasion. In Klemperer’s (LTR, p. 23) words, “[t]he sole purpose of the LTI is to strip everyone of their individuality, to paralyse them as personalities, [...] to turn them into atoms in a huge rolling block of stone”. Yet Klemperer thinks that Goebbels pursued this aim in a wrong way. Instead of retaining the public’s “freedom of choice” – as enterprises do when advertising a razor blade while being countered by many others – Klemperer (Da, p. 92) says that Goebbels simply “binds” people by always and monotonously offering the same single thing. Likewise, Hitler did not address the city state in the agora – where objections can be expected at every moment – but through the wireless, so that no one can contradict him, thus remaining “completely unchecked” (Da, p. 493). It should be noted, however, that the fact of considering doubts or arguments hinders the acquisition as well as the subsequent expression of certainties (cf. ARISO 2019b). That is why Nazi leaders did their best to avoid critical thinking. To this end, they used resources such as what I regard as a *loose* sense of persuasion, according to which the individual is “persuaded to neglect” particular differences (LC, p. 27). Wittgenstein illustrated this kind of persuasion through the expression “This is really only this” (LC, p. 24), which, in turn, had a sinister echo in the slogan “Hitler is Germany; Germany is Hitler” that Rudolph Hess famously uttered at the 1934 Nuremberg Party Rally. In this case, Germans were invited to concentrate on the identification of Hitler with Germany, thus sidelining grounds and facts that could lead Germans to put such an identification into question. Yet while in this kind of loose persuasion the persuadee can overcome the persuader’s intention by deciding whether he considers the alternatives that the persuader wants him to neglect, in cases of strong persuasion certainties are not acquired at will by the persuadee. The way I see it, in this case the persuader can be blamed for his intention to impose a world-picture upon another individual (e.g. SIEGEL, 1988) because no one can persuade unintentionally, but the acquisition of a certainty is something that eventually *happens* to the persuadee regardless of his will.⁹

When one looks for explanations of human history, it is tempting to focus on

macro-interpretations that clarify once and for all world history. For example, Spengler (1926) and Toynbee (1934) held that human history should be regarded as a process in which civilizations pass through the stages of rise, maturity, and fall. Meanwhile, Ortega y Gasset (2008) claimed that the belief – which I will take here as a synonym for ‘certainty’ – in God was substituted in the 16th century by belief in reason. Yet such claim provides a too simplistic and biased view of reality. In this sense, Wittgenstein had previously written:

[Freud] wanted to find some one explanation which would show what dreaming is. [...] And he would have rejected any suggestion that he might be partly right but altogether so. If he was partly wrong, that would have meant for him that he was wrong altogether. (LC, p. 48)

One may be tempted to think that complex issues must necessarily be solved by finding out mono-causal explanations. By way of example, some people might conclude after watching some films about the Second World War that the Holocaust was merely due to the fact that all Germans without exception were mentally deranged Nazis. In fact, there may be people who take for granted that all Germans shared the Nazi world-picture during the Third Reich. Yet keeping in mind, on the one hand, that certainties cannot be adopted at will, and on the other hand, that Nazi certainties were particularly ludicrous, it should be expected that Nazi certainties were not unanimously assimilated by about 80 million people:

[T]here arose a number of local moral – or rather, immoral – certainties encouraged by the Third Reich and assimilated by the population to varying degrees, e.g. that killing Jews was not wrong but necessary. Some may have shared this certainty; others may have tried to do so unsuccessfully; still others may have pretended to share it, just to avoid problems; many others abhorred it; and there may even have been people who remained indifferent to the matter. (ARISO 2022b, p. 69)

This variety is illustrated by the different testimonies offered by Klemperer. Despite recognizing that Hitler’s success was due to the fact that he “really does embody the soul of the German people, that he really stands for ‘Germany’” (Da, p. 286; see also pp. 283, 291, 308), the enormous variety of attitudes found by Klemperer in his daily life leads him to admit time and again that “[t]he most insoluble and yet decisive riddle is the mood of people. What does it believe?” (Da, p. 400; see also pp. 356, 430, 436, 470, 472, 475; LTR, p. 51). Researchers who remain deeply engaged in the search for mono-causal explanations of complex social events – which would allow them to formulate categorial and far-reaching conclusions – may be disappointed to find out that a particular society was driven by a variety of certainties and even world-pictures mixed with diverse doubts, fantasies and fears. Yet such a motley background can help us to better understand a particular society, although this task will surely require an extensive research work that has nothing to do with the seeming charm of unveiling a hidden certainty that appears to suddenly explain a whole enigma.

Among the great variety of attitudes towards Hitler and the Third Reich, there were also borderline cases which reflect the occasional difficulty of assessing whether or not a specific individual shares a particular certainty. To illustrate this difficulty, now I am going to present four examples taken from Klemperer’s notes. Firstly, a woman who had “made a wild, hysterical declaration for the ‘Führer’” was confuted by Klemperer, to which she answered: “I cannot discuss it. I have faith” (Ds, p. 84). Secondly, another woman could not conceive how a German woman could be married to Klemperer, “a foreigner, a creature from another branch of the animal kingdom”, to the extent that “her

feelings could not grasp” such a fact (LTR, p. 98). Thirdly, a woman who belonged to the old nobility stated that classical writers such as Herder would be convinced of the Führer’s greatness. Klemperer asked where that certainty came from, to which the woman answered: “Where all certainties come from: faith. [...] Because I believe in him, and I had to tell you that I believe in him” (LTR, p. 110). Fourthly, Klemperer met an old pupil wearing a swastika. The pupil admitted: “I can’t deny it, I believed in him”. And when Klemperer remarked that he surely could no longer believe in Hitler, the old pupil confessed very quietly: “I accept all that. The others misunderstood him, betrayed him. But I still believe in HIM, I really do” (LTR, p. 122). In principle, all these individuals seem to share Nazi certainties, but it could also be the case that they were trying to appear as recalcitrant Nazis. In addition, we do not know if these seeming certainties were shown “partially or from time to time” (ARISO 2017, p. 9). Unfortunately, Klemperer does not offer more information about these cases, so that we cannot reach any firm conclusion on them.

Nevertheless, he mentions a very interesting means of detecting certainties: I am referring to the informers who “provoke citizens into speaking their mind, by grumbling themselves” (Da, p. 472). Let us see a couple of examples of how these informers acted. In the first instance, two ladies got on a railway compartment in which an officer and a lady were reading. Suddenly, the women started to complain about the government until the officer finally asked them to shut up. In that moment, the ladies showed their Gestapo badges and said: “It’s bad enough that you as an officer listened so long without saying anything. And the lady there didn’t protest at all. You will both be charged” (Db, p. 338). In the second example, a star-wearing Jew was abused on the street. When a small crowd gathered, some people took the Jew’s side. Shortly after, the Jew showed the Gestapo badge on the reverse of his jacket lapel, and noted the names of his supporters (Db, p. 338). Leaving aside for a while the treacherous intentions of these informers, I think this resource makes it possible to assess the spontaneous reactions and, by extension, the certainties that people shared on specific issues in contexts where they were not feeling tested at all.

Certainties are ineffable because they “have no use within a language-game – that is, there is no recognized context or circumstances in which the expression functions” (MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2004, p. 94). If we cannot find any context in which this expression gains sense, it remains nonsensical (cf. OC §468). Hence, there are contexts in which such expression no longer strikes us as meaningless (cf. OC §469). For instance, certainties bear saying “in heuristic situations, in situations where such rules of grammar are transmitted (through drill or training)” (MOYAL-SHARROCK, 2004, pp. 94-95). It might be argued that Nazi leaders used their speeches, among other things, to transmit certainties. Yet, unlike people who utter certainties quite calmly and with full conviction, Nazis transmitted certainties strangely. This is what Klemperer said about Hitler:

It seems that perhaps for the moment he is all-powerful – but the voice and gestures expressed impotent rage. Doubts of his own omnipotence? Does one unceasingly talk about a thousand years and enemies destroyed, if one is certain of these thousand years and this annihilation? (Da, p. 31; see also LTR, p. 32)

Bearing in mind that certainties are shown “in the way I act and in the way I speak about the things in question” (OC §395), when someone proclaims certainties so often and even with rage in order to transmit them to an audience that cannot raise any question or doubt, it may be wondered even whether he is actually certain of such things. As if this were not enough, everything must speak for and nothing against a

certainty (cf. OC §§89, 93, 117-119), to the extent that any doubt about it should remain unintelligible. However, Klemperer wonders: “Is it really a mark of strength, if literally every day a minister or the Führer himself declares, we have the strongest army in the world?” (Da, p. 367). And, as is well-known, it was very easy to call this seeming certainty into doubt. For,

if the Germans bombers are so absolutely irresistible, why is a fleet still blockading Narvik at all, how could English troops get to Norway, why is there still a single ship unharmed in Scapa Flow??? I cannot type enough question marks. (Da, pp. 403-404).

It should therefore come as no surprise that LTI always showed what Klemperer called “a bad conscience; its triad: defending oneself, praising oneself, accusing – never a moment of calm testimony” (Da, p. 305). After all, LTI was not aimed at giving testimony, but at triggering action: in the next section, we will see how they reached this goal by skilfully generating emotions.

Nazi leaders managed doubt in different ways. When they wished to cast the shadow of doubt over some expression or idea, they used what Klemperer called “ironic inverted commas” (LTR, p. 75). Conversely, when they wanted to dispel any doubt about something, they used expressions like ‘*Knif*’ – which stands for ‘*kommt nicht in Frage*’, i.e. out of the question – or ‘*Kakfif*’ – which stands for ‘*kommt auf keinen Fall in Frage*’, that is, absolutely out of the question (LTR, p. 91). Yet the most important and effective resource to dispel any doubts was to create contexts in which doubt and mistake are unintelligible not because of their logical exclusion (cf. OC §194), but due to their *emotional* exclusion – which, far from precluding the possibility that such exclusion ends up being logical, promotes it. After all, Hitler was fully aware that he could “only expect loyalty from those who inhabit a similarly primitive world”, which could be reached by promoting the earliest stage of human development in such a way that the individual horde of people regards “the neighbouring horde as an entirely different pack of animals” (LTR, p. 180). To explain how emotions were carefully managed by the Third Reich, now I will consider four examples from Klemperer’s notes: these examples are related to the realms of the military and religion, and to the use of slogans and superlatives.

As soon as a military superior gives an order, an absolutely determined squad starts parading with fully synchronized movements, or blindly throws itself against the enemy. This is the ideal of military training. It is therefore no accident that the term ‘*blindlings*’ – i.e. ‘blindly’ – became one of the most characteristic words of the LTI, as it denoted that, in order to carry out an order from a Nazi leader, one “mustn’t even begin to think about it” (LTR, p. 156). In this way, the soldier follows an order “just as a machine springs into action at the press of a button” (LTR, p. 157), which explains why the LTI used many words from the realm of technology. Paradoxical as it may sound, the soldier becomes identified with a machine after being emotionally engaged with his duty. In this sense, Klemperer recalls how Nazi troops marched singing vigorously even a few days before the bombing of Dresden: although those songs listed things that had already gone wrong, soldiers motivated themselves “because in song, in the melody, there is a meeting of moods, but in a communally spoken text there is supposed to be a convergence of thought within a group” (LTR, p. 255). Stated otherwise, Nazis promoted an emotional exclusion of doubt in the army with the aim – as all, or nearly all, other armies, I would dare to add – of soldiers moving and acting as efficient automatons for whom *any* doubt is unconceivable. From this standpoint, the automated movements of the ideal soldier might be contemplated as expressions of certainties of

the kind of ‘The best soldier always impresses his superior by forcefully reacting to an order as if he were an automaton alien to fear and doubt’, ‘I must follow each order even if it costs me my life’, or ‘There is no greater honour than dying for the homeland’.

When LTI enters the religious realm, the generation of emotions reaches its peak. To begin with, Klemperer noted that Hitler declaims like “a fanatical preacher” (Da, p. 91), with “[t]he unctuous bawling, truly bawling, of a priest” (Da, p. 6). Hitler was inspired by Mussolini’s style of addressing the crowds, which was characterized by

the passionately sermonizing, ritualistic and ecclesiastical intonation of his terse outbursts, each consisting of only the shortest of sentences, like fragments of a liturgy to which everyone can react emotionally without the least bit of intellectual effort, even if they don’t understand the meaning – indeed all the more so if they don’t. (LTR, p. 52)

Furthermore, the Third Reich appropriated the language of the Gospel, as a result of which millions of Germans accepted it as Gospel (cf. LTR, p. 121). To give some examples, Hitler referred to his sixteen followers who died in the Feldermhalle during the putsch of 8 November 1923 as “My Apostles”, to which he added: “You have risen again in the Third Reich” (LTR, pp. 114-115). Meanwhile, at the burial of those who died in action it was proclaimed: “He fell believing in his Führer to the last” (LTR, p. 125). Goebbels wrote that if the whole of mankind really knew Hitler, “it would bid farewell to its false gods and render him homage” (Db, p. 475). And when Hitler visited the workers in Siemensstadt, the radio announcement claimed “At the thirteenth hour Adolf Hitler will come to the workers”, just as if the Redeemer came to the poor (Da, p. 49). As regards the press, it not only worshipped Hitler “like God and the prophets rolled into one” (Da, p. 39), but also completely dechristianized the Thought for Christmas by focusing on “the rebirth of light of the German soul” (Da, p. 346).

On this basis, rituals also contributed to presenting National Socialism as a religion. A clear example of this was the Nuremberg Rally, where Hitler used the *Blutfahne* (Blood Banner) of 1923 to consecrate new SA colours by meeting both flags with cannon fire. In this ritual, “people sit there piously rapt” (LTR, p. 34): and how could these people harbour any doubt about such ritual? Indeed, despite all the horrors, in April 1945 many people still swore that the victorious German offensive would come on the Führer’s birthday, for “the Führer said so and the Führer doesn’t lie, he should be believed over and above any rational arguments” (LTR, p. 56). As “the Führer was not to blame” (Db, p. 578), it was not conceived that he could make any mistake. The alignment of Hitler and his actions with the Saviour and the Bible took place daily and “it was impossible to contradict it in any way” (LTR, p. 116), so that it was not possible to prove that Hitler was wrong. All this leads me to think that the Third Reich intended that certainties usually linked to God were applied to Hitler: I am referring to certainties of the kind of ‘God is omnipotent’, ‘He is kind to those who believe in Him’, and ‘He never harbours doubts or is wrong’.

Slogans appeared everywhere in Nazi Germany. For instance, subordinate leaders repeated time and again “Adolf Hitler is Germany” (Da, p. 105). *Der Stürmer*, a Nazi paper devoted to anti-Jewish hate stories and perfidious illustrations, was displayed at many street corners bearings slogans like “The Jews are our misfortune” or “Whoever knows the Jew, knows the devil” (Da, p. 144). A similar slogan, “Who fights the Jew, wrestles with the devil” could be found in another newspaper (Da, p. 227). Yet all these slogans could impress Germans only in a very particular way:

‘Command us Führer and we will follow!’ or ‘Our flags pledge victory!’ impressed themselves on the mind simply as banners, as phrases in their own right, and I

didn't know of any instance where a saying or word and an image belonged together sufficiently for the one to evoke the other. (LTR, p. 89)

As we can see, the meaning of most of these slogans was far from being clear, to the extent that it was virtually impossible to find images that illustrated them. What does "Hitler is Germany" actually mean? How can be checked whether the devil – even assuming its existence – can be known by knowing a Jew? And how can flags pledge victory? Of course, these slogans are not intended to promote debate or reflection, quite the opposite. These slogans may impress people to a greater or lesser degree, but they cannot be refuted. Instead, they constitute literary devices that are simply *experienced* either as fascinating or as repugnant, for readers cannot remain indifferent to these slogans because of their strong emotional load. Hence, their goal was to trigger action, thus bringing people away from doubt and critical thinking.

Since LTI was not intended to promote reflection but to trigger action by generating emotions, it should come as no surprise that the use of the superlative within the LTI was not based on grounds. Thus, although most Germans surely did not know in detail the characteristics of their army – and even less so the capacities of foreign armies – nearly all Germans were sure, according to Klemperer, not only that they had "the biggest army in the world, the best air defence in the world, the best fortifications in the world", but also that "Hitler is the greatest statesman" (Da, p. 331). The use of the superlative also became frequent in military bulletins: for instance, it was reported that Bialystok-Minsk constituted "the greatest battle of encirclement and attrition in world history" (Da, p. 511). As could be expected, Hitler also used the superlative for propaganda purposes. Thus, in his New Year Order of the Day in 1940, he proclaimed: "The year of 1941 will see the accomplishment of the greatest victory in our history" (Da, p. 445). Of course, the superlative is also used to despise enemies (cf. Da, p. 362; Db, p. 435). And when numerical evidence did not fit Nazis' expectations, they used striking terms instead of such evidence: for instance, the LTI used expressions such as "[t]he enemy's *unimaginably* bloody losses" (Da, p. 521), "world history *unparalleled* victories" (Da, p. 553), "[t]he enemy *totally* cut off" (Db, p. 382), or "the Third Reich is the *eternal* German Reich" (LTR, p. 114). As we can see, the way in which the superlative is used in the LTI is "half megalomania, half frantic auto-suggestion" (Da, p. 302). It could therefore be argued that Nazis employed the superlative in order to inoculate certainties by impressing Germans. In this vein, Klemperer notes that the superlative of the LTI had terrible consequences from the beginning because German language and people were not previously inoculated against it (cf. Da, p. 493; LTR, p. 228). As a result, many German citizens might have taken for granted that the Government and mass media used superlatives because they had compelling grounds to support such claims, which should thus be believed without any reservation.

The loss of some certainties does not entail that one cannot be certain of any judgement (cf. OC §§419, 490, 494), for there are alternative certainties or world-pictures to them. Thus, there are no alternatives to the certainty of our being alive, so that we cannot understand those individuals with Cotard syndrome who lose such certainty. Conversely, if one loses one or several religious certainties, one can end up sharing a number of alternative certainties. Beyond atheism, "there are also intermediate options like the diverse degrees and ways in which religious belief may be associated with doubt" (ARISO 2020, p. 662). In my view, this is also the case for Nazi certainties. Nazis were fully aware that many Germans shared other world-pictures, which explains that the Third Reich developed a huge propaganda campaign to impose its own ideals. They were acquainted with those alternative language-games and world-pictures, for

people around them shared them and many Nazis had been educated within such world-pictures. However, it is understandable that Nazi certainties were more easily assimilated by children who grew up in Nazi contexts. This is the testimony of a young woman who became one of Klemperer's students:

“We were taught a physical aversion to Jews. There was a class text: an Aryan girl marries a Jew; her horror as the racial characteristics became evidente in their child: black curly hair, crooked nose... I thought, it may be hard for the individual, but they must be got rid of, they are a contamination, this race... with dogs, too, we try to keep a pure pedigree...” (Dc, p. 202)

Then Klemperer asked her if she had never thought that it is the mind instead of the physical or the dog-breeding that counts with human beings, to which she replied:

“But we were taught that everything is derived from race... It made such an impression on me, Professor, when I heard you speaking in the theatre... I was very shaken, when I was told you were a Jew. I would never have believed it...” (Dc, p. 202)

At this point, I should like to draw attention to the loss of Nazi certainties. Specifically, it is not clear whether this young woman lost her anti-Semite certainty just when hearing Klemperer in the theatre; however, it is highly likely that this was not a sudden loss, but a time-consuming process. Such a process is more clearly hinted at in the case of another woman, about whom Klemperer succinctly wrote: “Schermer told us how badly Fräulein Uhlmann, who was morally intact, but had grown up believing completely in Nazism and the Führer, had suffered from collapse and learning the truth” (Db, p. 623). Unfortunately, Klemperer does not tell us anything else about this case; yet it is reasonable to presume that Fräulein Uhlmann's collapse and above all her ‘learning the truth’ unfolded over time. This leads me to think that, when someone loses a certainty, he does not necessarily acquire another certainty at that very moment. Instead, it may take time to assimilate a new certainty. In my view, this liminal space is worth studying, in particular taking into account that certainties are not acquired at will, so that the individual is meanwhile in a vulnerable position.

CONCLUSION

With this paper, I have attempted to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the LTI from a philosophical standpoint. Specifically, I have shown how LTI aimed, albeit implicitly, at modifying Germans' certainties. Of course, this analysis cannot account for the issue that Goldhagen (2003) regarded as the most relevant one to understand the Holocaust, i.e. the excessive cruelty with which Nazis treated their victims. Just as Pleasants (2004, p. 195) claims that Goldhagen was wrong when stating that this issue could be explained by taking into account the perpetrators' “eliminationist anti-Semitic beliefs about the nature and influence of Jews, in combination with their moral sense of justice and duty”, I think that such issue cannot be explained by claiming that Nazis shared a number of certainties either. Nonetheless, I have remarked eight things that the LTI can teach us about certainties in Wittgenstein's sense. First, mass action is triggered more efficiently by transmitting certainties than knowledge-statements, for action is hindered when it is grounded on arguments that could be discussed and even refuted. Second, the incapacity of being certain of any judgement – when one starts doubting a certainty – is not *experienced* but reasoned by the concerned individual. Third, the persuadee can avoid at will persuasion in the loose

sense, but not in the strong one. Fourth, just as there is a bias towards explaining complex social events through a mono-causal explanation, one may be tempted to explain them by considering one particular certainty. Fifth, occasional and categorical testimonies of one's being faithful do not suffice to conclude whether such faith can also be regarded as certainty, but there are interesting resources like Nazi – deplorable – informers that can greatly contribute to assess it. Sixth, certainties can be uttered for heuristic purposes, but they must be appropriately transmitted to prevent suspicions. Seventh, the emotional exclusion of doubt about a specific issue facilitates the logical exclusion of doubt about it in a future. And eighth, the substitution of one certainty by another sometimes takes a significant amount of time, which creates a liminal space worth studying because it may help us to understand how and why a particular certainty is assimilated instead of another one.

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Abbreviations for Klemperer's works

LTR = The Language of the Third Reich;
Da = I Shall Bear Witness: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1933-1941;
Db = To the Bitter End: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1942-1945;
Dc = The Lesser Evil: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1945-1959.

Abbreviations for Wittgenstein's works

LC = Lectures and conversations on aesthetics, psychology and religious belief;
OC = On Certainty;
PI = Philosophical Investigations.

NOTAS

- 1 As indicated above, in this paper I will use abbreviations for some works. Thus, I will refer to Klemperer's *The Language of the Third Reich* as 'LTR', while the three volumes of his diaries will be mentioned as 'Da', 'Db' and 'Dc', respectively. Moreover, I will employ the abbreviations 'OC' to refer to Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, 'PI' for his *Philosophical Investigations*, and 'LC' to make reference to his *Lectures and conversations on aesthetics, psychology and religious belief*.
- 2 This may be due to Klemperer's often admitted inability to understand philosophical issues.
- 3 Kusch (2017) published an insightful chapter on certainties that appeared during the Third Reich, but he focused on the analysis of survivors' linguistic despair when expressing their personal experiences.
- 4 After all, LTI was not just a cluster of idioms, but a practice so repeated and widespread that eventually, said Klemperer (LTR, p. 205), one breathed LTI and lived according to it.

- 5 Throughout the entire era of the Third Reich, says Klemperer (LTR, p. 62), the term ‘fanaticism’ was “an inordinately complimentary epithet” that constituted a “gloriously eloquent fusion” of the virtues of courage, devotion of persistence, thus without any pejorative connotation.
- 6 This infamous message was easily adopted by the dullest section of the population, says Klemperer, because it regarded anyone who dressed or spoke differently not simply as a different person, but as “a different animal from a different sty with whom there can be no accommodation, and who must be hated and hounded out” (LTR, p. 179).
- 7 Arguably, this last example seems to show that Jews themselves had assumed there were a number of trivial reasons to justify their own execution by the Nazis. Nevertheless, I think that such evidence does not allow us to clarify this issue. Maybe Jews did not regard at all covering the star or being on the street after eight as justifications for their being killed, but as the unfair conditions that Nazis imposed for daily life.
- 8 There were many other Nazi certainties. For instance, Author (2019a) notes that, due to the influence of Weimer (1925), mistakes were not contemplated in German schools as expected events from which pupils could learn, but as aberrations which should be avoided at all costs. Furthermore, Kusch (2017) lists a number of certainties shared by Holocaust survivors.
- 9 Even though certainties cannot be acquired at will, we should avoid the exculpatory implications of portraying the situation as one in which the mass of the population were cynically manipulated by a brainwashing elite. I am grateful to Nigel Pleasants for this remark.