

Between subject and citizen

On Étienne Balibar's Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology

Warren Montag

'All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.' Spinoza's maxim, the last sentence of *The Ethics*, serves as a fitting observation with which to begin a discussion of Étienne Balibar's *Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology*, given the difficulty proper to the excellence of his text. Its difficulty is not, or not only, that of following him as he cuts an oblique path through thickets of words, texts and languages. It is rather the difficulty we encounter at the point of his discovery of 'unknown territory', the existence of which is all the more disconcerting when it is revealed to us that this unknown world is in fact the world we inhabit, the world of our historical conjuncture.¹

The point to which he leads us is what Balibar calls a 'point of heresy', one of those paradoxes that must be allowed to stand unresolved because it remains historically without resolution (e.g., the economy is determinant in the last instance, but the hour of the last instance never comes) (3). To understand philosophy as he does as 'writing in the conjuncture' (10), and not writing *on* the conjuncture, is to acknowledge that the materiality of its written form is shaped by the conflict of forces that defines a specific conjuncture.

It was in one such intensely overdetermined conjuncture (roughly between 1950 and 1975) that French philosophy made one of its most important contributions: in all its diversity, in the heterogeneity of its origins and sources, it combined to pose the problem of the subject; that is, it posed the subject as a problem rather than the necessary starting point

for any explanation of human action. Moreover, some of the most important statements and formulations concerning this problem took shape in the Althusserian milieu in which Balibar played a crucial role. By the end of the 1970s, however, the active interrogation of the subject began to diminish in frequency and intensity, finally threatening to recede into an unintelligibility masked as irrelevance. The shift in the global balance of social forces produced among other things a crisis of Marxism, whose effects were felt even in the rarefied world of philosophy.

This was the conjuncture in which Balibar's earlier essay 'Citizen Subject' – an initial sketch of the project which this book embodies and which is reprinted in it as 'Overture: Citizen Subjects: a response to Jean-Luc Nancy's Question "Who Comes After the Subject?"' – appeared in 1988 (19–39). It represented an entirely new approach to the question of the subject, more attuned than was the case in his earlier work to actual texts and the resources and limits of the languages in which they were written: as such, it constituted a decisive intervention. By tying the subject to a word and a concept whose disappearance appeared unthinkable – the citizen – he recast the problem of the subject in a way that made visible the fundamental and irreducible antagonism that the notion of the subject embodies. Written without a conjunction ('and' or 'or'), a hyphen or forward slash, Balibar's title acts pre-emptively to exclude any assumption that the terms can be understood as equivalent or, in contrast, opposed. In this way, he left open the set of possible relations between these terms.

The three parts of the book represent the nodal points around which the new approach to the subject is organised. By examining the prehistory of the subject in its modern sense in the texts of Descartes, Locke and Rousseau, Balibar demonstrates its necessary link to subjection, as well as its permanent exposure to the dangers of an otherness within and a self that remains in part outside. The second nodal point concerns the constitution of the common and community, not simply understood as an intersubjective network linking individuals, but as a 'we' that is both as real and simultaneously as unstable as the 'I'. Here, Balibar draws not simply on Hegel and Marx, but on Tolstoy's portrait of armies rather than nations as exemplary communities. Finally, Balibar poses the problem of what we might call, following Locke, the forensic production of the individual through legal judgment, and the claiming of citizenship not through agreement, consensus and obedience, but through conflict, dissensus and transgression.

The idea of the citizen first arose in opposition to that of the subject. Citizens are defined as equal insofar as they are considered members of the *Civitas*, whereas subjects, in one sense of the term, are under (as the etymology of the word 'sub-ject' indicates) the authority of another. In an opposing sense, first articulated in philosophy by Kant, however, the citizen is a subject, originally free, causally as well as morally, determined by his will alone and therefore responsible for his actions, which cannot be imputed to anyone else: 'a person is a subject whose actions can be imputed to him.'² Paradoxically, it was at this historical point, when the triumph of the ideal of citizenship over subjection, the most palpable sign of progress and enlightenment, seemed assured, that 'citizen' could simultaneously appear as just another name for the subject, but one whose subjection is secured by the very imputation of an original freedom and equality. There can be no better guarantee of the legitimacy of subjection than that its origin lies in the consent of originally free and equal individuals, each directed by no one but himself. This is the constitutive equivocity of the term subject made visible by its proximity to the word 'citizen'. The free subject, author, agent, actor, is always also a subjected subject, subjected by means of the freedom imputed to it, a

free subject only on the condition that it is subjected: this is the dynamism of a history torn between the two poles of the becoming citizen of the subject and the becoming subject of the citizen (5).

The problem of the subject was posed unevenly and in different ways across disciplines, authors, oeuvres, sometimes as a declared objective and sometimes as an unintended and perhaps undesired consequence. First, it appeared as the imperative to locate the subject as a concept at work even or especially when it was not identified as such, visible only in the form of a synecdoche: individual, author, actor or agent. Second, to problematise rather than simply postulate the subject – which, as Althusser noted in relation to various forms of structuralism, could be understood as collective, as well as individual – as the necessary starting point for any investigation of human action, meant that its function, as well as the history of this function, became part of the field of investigation rather than its guiding principle. I am compelled to use this now familiar, but not completely understood, verb 'problematise' (which should not itself escape problematisation) in relation to the subject to demarcate it from the activity with which it is often confused: that of declaring the disappearance of the subject, as if it were no more than illusion or error, or, following Nietzsche's gesture, to declare its death, as if there had once been a subject (or subjects) that, whether tragically or happily, proved unable to survive the inhospitable atmosphere of modernity.³

Who comes after the subject?

Balibar's essay was written at the request of Jean-Luc Nancy who in 1988 had issued a call in the form of a question to a distinguished group of philosophers, including Badiou, Rancière, Derrida, Blanchot, Levinas and Balibar: who comes after the subject?⁴ To Balibar the call was a reminder of what was in danger of being forgotten: precisely the 'critiques of the philosophies of the subject', including those of Althusser and Balibar himself, which 'constituted the point of intersection (but also of friction) between the discourses of phenomenological (or post-phenomenological) deconstruction of the "metaphysics" of foundation, the structuralist "decentering" of the immediate data of

consciousness, and the Marxist, Freudian and Nietzschean of the “illusions” that beset the claims of consciousness to truth’ (2). But Nancy had formulated the question of the subject in a way that made it, according to Balibar, ‘tricky’ and unfamiliar. The critiques of the subject noted above typically operated by displacing it from its position as origin and foundation, that is, by postulating the structure that ‘always already operates’ or the process that ‘actualises itself *before* the subject’ (3). The ‘after’ in Nancy’s question might be understood as indicating a historical chronology or even eschatology (what or who will replace the subject as origin now that it is dead or has disappeared?).

Balibar suggests, however, that Nancy’s formulation implies the opposite: if the subject can no longer be understood as originary, it nonetheless cannot be understood as a mere illusion to be dissipated through critique. Instead, it ‘has a material existence’, to use Althusser’s expression, in discourse, as well as in the Ideological State Apparatuses, and their practices, rituals and liturgies. What follows, or follows from, the non-originary subject, part of whose material existence involves the imputation of its originarity, that is, its freedom to determine itself? Balibar’s response to Nancy’s question, that after the subject comes the citizen, appeared simply to add to it a closely related and equally contradictory term. But the effect of this addition was significant: it succeeded in conferring new meanings on familiar terms or simply, as in the case of the term subject itself, in recalling the ambiguity or antagonism inscribed in the word itself as the indelible mark of its history. Balibar was at that point, by his own admission, in the ‘unknown territory’ of a new political and historical conjuncture.

In fact, one of the most important contributions of *Citizen Subject* is neither contained in one of its chapters nor is it explicitly connected to the theme of citizen and subject: it lies in the discussion of what Balibar initially calls ‘method’ and later ‘theoretical practice’, a phrase coined by Althusser only to be dismissed as part of his ‘theoreticist’ deviation, and subsequently rehabilitated by Balibar (9). Philosophy understood as theoretical practice cannot consist of the extraction of ideas, thoughts and arguments from their discursive existence, as if language, which is

always the specific language in which a text is written, were simply a container or vehicle external to the concepts or notions it communicates. Reading a philosophical text ‘to the letter’ implies the opposite: a scrupulous attention to the precise words in the original language in which ideas take shape and congeal into arguments.

In this sense, Balibar is a nominalist: he argues that no text is identical to any other text, irrespective of authorship: ‘no author writes the same text twice’ (9). Even in those cases in which an author affirms that a given text is designed to clarify or restate ideas expressed in a previous text, Balibar notes that there is irreducible and necessary variation between what amount to the singular statements that make up singular texts. This variation, so often ignored or suppressed in order to construct such doctrines as Kantianism or Marxism, is the effect of the constitutive incompleteness of thought, not because its expressions communicate it in a partial and diminished form, but because philosophical thought does not exist prior to its written form and is consubstantial with it. Balibar sets aside the fictitious unity offered by categories like an author’s oeuvre or corpus, ‘Cartesianism’ or ‘Hegelianism’, in order to read ‘the Second Meditation’ or ‘Sense-Certainty’ in the concrete singularity of its words and phrases, and explain the choice of one word instead of another: consciousness instead of conscience, citizen instead of subject. This position leads him to reject the abstraction of arguments from texts characteristic of analytic philosophy as an act of translation that abandons the text as it is, leaving it unexamined and unexplained, in order to replace it with a simulacrum from which diversity and conflictuality have been eliminated.

Once we understand philosophy as composed of singular texts themselves constituted by singular statements, rather than as a sequence of systems emanating from a single philosopher who serves as a guarantee of the unity of the philosophical doctrine, the dialogical character of the diversity and conflictuality of philosophical texts becomes intelligible. To take Balibar’s example, Hegel’s use of *das Selbst* [self], *Selbstbewusstsein* [self-consciousness] or *Sichanderswerden* [becoming other than oneself or itself] represents Hegel’s ‘conversation with Descartes, Locke and

Rousseau' concerning the movement of substance as subjectivity, or more specifically, as 'Erinnerung', that is, internalisation-memorialisation (10). This conversation, however, is always 'incomplete or interrupted', making it possible and perhaps necessary, if this conversation is to be made intelligible, to intervene in it through the act of reading, by drawing lines of demarcation within, rather than between, texts and in doing so reconfiguring their boundaries (10).

If it is in and through the complexity of the conjuncture that theoretical problems in their always concrete historical forms are posed, then, Balibar argues, there is no metalanguage in philosophy (a maxim borrowed from Lacan) 'that would make it possible to reformulate texts in universal, descriptive or systematic terms' (11). Nor is it possible to raise their meanings above the letter of the texts through a purifying translation or 'to reduce them to an ultimate materiality more fundamental than their own' (11). He cites the example of Hegel's *Phenomenology* which endows the systems he incorporates with a common language (absolute knowledge) that allows them 'to dialogue among themselves' but only to the extent that they are translated into this language (11). Balibar, in contrast, rejects translation, both conceptual and linguistic, in order to grasp the particularity of philosophical texts. Only in reading these texts in the idiom in which they were composed and with the awareness that this idiom is to a greater or lesser extent a result of the work of translation or assimilation of 'foreign' words, whose meaning is always changed through addition or subtraction, may we grasp the 'signifying chains' to which its terms and concepts are linked and in this way understand the history of philosophy as a paradoxical process of translating what is in its materiality untranslatable (75).⁵

No concept immanent in the materiality of its discursive forms so clearly exhibits the scars and traces of this paradoxical history as the subject. Nor is there any clearer sign of its philosophical and political centrality than the fact that the complexity of its concrete textual forms lies concealed under the myth of the subject. Balibar, who insists that we must 'completely dismantle' this myth, addresses Heidegger's narrative of the history of the subject and of the consciousness that makes the subject a subject in the modern sense

as developed in the text 'Metaphysics as the History of Being' (5). Heidegger's account of the history of Being traces the process by which the translation/transformation of the Greek *hypokeimenon* [πυ] into the Latin *subjectum* (or *substantia*) comes to obscure 'the essence of Being thought in the Greek manner.'⁶ The *subjectum* understood as *substantia* becomes both that which lies under, as a necessary support of what is, and that which precedes all existing things, which in turn become its predicates. For Heidegger, the Latin translation of Greek terms signifying Being, characteristic of Scholastic thought, imposes a set of unprecedented divisions: potential and actual, truth and certainty, and finally subject and object. But, he argues, it is only with Descartes that there occurs a definitive break with Greek thought and Being as presence: he is the first to demand proof of the reality of the external world and the first to demand not simply the certainty of this proof, but self-certainty as the foundation of any adequate knowledge. For Heidegger, self-certainty is above all a relation to or with oneself, a willed relation of the ego to itself; that is, *con-scientia* or consciousness. As Balibar shows, however, Heidegger's account of the eclipse of Being, while enormously influential, was fundamentally incompatible with the letter of Descartes' text.

The Third Meditation shows that Descartes' ego is not 'subjectum' or agent but 'subjectus', existing, thinking and acting only through its subjection to another; in this case, to God. But just as importantly, neither the word nor the concept of 'consciousness' is to be found in the *Meditations* (55–73). The Cartesianism to which Heidegger assigns such an important role as the founding event of modernity is in fact Kant's invention, projected back upon and obscuring the actual words of Descartes' text. It was Kant who first transformed 'I think' into the nominal form, 'the Cogito', 'the *I* think', in order to assign to it the role of 'Subjekt', the origin and foundation of initiatives.⁷ While 'consciousness', the relation to oneself necessary to the subject [*subjectum*] in the modern sense is Locke's invention, far from serving as the guarantee of a self-sufficient subject, consciousness must mediate between the thoughts it perceives 'in a man's own mind', and an ever-watchful God to whom, on the Day of Judgment, all thoughts will be revealed. The

fact that this form of subjection is less intimate than that of Descartes in no way lessens its importance in relation to consciousness.

In the case of Descartes and Locke, the supposed founders of the modern subject, subjection understood as a vertical relation of dependence precedes and accompanies subjectivity as its condition of possibility, its necessary submission to something other than itself that is above it in every sense. Here, Balibar argues that only the concept of the citizen, historically grounded in the demand for equality as the condition of any genuine sociality, makes visible both the fact that the modern subject is first a subjected subject and the fact that the vertical relation that confers subjectivity on the individual simultaneously demands a separation between individuals. It is this separation that permits each individual to be the sole author and proprietor of his or her 'own' thoughts and feelings, as well as speech and actions, and thus accountable for them. Both Descartes and, even more, Locke, however, are haunted by the spectre of an other within, whether that other, present as the thought and feeling foreign to me that I nevertheless discover in myself, originates outside of me in the minds of other individuals, or whether there is an other who exists solely within me, my own true other, more true to me than I am to myself, as if I exist to conceal what and who I truly am. For Locke, the distinction between the Night Man and the Day Man invoked in chapter 27 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is above all a forensic problem. Which of 'us' is to be held responsible for what 'I' (now a pronoun occupied in shifts by the two of us that I am) say or do? If I remember another person's perceptions, think that person's thoughts or desire his or her desires – that is, if I share, in part or whole, that person's consciousness – am I complicit in that person's actions?⁸

A century later, the very possibilities that Locke repeatedly attempts to rule out once and for all, but cannot, reappear in Rousseau and Hegel, but now in positive form, as attempts to think what Balibar calls (following Simondon) transindividuality. Balibar cites an extraordinary passage from *Rousseau, Juge de Jean-Jacques*: 'Our sweetest existence is relative and collective, and our true self [*notre vrai moi*] is not entirely within us. The constitution of man in this life

is such that one cannot truly enjoy oneself without the participation of another' [*on n'y parvient jamais à bien jouir de soi sans le concours d'autrui*].⁹ What is notable in this passage is the fact that Rousseau rejects both the notion of the separated individual who can truly know only the contents of his, or, to use Locke's preferred phrase, his 'own' consciousness and, at the same time, the notion of a dissolution or reduction of the individual to a community or collectivity. If 'our sweetest existence' is collective, the collectivity to which Rousseau refers must be distinguished from the crowd [*foule*]: it is relative or relational, as minimal as a dyad or triad of individuals, whose unity would nevertheless be just as integral as that of the individual person (an idea that Balibar explores in his chapter on *La Nouvelle Héloïse*) (91–105). In fact, Rousseau preserves the notion of a boundary between self and other, as if 'our true self', according to his formulation, is in part within us – that is, within the borders of the self – but also extends across these borders to include a part or parts (though not the entirety) of an other or others. This is indeed a singular thinking, feeling and desiring thing: Rousseau preserves the otherness of the other in order to argue that the self, understood in its truth, includes what is other than itself. The self imputed to us by the forensic notion of the affectively separated person is thus a fabrication or fiction that is not only untrue but diminishes our enjoyment of this life.

I and we

If Rousseau's formulation looks forward to Hegel, Balibar argues, Hegel must return to Rousseau as the beginning of what is perhaps the key 'turning point' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness: 'It is in self-consciousness, in the notion of spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point' [*Das Bewußtsein hat erst in dem Selbstbewußtsein, als dem Begriffe des Geistes, seinen Wendungspunkt*].¹⁰ Hegel seems here to designate self-consciousness as the form in which the concept or notion of spirit first appears, not simply as an anticipation of an awaiting end, but as an eruption of an end in search of itself, lacking the knowledge of its own immanence. But it is what allows this

association of self-consciousness and absolute spirit that interests Balibar: self-consciousness is characterised by 'its unity in its duplication' [*seiner Einheit in seiner Verdopplung*].¹¹ Consciousness becomes self-consciousness insofar as 'it has come outside of itself' [*es ist außer sich gekommen*].¹² Self-consciousness is thus unity in difference, that is, difference is the specific form of unity proper to self-consciousness.

As Balibar points out, however, for Hegel the difference in question is a particular difference, the distinction, both grammatical and philosophical, between the first person singular and first person plural: 'Ich, das Wir, und Wir, das Ich ist' (125).¹³ A.V. Miller's translation of the sentence as "'I" that is "We" and "We" that is "I"' serves as a powerful reminder of the effects of philosophical untranslatability, seen above all in Miller's omission of an equivalent of the neuter article 'das', his interpolation of 'that' twice, and the repetition of the verb that occurs only once in German. To fully grasp the strangeness of the passage even in German, it might be rendered 'I is the We and We the I.' The use of the third person singular 'is' or 'ist' (instead of *Ich bin* [I am] and *Wir sind* [We are]), Balibar insists, 'entails a syntactic forcing that tilts towards explicit nominalisation' (128). Unlike Descartes and Locke who easily revert to the first person in their philosophical texts, however, Hegel tends to use 'I' in the *Phenomenology* not as a pronoun but as a noun, 'the I', or 'an I', as if it were a thing among things.

But if the long return of spirit to itself begins with a rejection of philosophy in the first person, a position Hegel identifies with the notion of consciousness, when consciousness comes out of itself to become self-consciousness, its very division gives it 'the experience of what spirit is – this absolute substance' [*die Erfahrung, was der Geist ist, diese absolute Substanz*]. To follow the sequence of Hegel's statements, 'the experience of what spirit is' represents the experience of a unity that exists only in the form of difference and division, which in turn only exist in the form of unity, and thus an experience of a relation of mutual immanence without reduction or transcendence. Hegel could have, and from a certain perspective perhaps should have, remained at the level of spirit and substance, the principle protagonists of his drama. Instead, it is

here that he chooses to return to 'the I' that is in fact a 'we' and the 'we' that is always also an 'I'. Balibar is right to read in this passage a conception of the individual/community relation that is neither an organic whole of which the world of distinct individualities is a secondary expression nor an original condition of separate and antagonistic individuals that must be overcome for any kind of society to exist. There is no sublation of 'their opposition', any more than of their 'freedom and independence', which Hegel describes as *vollkommenen*, that is, perfect, completed or absolute.¹⁴

It is precisely here that spirit reveals itself, requiring neither fear of the sovereign, nor the pressure of need to induce individuals (referred to in this passage as 'self-consciousnesses', indicating that each is divided from itself) to live with others without threatening their independence or freedom. This is a glimpse of the end that awaits, which allows us to understand what follows, the conflict between master and slave, as a moment, both necessary and necessarily fleeting, in spirit's return to itself. This does not, however, exhaust the significance of the passage in the economy of Hegel's narrative: it may also be read as a comment on the 'I' as subject in Locke's sense. Not only does Hegel's differentiation of self-consciousness from mere consciousness deprive the 'I' of its status as the unique point of origin for thought, speech and action, by defining it as a 'we', but like Rousseau he endows 'the I' with a multiplicity produced not simply by the act of consciousness 'coming outside of itself', but also by the act of bringing the outside *into* itself. This outside, or otherness, is internalised without, however, ceasing to be other, or more accurately, a multiplicity of others, with the result that self-consciousness is complete or perfect in its diversity.

This is the moment at which it becomes possible to think the citizen not simply as the concept that makes visible the contradiction at the heart of the figure of the subject (and its stand-ins: agent, actor, etc.), but in itself. The passage from Hegel's *Phenomenology* examined above offers, in a quite explicit way, a theorisation of what Balibar has called 'equaliberty'. The notion of a world of individuals knowing themselves as other and knowing others as

themselves and therefore a recognition of the irreducible difference and independent existence that not only separates each from the other, but each from him- or herself, would appear to require a real equality that in no way implies, but on the contrary excludes, the sameness or interchangeability of the individuals recognised as equal. Hegel, read in this way, has proposed a universalism opposed to the universalism that will appear later in the *Phenomenology*, based on Adam Smith's account of the invisible hand, produced behind the backs of individuals compelled to labour to satisfy the needs of others in order to satisfy their own, which is an overcoming of difference and opposition in the process of producing the same. The universalism contained in the brief glimpse of absolute spirit prior to its disappearance into the struggle between master and slave is a universalism of difference, in which othernesses proliferate both inside and outside every conceivable border and in this way come to define what is common.

Divided universals

However, one divides into two: Balibar's conclusion, 'Bourgeois Universality and Anthropological Differences', confronts the fact that, to use Hegel's idiom, even the universalism of difference, which necessarily remains a field of struggle, produces its other. Difference, even in the seemingly hospitable environment of the universal that finds its truth, and its identity, in its diversity, is itself subject to differentiation.¹⁵ Difference divides, according to Balibar's argument, into the antinomies of the assimilable and the inassimilable, the functional, that which maintains individuals in their independence, and the dysfunctional, which disturbs the state of equilibrium that their opposition produces. Here, the very notion of independence, too, divides into antithetical meanings: on the one side, it is an overcoming of the vertical dependence of a being under the authority or power of an other, that is, a freeing of oneself from subjection; on the other, it is the loss of a mutual, horizontal interdependence which can be understood as the material form of the common, and thus the social and economic abandonment which Marx likened to the medieval penalty of being declared *Vogelfrei*: pushed outside the law and

free as a bird without refuge or protection to become the prey of any animal, fish or bird.

It is here, too, that the concept of citizen divides into an antagonism, even, or especially, in the ultimate form of universal citizenship. Distributed between the poles of inclusion, of a substantive being in common, and exclusion, through the imposition of the distinction between the citizen and non-citizen, the concept of citizen is opposed to and thus perpetually redefined by a series of others to which no *a priori* limit can be assigned, each defined by the specific distance that separates it from the citizen of the realm they both inhabit: friend, ally, foreigner, stranger, internal enemy, and so on. One of Balibar's most important contributions to contemporary political thought is to have shown that what is often regarded as the ultimate form of universalism, the doctrine of human rights recognised as pertaining to every human being without exception (and thus irrespective of the varying rights conferred on or denied them by a given constitutional order), must determine the meaning of 'human'. Because the condition of being human is co-extensive with the inalienable, undetachable rights proper to the human species, 'the human being cannot be denied access to citizenship' in its universal form 'unless, contradictorily, he is excised from humanity' (276).

This excision appears as the retroactive classification of individuals and groups, not simply as non-human but as subhuman, defective or monstrous, or as those have fallen below (or who have never risen to) the threshold of the human proper. The striking paradox of modernity (at least in its dominant forms) is its obsession with classifying, and often producing, the anthropological differences it identifies, so as to endow them with decisive significance for the universal political order. Certain phenotypical characteristics, such as skin colour, or certain customs or practices, become markers of the distance that separates certain groups from the norms that define the human. The universal in this sense does not so much divide into two, but shatters into fragments, each of whose specific difference is measured by its distance from the norms of the human. This distance is expressed not only in bodily appearance and practices, but language itself; that is, in diverse languages classified

hierarchically according to their capacity to capture and communicate the abstractions necessary to the material and spiritual progress of humanity. By reading Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* together with Fanon's discussion of language in *Black Skins, White Masks*, Balibar shows that language, the most material and palpable form of community, serves as a contrast medium that makes difference visible and audible – above all, the difference between authentic members of a given nation and the others, who cannot conceal their inability to master not simply the rules of a given language (above all, morphological, syntactical and semantic) but the far more elusive and in fact constantly changing phonological distinctions that characterise the discourse of the 'native' speaker.

Balibar concludes by offering what we might call a dialectical understanding of subjection, citizenship and universality. His dialectic, however, offers none of the assurances associated, rightly or wrongly, with the Hegelian version: no linearity, no finality, no sublimation of contradiction and thus no order or systematicity. A dialectic without guarantees, not even the guarantee of defeat, leaving us no choice but to take up the struggle, even as we know that there can be no true thresholds of irreversibility, no absolutely definitive victories, and that our own achievements may be links in the historical sequence through which our defeat is realised. Balibar refuses to tell stories, as Althusser used to say; that is, to offer lessons in the providential workings of history. He asks us to dwell in the insoluble paradoxes, petrified contradictions, problems without solution of the current conjuncture and of the history immanent in it. He writes with urgency, as if he cannot let a single feature of the inhospitable landscape of the present escape analysis. He does so not to overwhelm or paralyze the reader, but on the contrary to chart the ever-changing conflicts and antagonisms that allow us, at certain moments, to tip the balance in favour of the becoming citizen of both subject and stranger.

Warren Montag is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California, and author of *Althusser and his Contemporaries* (2013).

Notes

1. Étienne Balibar, *Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 2 [subsequent page numbers given in the text].
2. Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 50.
3. Balibar singles out Foucault's pronouncement at the conclusion of *The Order of Things* that 'man' might one day 'be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea'. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1970), 386.
4. Jean-Luc Nancy et al., *Après le sujet qui vient. Cahiers Confrontation* 20 (1989); Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, eds., *Who Comes After the Subject?*, trans. Eduardo Cadava et al. (New York: Routledge, 1991).
5. See also Balibar's contribution to the entry on the subject in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: a Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 1069–1091.
6. Martin Heidegger, 'Metaphysics as a History of Being', *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 27.
7. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 468.
8. See Étienne Balibar, *Identity and Difference: John Locke and the Invention of Consciousness*, trans. Warren Montag (London: Verso, 2013).
9. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Rousseau, juge de Jean-Jacques', *Dialogues*, in *Collection complète des oeuvres* (Geneva: Société typographique de Genève, 1780-1789), vol. 11, 216.
10. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 145; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 110.
11. Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 144; *Phenomenology*, 109.
12. Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 144; *Phenomenology*, 110.
13. See Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 145; *Phenomenology*, 110.
14. Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 145; *Phenomenology*, 110.
15. See also Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, trans. Chris Turner, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991).