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# 1

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## Introduction

Although the current study has one clear focal point, it in fact has a twofold goal. This dissertation not only aims to give a thorough analysis of Wittgenstein's view on human subjectivity, but also wants to evaluate the objections that are frequently raised against such non-Cartesian accounts.

In line with the dual nature of the explorations that follow, the current introduction has more than one goal as well. That is to say, in this chapter I will lay out my reasons for devoting a study to Wittgensteinian subjectivity and to the arguments against accounts of this kind, as well as describe how I more precisely plan to go about analyzing these matters, but before I can explain any of this, the meaning of the main terms I use needs to be clarified. "Subjectivity" is neither an uncontested nor an unequivocal term and "Wittgenstein" is, in a similar vein, not the label for one clearly definable and universally recognized philosophical position. Let me therefore start by expounding what both the word "subjectivity" and the name "Wittgenstein" are taken to mean in the current context. This explanation will then gradually evolve into an exposition of the rationale behind this study and of my plan of work, which form the other objectives of this introduction.

### 1.1 The many meanings of the term "subjectivity"

With regard to my use of the term "subjectivity" - but to already hint at my use of the name "Wittgenstein" as well - it should first of all be noted that this word does not exactly abound in ordinary everyday speech. When a situation does give rise to the employment of a term like "subjectivity" or "subjective", such terms are typically used to indicate, say, the partiality or relativity of a certain point of view, or of points of view in general. Yet while the relativity of viewpoints is certainly a topic of philosophical interest, this is not what philosophers by and large refer to when they use this word. And while Wittgenstein famously vowed to "bring words

back from their metaphysical to their everyday use,”<sup>1</sup> the relativity of viewpoints is not the topic of the following investigations either. One could say that this study explores “subjectivity” in the philosophical rather than the ordinary sense of the word.

That is not to say that there is one clear issue for which “subjectivity” in all philosophical discussions stands.<sup>2</sup> A treatise on subjectivity may concern several topics that, though not entirely unconnected, do not completely coincide either: topics like consciousness and self-consciousness, the phenomenality of experience, intentionality, personal identity, the relationship between mind and body or between mind and brain, and the so-called problem of other minds. In either of these guises, subjectivity has been a topic of philosophical concern for ages and has occupied thinkers on both sides of (what has become known as) the analytic-continental divide. In the course of the previous century, however, philosophical debate on subjectivity took a quite specific turn, primarily on account of thinkers that can be labelled “continental”. This development has already been told and retold to the point of having become a philosophical myth of sorts, but it nonetheless needs to be recounted here, too, in order to delineate more clearly what “subjectivity” in the context of the current study means.

Though the emergence of anti-Cartesianism undoubtedly has its roots in developments (both philosophical and non-philosophical) dating from before that period, somewhere during the twentieth century many thinkers became imbued with the thought that the philosophical tradition, if not commencing from then certainly taking a giant leap forward with the work of Descartes, had succeeded in misunderstanding the nature of man in all possible ways and therefore needed to be amended or even broken down in its entirety. If one would be pressed to give a more specific date to indicate the beginning of what has itself become a philosophical tradition, one could with sufficient right name the year Heidegger’s *Being and Time* appeared.<sup>3</sup> It has been pointed out that Heidegger’s account of Western thought was not in all respects the most accurate one, to say the least,<sup>4</sup> but his claim that the history of philosophy up until then was a history of the forgetfulness of being and, not unimportantly, of the being of human being, has nonetheless struck many as being all too true. Heidegger argued that by speaking of

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<sup>1</sup> PI 116.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Zahavi 2003, pp. 56-57. Zahavi observes that the renewed interest in subjectivity over the last decades led to a veritable upsurge in different - sometimes complementing, sometimes competing - notions of the self. As he points out, Niesser already distinguished 5 different conceptions of subjectivity in 1988, but by 1999 Strawson was able to list no less than 21 notions.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. Carr 1999, pp. 5-6; White 2000, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Both Carr 1999 and Sturma & Ameriks 1995 set out to paint a more nuanced picture of the history of subjectivity, in particular with regard to the German tradition. Seigel 2005 takes an even broader focus and aims to show that it is hard to find any modern Western thinker – including Descartes and Leibniz - subscribing to the black-and-white views on subjectivity often attributed to them by their critics. Let me also refer to Taylor 1989 here, trying to reconcile the advocates and critics of modern subjectivity by tracing the history of this notion.

“the *ego cogito* [...], the subject, the “I”,”<sup>5</sup> his predecessors inevitably yet incorrectly presented human being as just an object among others, and he proposed to analyse the nature or being of human being in terms of *Dasein* instead.

Following Heidegger’s example, it seems, terms like “subject” and “subjectivity” came to be used almost exclusively to refer to the worldless, Cartesian-style Ego:<sup>6</sup> to the idea that man can, on final analysis, be understood as a thinking substance whose inhabiting a (social) world and a body accordingly do not pertain to its essence. Following Heidegger’s example, moreover, other attempts were made to show, not just that human being does not come in the form of an ethereal and monadic self, but that its embodiedness and embeddedness had been explained away only at great, great cost. Not seldom, Heidegger himself was criticized for insufficiently breaking with traditional conceptualizations (with the later Heidegger, of course, among those questioning the satisfactoriness of his earlier analysis).<sup>7</sup>

At this point, the story of the subject’s vicissitudes can be relocated to another part of the continent, for the philosophers who most ardently appeared to want to finish what Heidegger had started, did not hail from German soil. Those who are in any case typically considered to have delivered the final blow to the Cartesian Ego are French thinkers like Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault.<sup>8</sup> By deconstructing the concept of subjectivity, writing it off as one grand narrative among others, or presenting the subject as a contingent product of power relations, each contributed to or even explicitly predicted the so-called “death of man”.<sup>9</sup> With these thinkers – often collectively though not entirely correctly placed under the banner “postmodern” – the critique of subjectivity gained new momentum and became the indisputable starting point for much theorizing, both in- and outside philosophy. (And, it could be added, both in- and outside the continent, for postmodernism also found firm footing among American academics.)

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<sup>5</sup> Heidegger 2000, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Critchley 1996, pp. 13-15. As Critchley points out, Heidegger may take the term “subject” to always already designate the Cartesian Ego, it was not used in the English language in that sense before 1796, and one would in fact be hard pressed to find Descartes using the term “subject” in this way.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Krell 1978, describing the development in Heidegger’s thinking. And while his arguments are by no means the same as those of the later Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty can for instance also be counted among *Dasein*’s critics; cf. Carman & Hansen 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. White 2000, p. 51; Benhabib 1992, p. 3. Of course, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard do not take their inspiration from exactly the same sources and it is moreover not only Heidegger to whom they are indebted. Indeed, as Descombes 1980 argues (see pp. 3-5), the development in French philosophy in the 1960’s can be explained as a dethroning of those inspired by the three H’s (Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger) by those inspired by the so-called masters of suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche and Freud).

<sup>9</sup> The death of man was famously proclaimed in Foucault 1973 (see p. 387); cf. Derrida 1969, pp. 39-40, pp. 54-55; Lyotard 1993a, pp. 20-21.

None of these developments, however, has so far made the philosophical use of terms like “subject” and “subjectivity” rare or even anachronistic. As soon as there was any talk of man being dead and buried, critics retorted that deconstructionism’s, postmodernism’s and/or post-structuralism’s anti-humanism<sup>10</sup> might even be more objectionable than the position it was meant to undermine. It was argued that the Cartesian Ego, for all its faults and dangers, at least still offers a site for agency and autonomy as well as a bearer of rights and responsibility – I will come back to these criticisms shortly. Yet even apart from the voices contending that at least some concept of subjectivity should be preserved, the thinkers labelled “postmodern” arguably never made all talk of self and subject entirely obsolete.

That is to say, on my understanding of the specific turn that the debate on subjectivity took, those responsible for the demise of the traditional subject did not set out to eradicate each and every notion of human being. Rather, they tried to move away from a particular way of explaining (to put it in traditional terms) the nature of man. And to be sure, conceptualized differently human being may not look anything like the Cartesian Ego, but that does not mean that its critics leave one wholly empty-handed. Their undertakings can accordingly be described, if the proper provisos are kept in mind, as a rethinking rather than an “un-thinking” of human being. Recently, as a result, terms like “subject” and “subjectivity” are increasingly used, not exclusively as a label for the self in its Cartesian guise, but also to more generally refer to that specific type of being we call “human being,” no matter how it is conceptualized.<sup>11</sup>

It is in the latter sense, to bring the first part of this terminological exposition to a close, that the current study concerns subjectivity as well. In what follows, “subjectivity” is used less as a shorthand for an outdated or detrimental philosophical figure than as a label for attempts, from the most one-sided to the most nuanced, to answer what Kant described as *the* philosophical question: “What is man?”<sup>12</sup> I will speak of anti-, non- or post-Cartesian subjectivity to distinguish the accounts that emerged during the previous century from the more traditional ones.<sup>13</sup> Now I realize that one might already conceive of this terminology as a concession - and a fatal one at that - to Cartesian-style explanations of what it

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<sup>10</sup> See Ferry & Renault 1985, pp. 18-25.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Nancy 1991, pp. 4-5; Nancy explicitly points to these two uses of the term, one more negative and one more positive. Also, cf. Critchley 1996, discussing the possibility of “post-deconstructive subjectivity”; Benhabib 1992, promoting the “situated self”; White 2000, making a case for the “sticky subject” of “weak ontology” (see p. 8), to give just a few examples.

<sup>12</sup> Kant 1992, p. 538.

<sup>13</sup> I am aware, as I already tried to put across, that traditional accounts of subjectivity are not always fairly represented, but it is not within the scope of this dissertation to paint a more nuanced picture thereof. Albeit with some reluctance, I will simply speak of “the philosophical tradition” and will also use the label “Cartesian” to characterize all traditional accounts of the nature of man. Again, see e.g. Seigel 2005 for an attempt to paint a more nuanced picture of the philosophical tradition.

means to be a human being, but here I take a Wittgensteinian stance. For while Wittgenstein was, no less than Heidegger, aware that one should be careful not to be misled by the words one uses, he did not conclude that one should therefore “aim to refine or complete [...] the use of our words in unheard-of ways.”<sup>14</sup> On his view, what matters is not so much *what* concepts one employs as *how* one employs them. Or to put it in the words of *Culture and Value*, assuming that what holds for a notion like “the Trinity” holds for a notion like “the subject” too: “Really what I should like to say is that here too what is important is not the words you use [...] so much as the difference that they make at different points in your life.”<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2 The many meanings of the name “Wittgenstein”

This brings me to the fact that this study does not concern subjectivity *tout court* but takes subjectivity according to or after *Wittgenstein* as the topic of its investigation. (And according to or after the *later* Wittgenstein, to be exact.) Even though Wittgenstein is not typically counted among the philosophers of a continental bend, he is frequently mentioned as one of the thinkers responsible for the anti- or non-Cartesian turn that the debate on subjectivity took.<sup>16</sup> This is not without right, for in spite of the fact that he never explicitly took part in the debate about the subject, many of Wittgenstein’s remarks can be said to address the problems or puzzles surrounding subjectivity. In addition to demonstrating that meaning cannot be considered to be a mental object and that normativity is always already a public and practical affair, much of his writings - circa- as well as post-*Investigations* - consider what it means that we take thoughts and feelings to be inner, for instance, and explore the socio-linguistic preconditions for being able to talk about matters mental. What is more, Lyotard explicitly draws on Wittgenstein’s notion of a language game in order to unmask the grand narratives such as those of modern subjectivity.<sup>17</sup>

However, while Wittgenstein can thus for several reasons be held co-responsible for the demise of the Cartesian Ego, a detailed account of his take on the nature or being of human being has so far not been at philosophy’s disposal.

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<sup>14</sup> PI 133. Of course, Wittgenstein is talking of ordinary rather than philosophical language here, but as I already hinted at and will shortly explain in more detail, I do not take him to be the antidote or antithesis to philosophy and think that his adage can be applied to philosophical language too.

<sup>15</sup> CV 85d.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Carr 1999, p. 10; Nancy 1991, p. 5; Benhabib 1992, pp. 208-209.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Lyotard 1993b, where he recounts his indebtedness to Wittgenstein. As Lyotard is the first to admit, it can be debated whether his reading of Wittgenstein is the most accurate one. I do not think it is, but I will not discuss this explicitly, primarily because Lyotard does not draw on the same material I use. Even so, the fifth chapter will touch upon issues related to the idea that each language game has its own standards of correctness that can never come up for discussion; a perspective on Wittgenstein I will argue to be incorrect.

To be sure, the anti-Cartesian character of his explorations has been extensively discussed, his insights have been compared to and combined with those of other rethinkers of the subject,<sup>18</sup> but no book aimed exclusively at drawing out Wittgenstein's alternative conception, consulting not only his anti-Cartesian remarks but other parts of his oeuvre as well, has as of yet appeared. The current study sets out to fill this gap. It is thus more exactly by presenting a Wittgensteinian account of the subject that my investigations hope to contribute to the debate about human subjectivity.

Simply mentioning the later oeuvre of this thinker, however, does not suffice to explain what it means that the following study is on subjectivity à la Wittgenstein. I have to be somewhat more specific about my use of the name "Wittgenstein" because to the extent that he is considered to contribute to philosophical discussions - be they about subjectivity or any other topic - he is often considered to add to such debates only by bringing out their nonsensicality. According to a widespread picture of Wittgenstein's method, he took questions about the nature of things to arise solely when our actual use of language is being ignored or distorted, and accordingly maintained that philosophical problems can literally be dissolved by reminding thinkers of their concept's humble roots - or, as the remark I quoted earlier has it, by bringing words like meaning and subjectivity "back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."<sup>19</sup> Even though there is no consensus among his commentators as to the exact aim and nature of the Wittgensteinian approach,<sup>20</sup> according to the prevailing picture of him, Wittgenstein does not provide yet another philosophical theory but offers a kind of therapy that should make all philosophical theory formation redundant.

Now while this may in fact go some way toward explaining the unavailability of a Wittgensteinian account of subjectivity, I feel that his contribution to philosophy consists of much more (or even essentially consists of something else) than the exposition of other philosophers' mistakes and the consequent dismantling of their discussions. My somewhat deviant understanding of Wittgenstein's involvement with philosophy is reflected in the way I use terms like "Wittgenstein" and "Wittgensteinian". That the current study is on subjectivity after Wittgenstein does not mean that I will take his remarks as a starting point for showing where thinkers

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<sup>18</sup> For some interesting examples thereof, see Cavell 1979, Glendinning 1998, Mulhall 1990, and Overgaard 2007.

<sup>19</sup> PI 116.

<sup>20</sup> The "New Wittgensteinians" for instance part ways with other commentators in taking (austere) nonsense to be a term of philosophical appraisal, for the early as well as the later Wittgenstein. On their view, both TLP and PI achieve their therapeutic aim when the reader comes to recognize the very nonsensicality of philosophical statements, including Wittgenstein's own. Cray & Reed 2000 brings together several interpreters supporting this view, as well as a dissenting voice. However, even though the collection has given rise to much debate after its publication, the overall non- or anti-philosophical character of Wittgenstein's writings does not seem to be disputed. Exceptions to this rule are commentators such as Hutto and Genova (see Hutto 2003 and Genova 1995). I will present my own constructive reading of Wittgenstein's method in the second chapter.

of the subject go wrong in trying to understand what kind of beings we are. It means - lest there be any misunderstanding - that I will investigate what positive account of subjectivity can be extracted from Wittgenstein's later work.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.3 A two-fold goal

As I already underscored at the beginning of this introduction, the following explorations do not only hope to improve the subjectivity debate by making one of the voices contributing thereto more explicit. This dissertation also tries to assess the objections that are frequently raised against non-Cartesian accounts of the nature of man. Now that I have covered the terminological part of this introduction, let me explain the two-fold goal of this study in more detail. As I mentioned in my description of the subject's vicissitudes, the post-Cartesian perspective offered by Wittgenstein and the thinkers labelled "postmodern" has been highly influential, but their outlook has received severe criticism too.<sup>22</sup> The severity here is not so much a matter of the number and variety of thinkers that have rallied against the anti-Cartesians – even though critique has come from various corners - as of the nature of the objections that have been made against them: their outlook is first and foremost rejected on ethical and political grounds.

Those critical of the anti-Cartesian turn in the debate on subjectivity for instance argue that the rejection of the notion that man is in essence a thinking substance - no matter how flawed that notion might be - amounts to a rejection of the very idea of a thinking and feeling human being to whom matters like rights, responsibilities, malicious intentions and moral sensibility can be ascribed. This, critics maintain, is an intolerable result, for it means that Wittgenstein and the postmodernists leave one without a centre or focal point for ethics.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, those challenging the demise of the Cartesian Ego maintain that with the rejection of the idea that man is a self-same and self-sufficient being - even if that idea is not entirely accurate - the reconceptualization of subjectivity becomes politically irrelevant or even outright harmful. By arguing that the subject is the product of its socio-political context, critics claim, Wittgenstein and the postmodernists

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<sup>21</sup> To be sure, the latter need not be completely at odds with the former, but to the extent that interpreters subscribe to the more prevalent reading of Wittgenstein's approach, they nonetheless seem unwilling to ascribe him a desire to formulate alternatives to the positions he contests. In the second chapter, I will go into this methodological issue in more detail.

<sup>22</sup> Let me point out here that I do not think that the alternatives Wittgenstein, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and others offer are wholly interchangeable. It is not within the scope of the current study to discuss this, but the fact that these thinkers all oppose a similar account of human being does not mean that there are no differences between the perspectives they offer in its stead. I will however collectively refer to them as the "rethinkers of Cartesianism" nonetheless.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Frank 1989, p. 10; Frank 1995, pp. 30-31; Murdoch 1992, p. 152; I will discuss these criticisms more elaborately after having presented my reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology in chapter 3.

effectively disintegrate each and every locus of agency and autonomy and consequently place even the most unjust political constellations beyond the reach of intervention.<sup>24</sup>

The accusations levelled against the rethinkers of Cartesianism are not exactly minor, then, and no discussion of one of the alternatives to traditional subjectivity can accordingly afford to ignore them. I, too, will consider the criticisms that the critics of Cartesianism in turn received, even though I have my doubts as to the validity of these arguments. For if Wittgenstein and the postmodernists have a point in claiming that subjectivity does not come in the form of a monadic and ethereal self, and if this is truly at odds with existing or prevalent conceptions of ethics and politics, is there any principled reason that one should refrain from developing a wholly different take on subjectivity rather than rethink one's ethico-political assumptions as well? Could it not just as well be argued that the significance of ethics and politics requires that one rethinks one's ethico-political assumptions over and over again? And to what extent do ethics and politics really allow one to make demands on a theory of subjectivity?

Indeed, I will discuss the objections raised against anti-Cartesianism only to point out that these arguments may not be as compelling as they seem. In this way, I hope to contribute to the subjectivity debate, not just by offering a detailed description of Wittgenstein's account of human being, but also by assessing the backlash that accounts such as these have received. Not because I hold that the post-Cartesians cannot be criticized, but because I think that the validity of the ethico-political objections to them is often taken for granted - which is more harmful to the clarity of the debate than the fact that Wittgenstein's voice therein has not yet been fully explicated.<sup>25</sup>

Yet there is more than this one side to the validity of the objections made to the proclamation of the death of man. As was already indicated by the fact that I needed to make certain provisos in formulating my doubts about the soundness of these claims, whether the arguments against anti-Cartesianism have true force depends not only on whether they really outweigh the contentions of Descartes' critics, it also depends on whether they actually present the anti-Cartesian outlook correctly.<sup>26</sup> For even if ethico-political considerations always already override

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Frank 1989, p. 338; Benhabib 1992, p. 16, pp. 214-218; I will discuss these criticisms more elaborately before embarking on my reading of OC in chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that the anti-Cartesian arguments of post-Cartesians are sometimes of a similar ethico-political nature. As I will accordingly argue in the concluding chapter, in so far as those responsible for the subject's demise also take the validity of ethico-political accusations for granted, they can similarly be said to do the debate more harm than good.

<sup>26</sup> I in fact made two provisos, explaining that the validity of these arguments also depends on whether post-Cartesianism is truly at odds with our ethico-political practices and/or suggests a different understanding thereof as well. Since this thesis is on conceptions of subjectivity rather than conceptions of the ethical and political, I will not explore this line of argument any further.

considerations as to the accuracy of an account of the nature of man,<sup>27</sup> and ethics and politics indeed require that the critique of Cartesianism is not followed through completely, the objections to anti-Cartesianism might still be declared null and void when those responsible for the demise of the Cartesian Ego do not or do not quite support the claims on which those objections are based. I will accordingly look at the exegetical validity of the backlash to post-Cartesianism as well.

What is more, I will look at this type of validity first of all, for although I doubt whether the objections mentioned make for proper counterarguments, I take them to point to an issue that is valid and interesting enough. They can be said to indicate that the consequences of the claim that the subject is always already embodied and embedded are not always already clear. Taking this claim seriously undoubtedly affects numerous assumptions we repeatedly make about human being - including those underlying our conceptions of the ethical and political - but the exact extent of this impact is not so easily determined. Does challenging the Cartesian inner-outer and self-other model for instance inevitably mean giving up each and every notion of privacy and of individuality? And if it does not necessarily have these consequences - as stated, Wittgenstein and others can be said to rethink rather than unthink subjectivity - what are the precise reasons that it does not result in a simple negation of the Cartesian take on the nature of man? Knowing that the declaration of the death of man need not be taken so literally, after all, does not automatically entail an insight into how it should be taken instead.

Hence, even though one might doubt the validity of the claim that (elements of) Cartesianism must be preserved in order for ethics and politics to be possible, one can grant those questioning post-Cartesianism that it is not self-evident what it means to embrace the latter position, while embracing it may have consequences beyond the theory of subjectivity.

As a result, I will not brush the arguments against the rethinkers of the subject aside but will take them as an incentive to have a closer look at the alternative offered by Wittgenstein. I will outline his version of the claim that the subject's materiality and sociality are essential to it only to probe his reorientation of the relationship between mind and body and the relationship between individual and community in more detail. The two objectives of this dissertation thus in fact go hand in hand. Investigating the interpretational validity of the objections to post-Cartesianism enables both a fuller understanding of the Wittgensteinian variety and a more thorough assessment of these ethico-political counterclaims. This combination of exegetical and systematic considerations will be reflected in the way the explorations that follow are set up. That is to say, the main chapters of this

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<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that an account of the nature of man can never be judged by its ethico-political consequences – far from it - yet as I will argue in the concluding chapter, the importance of ethics and politics should not lead one to reject certain perspectives on the subject out of hand - or to always already abstain from reinvestigating current conceptions of the ethical and political, for that matter.

thesis are of an exegetical nature, examining various parts of Wittgenstein's oeuvre in order to make his take on subjectivity fully explicit, but I will alternate these chapters with shorter sections (for which I will use the term "intermezzo") in which the larger systematic relevance of these exegetical efforts is brought to the fore. Let me lay out my precise plan of work.

## 1.4 Overview of the main argument and structure

### *Chapter 2: Wittgenstein and/as philosophy*

Given that the later Wittgenstein is more famous for debunking than defending philosophical positions, I will start by expounding in more detail why he need not be considered to form the antidote or antithesis to philosophy. While Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical reputation has not stopped interpreters from presenting his insights as substantive contributions to philosophical debates - including, as I pointed out, to debates about subjectivity, to some extent - this does not alter the fact that his later writings contain some vehemently anti-philosophical statements with which any scholar hoping to use Wittgenstein positively or constructively accordingly needs to come to terms. Such is my aim in the chapter following this introduction.

This chapter presents a close reading of what can be considered to be the *Investigations'* discourse on method: §§ 89-133. These remarks are often taken to reject philosophy as highly susceptible to mistakes or even inherently mistaken, but I will argue that they identify a tension rather than a mistake inherent in theory formation, to wit, that between philosophy's craving for generality and the multifariousness that is of the essence of the phenomena it describes. This tension may explain why and how philosophical theory can go awry - namely, when the focus is on generality and univocality at the cost of all particularity and ambiguity - but it does not bring Wittgenstein to conclude that investigations into the nature of things must be brought to an end. On my reading, in any case, he incorporates this tension into the way he himself contributes to such undertakings.

I will accordingly point out that the later part of Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* need not be considered to form an un- or anti-philosophical collection of observations, questions and examples. For on closer inspection, these writings combine specific observations with remarks of a more general nature, the latter making the former more perspicuous and the former preventing the latter from losing sight of their subject's complexity. Hence, placing the particular in a larger framework and inscribing the general with particularities at one and the same time, Wittgenstein accommodates the tension inherent in theory formation precisely by leaving it intact. And this means that he can be considered to be a philosopher among philosophers, even though he has his qualms about the devising of philosophical theories.

### *Chapter 3: Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology*

Hoping to have removed doubts as to the possibility of a constructive Wittgensteinian account of subjectivity, I will then consult his so-called “philosophy of psychology” in order to sketch the outlines thereof. The writings published as the *Remarks on the philosophy of psychology* and the *Last writings on the philosophy of psychology*, as well as parts of the *Philosophical Investigations* (most notably Part II) constitute an excellent starting point for investigating Wittgenstein’s view on human being. They examine some of Cartesianism’s key assumptions about the nature of man and take issue with its specific understanding of that supposedly quintessentially human possession: the mind. I will discuss Wittgenstein’s main arguments against the idea that psychological phenomena constitute objects and processes occurring in a literally inner realm, but the lion’s share of this chapter is devoted to explaining how Wittgenstein also presents an alternative to the Cartesian account of the relationship between mind and body, as well as to its accompanying take on the way self and other relate.

By tracing the lines of thought developed in Wittgenstein’s remarks on the human psyche – both those of a specific and those of a general nature - I will show that he takes mind and body to be intimately connected instead of almost accidentally related, and moreover maintains that the self, rather than requiring the help of others only to acquire labels for talking about pre-available thoughts and feelings, from day one depends upon its fellow men for developing its inner life beyond its infant state. According to Wittgenstein, I will argue, the outer can be said to be the locus of the inner, and can more specifically be said to be the locus of the inner against the background of the community of which someone is part. I will explain how this outlook neither amounts to a form of physicalism nor to a form of behaviourism, discuss the role of both nature and nurture in Wittgenstein’s account, and reflect upon the meaning of the term “fellow (human) being” when it comes to the sociality of Wittgensteinian subjectivity.

In the final section I will try to bring these insights together by pointing to the similarities between Wittgenstein’s ruminations on the psyche and his remarks on aspect perception or seeing-as. That is to say, I will argue that this latter concept can be used to capture the reality of psychological phenomena if they cannot be understood as objects or processes in a private interior realm - or to use the terminology developed in the third chapter, to capture the specific amalgam of ontology, epistemology and sociology with which Wittgenstein replaces the Cartesian account of the nature of man. For similar to his analysis of perceptions like that of the duck-rabbit, Wittgenstein contends that seeing a person grieving or rejoicing is neither a matter of coolly observing behavioural characteristics, nor of hypothesizing about a principally inaccessible state. On his view, one is able to see a person’s pain or joy itself when one takes her (fine shades of) behaviour to be expressive of mind and places her doings and sayings in the context of a larger cultural or communal pattern. Hence, as a first step towards formulating a

Wittgensteinian account of subjectivity, I will suggest that on the basis of his later writings, psychological phenomena can be described as aspects of the human being. This succinctly conveys that he holds such phenomena to be located on the outside rather than the inside of the subject, or even in the interspace between a community of subjects.

*Intermezzo I: Ethical arguments against non-Cartesian accounts*

My formulations are intentionally tentative (their perhaps sounding somewhat elusive is in any case not merely due to their being presented here out of the context of my exegetical endeavours) because, as stated, I will give an outline of Wittgenstein's take on subjectivity only to further explore the main elements thereof, both in order to explicate his contribution to the subjectivity debate in full detail, and in order to assess the objections to similar contributions in more than one respect. To truly get this two-fold undertaking off the ground, I will briefly adjourn my interpretation of Wittgenstein's writings after having presented my reading of his philosophy of psychology in chapter 3. In the systematic intermezzo following this chapter, I will discuss one important strand of criticism that the rethinkers of the subject received, namely, criticisms as to their ethical deficit.

As I will explain, commentators such as Manfred Frank and Iris Murdoch maintain that Wittgenstein and the postmodernists, by dismantling the idea of a Cartesian inner, leave one without a subject to whom suffering, courage, malice and so on, can be ascribed, and thus without a self that can function as a moral centre or substance. According to Frank and Murdoch, as a result, the project of post-Cartesianism makes for a cynical and amoral enterprise, an enterprise that should be rejected for that very reason.

As I already mentioned and will point out in this intermezzo too, I doubt whether the fact that Wittgenstein and others reject Cartesianism warrants the conclusion that they spell the end of all possible ethics and should therefore be dismissed; with reference to Levinas, I will underscore that the opposite could also be argued. However, I will reserve assessing the overall validity of this claim for the concluding chapter - first, I will examine its exegetical validity, or to be precise, I will examine whether commentators such as Frank and Murdoch are correct in claiming that Wittgenstein jeopardizes the very idea of a thinking and feeling human being. For even though I do not think that the interpretation offered in chapter 3 gives much support for this claim, I take Frank's and Murdoch's concerns to be justified in that it is far from clear what the embodied and embedded account of human being - an account that undoubtedly affects numerous others, no less important matters - makes possible and what it might exclude. Indeed, as I will bring to attention in the first intermezzo, Wittgenstein himself suggests that there are serious limitations to the rethinking of the subject.

That is to say, in addition to investigating matters like mind and meaning, Wittgenstein has contemplated questions of a religious nature throughout his life,

and in contrast to his explanation of the psyche, his account of religious belief basically disregards the way this phenomenon finds expression in collective patterns and observable doings and sayings. He even goes so far as to describe the difference between the believer and the non-believer in term of the “the interplay of forces within.”<sup>28</sup> One could take this to indicate that Wittgenstein, while vehemently criticizing Cartesianism in his psychological work, falls back on this very inner-outer model in his religious writings, and that his upsetting of Cartesian subjectivity thus goes too far even for Wittgenstein himself. It appears to conflict with his view on a topic that was even closer to his heart, namely, religious belief.

I will then explain that I choose not to jump to this conclusion, because the apparent conflict between Wittgenstein’s philosophy of psychology and his philosophy of religion can also be taken as an opportunity for exploring Wittgenstein’s take on subjectivity - and thereby the exegetical validity of the objections thereto – more fully. By investigating whether and to what extent Wittgenstein’s religious views are compatible with his psychological findings, it should be possible to make the implications and limitations of his embodied and embedded account somewhat more clear.

#### *Chapter 4: Wittgenstein’s philosophy of religion*

Chapter 4 accordingly has a closer look at Wittgenstein writings on religious belief in order to see if he can be said to explain religiosity, like (other) psychological phenomena, as an aspect of the human being: to what extent he situates religious belief in a person’s fine-grained and contextualized behaviour, taken as an instance of a larger communal pattern. These explorations will lead me, in contrast to the explorations in the other chapters of this study, through both earlier and later parts of Wittgenstein’s oeuvre. In addition to the *Remarks on Frazer*, the *Lectures on Religious Belief* and *Culture and Value*, the fourth chapter discusses (parts of) the *Tractatus*, the *Notebooks* and the *Lecture on Ethics* as well. I take this to be legitimate, not only because there would otherwise be fairly little material to go by in tracing Wittgenstein’s account of religious belief, but also because Wittgenstein’s ideas on ethics<sup>29</sup> and religion do not seem to have changed fundamentally over the years. Indeed, as I will show, Wittgenstein consistently takes religious belief to be a matter of the way one lead one’s life. In his earlier as well as his later work, he locates religiosity in the direction of the believer’s existence.

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<sup>28</sup> CV 33a.

<sup>29</sup> As I will explain in the first intermezzo, the words “ethics” and “religion” can be used more or less interchangeably in a Wittgensteinian context, but I do not consult his ethico-religious writings because they offer hope of morality where his psychological writings fail to do so: I consult them in order to get the implications of his overturning of the Cartesian inner-outer model more clear. Moreover, as will become clear in the fourth chapter, even if Wittgenstein uses the words “ethics” and “religion” interchangeably, he should ultimately be said to be more interested in contributing to discussions about the meaning of life than in contributing to the conventional study of ethics.

So even though he at one point suggests that faith is a literally inner process, Wittgenstein does not maintain that the believer distinguishes himself from the non-believer by having something inside that the latter misses. The difference rather lies in the fact that whereas the non-believer's life constitutes a mere succession of events, the believer makes his or her life into a meaningful whole. Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion is thus consistent with his philosophy of psychology in that it situates religiosity in the direction of the believer's existence rather than in a private inner realm. However, as my discussion in chapter 4 will also make clear, these two parts of this oeuvre are not therefore compatible in all respects. Wittgenstein may locate religious belief on the outside rather than the inside of the subject, he also holds that it is the individual believer's existence in which religiosity should be situated, regardless of the way in which her fellow human beings make their lives into a meaningful whole. Whereas he maintains that a person can only be said to pretend or hope, for instance, when she is able to take part in pre-existing practices, he claims that the religious believer need not follow in her elders' footsteps at all. The choice is up to the believer herself.

Hence, in so far as Wittgenstein's religious writings suggest that the overturning of the Cartesian inner-outer model goes too far even for Wittgenstein himself, it is in fact his upsetting of the Cartesian self-other schema with which his philosophy of religion seems to be out of synch. And while this indicates that the qualms of post-Cartesianism's critics are unwarranted when it comes to Wittgenstein's holding the subject to essentially be embodied – that is to say, it indicates that the idea that Wittgensteinian subjectivity is ethically wanting is based on a misunderstanding of the consequences of his take on the mind-body relationship – the fourth chapter has not shown the worries of post-Cartesianism's critics to be unjustified when it comes to Wittgenstein's claiming that the subject is fundamentally embedded. Indeed, Wittgenstein's perspective on religion makes the question as to the consequences of his embedding the Ego all the more acute. For how can he on the one hand hold that the subject is in an important sense socially constituted, and on the other hand maintain that the believer can and should choose a direction in life wholly of her own accord? Does this not undermine his own undermining of Cartesianism after all?

### *Intermezzo II: Political arguments against non-Cartesian accounts*

After discussing Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion, I will briefly suspend my exegetical endeavours again, for as I will point out in the second systematic intermezzo, the twentieth century upsetting of the Cartesian self-other schema forms another element of post-Cartesianism that has been vehemently criticized. Indeed, discussions on the death of man seem to centre primarily on the consequences, not so much of the claim that Descartes misunderstood the mind-body relationship, but of the claim that he erroneously thought human beings to be self-enclosed and self-sufficient entities. Critics take this to imply that post-

Cartesianism is also deficient from a political perspective.

Seyla Benhabib, for instance, maintains that a radical contextualization of subjectivity makes an emancipatory project à la feminism unthinkable. On her view, claiming that the subject is the product of pre-existing practices means doing away with notions such as agency and autonomy, and thus doing away with the possibility of changing the socio-political constellations in which one happens to find oneself, no matter how much they might call for reform. For the sake of politics, therefore, some elements of Cartesianism must be preserved.

Similar to my argument in the first intermezzo, I will point out that even if Wittgenstein and others can be said to present the subject as the product of the powers that be, it does not automatically follow that they undermine each and every conception of politics. The opposite could also be argued and has been argued, among others by Judith Butler. The second intermezzo will discuss her perspective on the post-Cartesian development as well - though not because I think that she is correct in claiming that it in fact has a greater liberating potential than its predecessor. For as I already explained earlier in this introduction, one of the aims of this thesis precisely is to argue that the ethico-political arguments in the debate about the death of man may not always be as valid as they seem - and as Butler's contentions go to show, such arguments are used by the rethinkers of the subject as well as by their critics.

However, as I will then explain, and similar to the course of action proposed in the first intermezzo, I do want to take the fact that post-Cartesianism has been greeted as both politically harmful and politically relevant *par excellence* as an incentive to have a closer look at Wittgenstein's version. For as the dispute between Butler and Benhabib makes clear, while post-Cartesianism is not necessarily a-political, qualms about this development are nonetheless understandable in that a renewed perspective the subject might also affect somewhat less theoretical issues. The implications of the claim that the subject always already finds itself in patterns and practices that are not of its own making, still wait to be explored, and it is for this reason that I will propose to examine the exegetical validity of the political objections to post-Cartesianism first.

But there is another reason that this can be said to be an informative next step. Investigating whether it is correct to say that Wittgenstein dissolves the subject in a multitude of pre-existing practices will also allow me to describe his contribution to the subjectivity debate in more detail, because it is precisely when it comes to the sociality of subjectivity that he may not seem to offer a wholly consistent account. According to conclusion drawn in chapter 4, after all, it is unclear how Wittgenstein's taking religious belief to be a pre-eminently personal affair squares with his situating psychological phenomena in the interspace between a community of subjects – if it can be made to square at all.

I will then bring the second intermezzo to a close by arguing that the interpretational validity of the political objections to post-Cartesianism and the consistency of Wittgenstein's account of subjectivity can be investigated simultaneously, because both depend on the account of community with which the contextualization of the Ego is accompanied. If Wittgenstein maintains that the community in which the subject is embedded is a static and uniform totality to which all human affairs are ultimately subservient, the claim that Wittgensteinian subjectivity is politically inert might indeed be warranted, and his philosophy of religion could certainly be said to undermine his philosophy of psychology. However, how Wittgenstein envisions community and socio-cultural membership needs to be investigated, and I will propose to investigate it by consulting *On Certainty*. Not because I hold that religious belief can be filed under the category of what Wittgenstein calls "certainty", as some of his interpreters maintain, but because this collection of remarks most carefully addresses the processes of in- and exclusion inherent in socio-cultural membership of all of Wittgenstein's writings.

#### *Chapter 5: Wittgenstein on community in "On Certainty"*

For as I will introduce my reading of *On Certainty* in chapter 5, Wittgenstein does not only extensively discuss the way children are prepared to become full-blown participants in the community's (epistemological) practices, he also describes what might happen when people who come from different backgrounds meet or collide. The fifth chapter will explore Wittgenstein's concept of community, both with regard to the processes by means of which infants are initiated into the community, and with regard to the room for difference and/or divergence this leaves.

I will immediately point out that *On Certainty's* account of social in- and exclusion may at first sight seem utterly conservative. It observes that a person always already has to take numerous things for granted in order for practices to be able to get off the ground. Wittgenstein dubs these beliefs or assumptions "certainties", and explains that one does not subscribe to them after thorough investigation, but because one's elders have taught one to. Judging by Wittgenstein's description of the way certainties are conveyed from the one generation to the next, the reader could get the impression (and many readers have had the impression) that this is a matter of outright indoctrination, and that Wittgenstein, moreover, leaves full-blown members of a community with little reason to welcome changes in or deviations from their world view. At first sight, *On Certainty* seems to preclude difference and divergence out of hand.

However, as I will then explain, Wittgenstein's view on religion suggests that he did not condemn diverging from or breaking with pre-existing conventions point blank, and the fifth chapter therefore sets out to see how this is reflected in the account offered in *On Certainty*, regardless of the conservatism it might appear to display. But there is another part of Wittgenstein's oeuvre indicating that he did not take the subject to automatically and unthinkingly reproduce the customs of its

community, I will point out, namely, his perspective on philosophy itself. For whether one takes Wittgenstein to merely bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use, or to more constructively contribute to answering questions like “What is mind?”, philosophy Wittgenstein-style requires making explicit what normally goes without saying and disentangling oneself from what the community always already takes to stand fast. Hence, both Wittgenstein’s philosophy of religion and his view on philosophy suggest that *On Certainty* is not conservative or conformist all the way through, and I will announce to investigate Wittgenstein’s account of what it means to become and be a member of a community with this in the back of my mind.

My reading of *On Certainty* proper then starts by discussing the way in which the child is prepared to become a full-blown participant in the community’s practices, according to the analysis offered in these writings. I will point out that Wittgenstein takes a person’s ability to doubt and question things to be dependent on and constrained by the certainties she acquires through a socialization process. However, as I will go on to show, he does not take the subject’s worldview to be entirely socially construed. According to Wittgenstein, an infant almost automatically incorporate its elders’ certainties but that is made possible by an instinctive trust that comes with its own basic presuppositions. This perspective gets refined and enhanced to correspond to the community’s certainties, but the child’s inborn capacities may prevent complete conformity from ever being reached. Wittgenstein’s naturalism prevents him from holding that the subject is the mere and utter product of its upbringing.

Moreover, if no process of initiation ensures that it is the exact same things that the members of a community come to take for granted, the world picture that is conveyed to children need not make for a monolithic unity to begin with. According to the account offered in *On Certainty*, in other words, a community’s world picture may not exactly form a clear and distinct whole, showing variations between the one member and the next. And, as I will argue, this also suggests how a person might come to take a step back from the certainties he or she inherited. The heterogeneity possibly present in a community provides opportunities for realizing that things could also be seen differently, thereby breaking the unquestionability of what one takes to stand fast. Wittgenstein may consider world pictures to largely be a matter of convention, he does not claim that the subject is unable to break with the customs and conventions it always already finds itself entangled in. Rather than comparing it to the way a machine is built up out of its components or a body is composed of its parts, the relationship between individual and community as it is at work in Wittgenstein’s writings can be captured by means of the fibre-and-thread analogy he originally uses to explain the way our concepts are no fixed and rigid entities.

### *Chapter 6: Summary and conclusion*

In the sixth and final chapter, I will bring this study to a close by concluding that the ethico-political objections to post-Cartesianism are exegetically invalid, at least when it comes to the Wittgensteinian variety. I will moreover argue that such objections - whether for or against the rethinking of the subject - are not exactly warranted in the first place, at least not when they come in the form of a demand. For even though ethico-political considerations are important and compelling, neither one's take on the subject nor one's conception of ethics and politics should be prevented from coming up for discussion beforehand. Yet that is precisely what ethico-political arguments, because of their compellingness, might go to prevent.

#### 1.5 "After"

As this précis of the investigations to follow made no effort to conceal, my approach to Wittgenstein's writings is - like my understanding of his own philosophical approach - perhaps not the most conventional one, combining seemingly unrelated parts of his oeuvre while practically disregarding their chronology, for instance. This brings me to the fact that one more term occurring in this title's study has not yet been explained. I started this introduction specifying what it means the current study is on Wittgenstein and subjectivity, but according to its title, it is in fact devoted to examining subjectivity *after* Wittgenstein.<sup>30</sup> Let me bring this introductory chapter to a close by clarifying why and how I use this term.

That the word "after" occurs in the title rather than, say, "according to" or "as meticulously analyzed by", is first of all motivated by the fact that there is no ready-made account of subjectivity to be found in Wittgenstein's writings. Not only is his general strategy in exploring any topic or subtopic to oscillate between synoptic statements and particular observations rather than providing well-rounded treatises, Wittgenstein never personally or explicitly took part in the discussion about the Cartesian Ego and its demise. That is not to say, lest there be any misunderstanding, that Wittgenstein's writings contain nothing even resembling a systematic treatment of a philosophical topic, or that he is incorrectly held co-responsible for the specific turn that the debate on subjectivity took. It is to say, however, that anyone trying to formulate an account of subjectivity on the basis of his observations cannot always follow in Wittgenstein's exact footsteps. In what follows, therefore, I will occasionally fill in the blanks in Wittgenstein's writings, use terms that he himself did not employ, and bring out lines of thought that he may not have been aware of developing. For in order to describe what account of human being is present in Wittgenstein's later writings, an interpreter sometimes has to go beyond the phrasings and arrangements of Wittgenstein himself.

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<sup>30</sup> My title takes its inspiration from Kerr 1986, exploring *theology after* Wittgenstein.

But the word “after” is of course primarily used to indicate a temporal order between events, and it is for this reason, too, that it occurs in the title I have given my thesis. For as I explained, the main aim of the current study is to make a contribution (and to make a contribution in no less than two respects) to a debate that has by no means subsided since Wittgenstein and others proposed to discard the Cartesian subject. I do not only want to explicate Wittgenstein’s version of the claim that the subject is always already embodied and embedded, but also try to assess the backlash that the rethinkers of Cartesianism received. That I use the term “after” thus also serves as a reminder of my two-fold systematic goal.

This moreover points to another reason for not wanting to claim that the following explores subjectivity “according to” or “as meticulously analyzed by” Wittgenstein. That is to say, the current study combines exegetical and systematic explorations, but at the end of the day even my exegetical endeavours should be said to stand in the service a systematic objective. The interpretation of Wittgenstein may take up the larger part of this book, but I consult his remarks first and foremost to further the subjectivity debate, both because his voice therein has so far not been made fully explicit, and because these endeavours enable me to evaluate the objections that have been raised to post-Cartesianism in more detail. Put differently - and although I actually do not think that these things are mutually exclusive - I am more keen on contributing to investigations into subjectivity than in making a contribution to Wittgenstein scholarship.

Hence, when I fill in the blanks in Wittgenstein’s writings or bring out lines of thought he did not explicitly defend, I certainly try to stay true to the spirit of his writings, but my doing so will be guided by systematic rather than exegetical considerations. This is also the reason - apart from the fact that most of the secondary literature does not examine the writings I examine with the same questions in mind - that I do not discuss other interpretations of Wittgenstein in much detail, and by and large reserve such discussion for the footnotes when I do. While I hope to give an accurate description of Wittgenstein’s take on human being, I have no intention of arguing that it is the only way to read the remarks I consult. I fall back on some commentators and disagree with others, but I will make this explicit only when it helps me spell out what can be said about subjectivity on the basis of Wittgenstein’s later work.

It is thus both because Wittgenstein does not offer a ready-made theory and because my main interest is in an ongoing systematic discussion that the word “after” occurs in this study’s title. That this dissertation is on subjectivity after Wittgenstein means that the following explorations set out to present, if not exactly Wittgenstein’s, then at least a Wittgensteinian account of human being, hoping to thereby make a dual contribution to debate about the Cartesian subject and its demise.