

PHILOSOPHY'S SUBJECTS

Nina Power

1. INTRODUCTION: AN INDISPENSABLE TERM?

There are manifold ways of articulating the term 'subject' that ultimately bear upon philosophy, and simultaneously, many modes of philosophising that have implications for a conception of the subject. What is surprising, given the term's indispensability in discussions ranging from politics to philosophy of mind, is the scant conceptual analysis usually devoted to the term. It is as if its theoretical, linguistic and practical ambivalences were acknowledged a priori to be too intricate to untangle. '*The philosophy of the subject,*' writes Paul Ricoeur, 'has never existed; rather, there have been a series of reflective styles, arising out of the work of redefinition which the challenge itself has imposed.'¹ Adorno also discusses the resistance of 'subject' (and 'object') to definition: 'The determination of their meanings requires reflection on the very thing the act of defining truncates for the sake of conceptual manageability.'² We can go further and state that the question of the subject is not only a problem for 'reflective' styles of philosophy (Ricoeur identifies this lineage with the figures of Socrates, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Fichte, Husserl),³ but for any thinking that concerns the relationship between humanity, thought and practice. 'It goes without saying,' writes Vincent Descombes, 'that philosophy as such, or at least *modern* philosophy, was on the side of an affirmation of man as "subject".'⁴ The subject haunts philosophical and political conceptualisations as both the presupposed bearer of thought (either at the level of the individual, the self, the philosopher him or herself, or at the level of the species) and as the *quality* of this bearing itself (for instance, as the passive substrate denoted by the Greek *hypokeimenon*, or an active force, as in Marx's early conception of the proletariat as a collective subject).

This article begins with a systematic exposition of the permutations of (a.) the term 'subject' itself and (b.) the conceptual history and reception of the term in French philosophical and political thought in the early twentieth century. The importance of this exposition is threefold. The key elements of my argument here will demonstrate, first, how certain prevalent interpretations of the 'subject' operate at the level of their presentation and argumentation; second, how one particular way of conceptualising the modern subject (namely, the Cartesian, or rather, a certain *construction* of the Cartesian subject) has come to dominate both the dogmatic and critical contemporary discourses of the subject and third, to show that the mid-twentieth century controversy concerning 'humanism' in its Marxist, structuralist, humanist and antihumanist modes masked the more fundamental issue of the nature and necessity (or otherwise) of a concept of 'the subject' for philosophy and politics.

The choice of these three elements is determined by a larger aim: to rehabilitate a certain notion of a collective subject, while acknowledging the dialectical oscillations inherent in the political roots of the etymology of the term – from *sujet* to *subjectus*, and from passivity to activity. The conceptual lineage of the collective political subject that I am constructing here is not, it must be noted, an attempt to conflate the very different trajectories of the subject (from the Greek *hypokeimenon* to the Latin *subjectum*; from the Latin *subjectus* to the political French *sujet*/English subject). Clearly the political implications of 'subject' are not coterminous with the origins of the Greek term (the physical substrate and the logical subject, the support for the predicates in a proposition): 'subjectivity is not the relative product of subjectness and subjection', as Balibar puts it.⁵ Nevertheless, the

Latin (and subsequently French) rendering of *hypokeîmenon* as *subjectum* (*sujet*) and as *subjectus* (also *sujet*) inaugurates an ambiguity in the term that precisely splits the term across its philosophical and political axes: ‘One gives rise to a lineage of logico-grammatical and ontological-transcendental meanings, and the other to a lineage of juridical, political and theological meanings.’⁶ The crucial point here is that ‘far from remaining independent of one another, they have constantly overdetermined one another, because, following Kant, the problematic articulation of “subjectivity” and “subjugation” came to be defined as a theory of the constituent subject.’⁷ Although the conception of subject as substance remains to some degree in Descartes (despite the claims of his epigones), Balibar is unusual in refusing to locate the origins of a modern, philosophical-political subject in Descartes, finding it instead in the interstices of Kant’s discussion of revolutionary politics in the speculative political, anthropological and historical texts, as well as the critical works: ‘It is ... only with the *Critique of Pure Reason* that *das Subjekt* becomes the key concept in a philosophy of subjectivity ... for all finite minds, that interplay [between the faculties of knowledge] constitutes “the world”.’⁸ The subject understood ontologically and logically as substance – as that which supports as well as underlies the sensible qualities it makes possible (as in Aristotle), and whose hypothetical existence must be supposed in order to make possible a ‘double intelligibility of the sensible’ (as Henriot puts it⁹) – seems absent, for the most part, from recent discussions of the term. It is the split between ‘subject’ understood logico-ontologically and ‘subject’ grasped as a political category that is fundamentally at stake here.

In the same vein, Balibar argues persuasively in several different texts that the reception of the French term ‘sujet’, and indeed, the history of the word in Western thought is governed by what he calls ‘an *objective* play on words’, the ‘simple’ fact that we translate as subject (*sujet*) both the neutral, impersonal notion of a *subjectum*, and the ‘notion of a *subjectus*, the political and juridical term’. In more recent work, he expands this account to include a third term, that of subjectness (*subjectité*), a translation of the Heideggerian neologism *Subjektheit* (best translated as ‘subjectness’ rather than ‘subjecthood’). Subjectness points to the very quality of ‘being a subject, prior to its metaphysical capture in a logic of humanism and representation, and before its definition in terms of passivity and activity. The term attempts to link the logical subject (that ‘of which’ there can be predicates) and the physical subject (that ‘in which’ there are accidents).¹⁰ We *know* this play on words “perfectly,” argues Balibar, but we deny it ‘at least as philosophers and historians of philosophy.’¹¹ On one level this is manifestly correct – the noun form and adjectival form of the political ‘subject’ (as in the phrases: ‘the people is subject’;¹² a faithful subject; a British subject, and so on) does not necessarily or immediately come to mind in discussions of the subject as a philosophical noun (as transcendental, reflexive, involved in subject-object relations, etc.). Nevertheless, the fact that the noun ‘subject’ refers to a legal or political person/collective *and* to a perceiving or cognising self, as the French etymology would have it, both reveals and obscures a political and historical coupling that is rarely noted. Even in those thinkers, such as Kant, whose work straddles the two acceptations of the term, the philosophic import of the double work of the term is, in many ways, basically concealed.

2. CRITIQUES OF THE SUBJECT IN CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

Despite the patent nature of the play on words at work in the term ‘subject’, its political and philosophical connections have been severely dislocated in much philosophical usage of the term; more specifically, the dominant (phenomenological-Cartesian) tendency in contemporary thinking on the ‘subject’ begins with a specifically philosophical conception of the term and presupposes that this is the precondition for any further discussion of politics (if, indeed, any discussion of politics is ever produced by this tendency). Contemporary thinking simply assumes that the philosophical meaning takes precedence. What this

means is that a certain concept of a self-reflexive, individuated subject has stifled any discussion of the subject that would treat the subjectivity of that subject as a primarily collective fact, in spite of such precedents as Feuerbach's discussions of the immediately generic nature of consciousness, Marx's early claims about humanity and Sartre's notion of the shared aims of the group-in-fusion. The individuated nature of the 'modern' subject, understood in a political framework as the bearer of certain rights or as a legal subject, has further entailed that the philosophical and political critique of the subject *tout court*, as for instance in Althusser's work on Ideological State Apparatuses, is fundamentally conceived as an attack on the *subjection* of an ideologically inculcated subject. In other words, Althusser's analysis of ideology and critique of the subject seem to presuppose that the subject in question is the *same* subject as the one proposed by the phenomenological-Cartesian position: 'we observe that the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognise that every "subject" endowed with a "consciousness" and believing in the "ideas" that his "consciousness" inspires in him and freely accepts, must "act according to his ideas", must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice.'¹³ The claim here is that no conception of the subject could be free from its association with a certain kind of consciousness which believes in its own freedom, and is thus always tied up with both representation and an ideological, though real, relation between 'ideas' and action. The critique of the subject here and elsewhere (for example, Althusser's attack on the 'circularity' of the concepts 'subject' and 'sovereign' in his early essay on Hegel) already concedes much ground to a certain conception of the subject as individuated, ignoring other political conceptions of the subject.¹⁴

We can see the same willful insensitivity to the double semantic register of the term 'subject' in Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*. In the chapter, 'The Image of Thought', Deleuze discusses the unifying nature of the cogito, which 'expresses the unity of all the faculties in the subject' and partners the double-sided *doxa* of common sense and good sense ('Good sense determines the contribution of the faculties in each case, while common sense contributes the form of the Same'). This claim with regard to unification and good and common sense is used by Deleuze to criticize both the individual qualities of the subject ('For Kant as for Descartes, it is the identity of the Self in the "I think" which grounds the harmony of all the faculties and their agreement on the form of a supposed Same object') and its universal presuppositions (the 'harmony of the faculties grounded in the supposedly universal thinking subject').¹⁵ What Deleuze neglects in the attempt to criticise the very form of supposedly 'dogmatic' philosophy are the tensions in the concept of the subject itself, even in the very thinkers he presupposes to be responsible for the notion that the subject is always entangled in questions of recognition and representation. If such an 'image of thought' exists in Descartes and Kant, it is because Deleuze illegitimately mortgages the idea of 'representation' to the *legal* conception of the word (thus engaging in a slightly different play on words than the one in question here, but one that similarly manipulates the ambiguity between the philosophical and political implications of the term), so as to make 'the subject', particularly, as he argues, in Kant's Critiques, the bearer of a 'naturally' statist position: 'Critique has everything – a tribunal of justices of the peace, a registration room, a register – except the power of a new politics that would overturn the image of thought.'¹⁶

But this is to underplay the existence of a relationship between the political implications of Kant's critical works, and what Kant says elsewhere (in the *Anthropology* and the political writings) regarding the very same questions. By reposing the question in terms of the individual, the universal and individuated,¹⁷ Deleuze traverses the link between the subject, humanity/species and politics (as Kant speculatively posits the relationship in the 'peripheral' works), which gives him the ground to make the aforementioned series of critiques of the subject, legality and representation (and, incidentally, brings him close to Althusser in this respect). By lining up the cogito, representation, recognition, uprightness, good and common sense, and the universal-Self relation in opposition to the individual-individuated relation, stupidity, the encounter, difference, repetition, Deleuze identifies the 'subject' of Descartes and Kant with the subject of philosophy understood as a reactionary and politically inhibitive discipline *per se*, rather than viewing the subject as a radically contested term that already questions the very opposition of philosophy and politics.

That Althusser and Deleuze, who both considered themselves to be throwing suspicion on the ideological skewing of the term subject, continued to operate within the political limits of its constitutive play on words – confining our attention to either one or the other semantic ranges of the term ‘subject’ – points to the enduring lack of a detailed examination of the term ‘subject’ and its offshoots. Furthermore, we can make a general claim that certain modes of conceptualisation, certain correlates of the term subject, more specifically ‘subjectivity’ (*subjectivité*), ‘subjectness’ (*subjectité* and *Subjektheit* in German), ‘subjectivation’ or ‘subjectification’ (*subjectivation*),¹⁸ ‘subjection’ (*subjection*), tend to assume the primary meaning in given modes of philosophising (or certain philosophies), whether they are explicitly acknowledged as doing so or not.

What is implied by this crucial matter of terminology for our argument? That it is necessary to excavate elements of the occluded history of the subject in its political sense, which itself borrows elements from philosophical conclusions, in order to present an elucidation of the modern political subject. In other words, not only to present ‘a genealogy of the identification of the *problem of subjectivity* with the *problem of subjection*, which will give a completely new meaning to the philosophical question of the subject,’¹⁹ but also to critically identify the complex reversals in the status of the ‘political subject’, of its passivity and activity, according to the various ways in which it is framed.

3. THREE ANALYSES OF THE MODERN SUBJECT: RICOEUR, HEIDEGGER, DESCOMBES (VIA KANT’S CONCEPT OF THE WORLD)

At this point, it is instructive to compare the key features of three interventions on the question of the subject in order to demonstrate how certain defining assumptions are made in contemporary thought with regard to who or what this subject is, and the role of and for philosophy in this determination. The three texts in question here are Heidegger’s ‘The Age of the World Picture’ (1938),²⁰ Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* (1990) and Descombes’s *Le Complément du sujet: enquête sur le fait d’agir de soi-même* (*The Complement of the Subject: An Investigation into the fact of Acting as Oneself*) (2004). These represent three main stands of the attempt to come to terms with the subject: by moving before or beyond the subject-object opposition of ‘modern’ philosophy to the ‘being of entities’ themselves, by returning in Heidegger’s case to a ‘pre-modern’ formulation, in other words ‘taking a new step backward’ as Schürmann puts it;²¹ by limiting the question of the subject to the problem of the self (understood as the cogito) while giving a phenomenological account of the body that undermines its problematic idealism (Ricoeur); by limiting the question of the subject to a grammatical or linguistic operation such that the subject is the complement of an agent like any other (Descombes). All of these discussions – the anti-representational, the phenomeno-hermeneutic and the linguistic – imply and presuppose a certain conception of the relationship between philosophy, the subject and the time in which the question is asked: the assumption of all three thinkers is that the question of the subject is a ‘modern’ concern of thought, for better or worse. But what this ‘modern’ era implies, even if all three thinkers are convinced that it begins with Descartes, is different in each case. The ‘subject’ in question will also depend on how the relationship between Descartes and Kant is figured in each position. Deleuze indicates something crucial with regard to this relationship in his lectures on Kant when he states: ‘[in Descartes] thinking substance is determined as subject. It’s the discovery which will mark all philosophy said to be modern, from the 17th century onwards, it is the discovery of subjectivity ... the Cartesian cogito is the assignation of substance as subject: “I think”, the Kantian “I think” is very different. Everything happens as if a further step was taken, namely that the form of subjectivity breaks away from substance.’²² It is the passage from the ‘discovery’ of subjectivity in Descartes to its desubstantialisation in Kant that frames the twentieth-century response to the question of the subject (even if we can technically locate – albeit without the

same linguistic terms – questions of interiority and subjectness earlier in Augustine, or even Plato). In ‘The Age of the World Picture’ Heidegger definitively aligns metaphysics and ‘the modern’ with certain innovations of Descartes: ‘The whole of modern metaphysics taken together, Nietzsche included, maintains itself within the interpretation of what it is to be and of truth that was prepared by Descartes.’²³ ‘With the interpretation of man as *subjectum*’, Descartes, Heidegger argues, consummates the era of anthropocentrism and creates the preconditions for the construction of every kind of anthropology.²⁴ He does so by inaugurating a relationship between representation and the subject as man. In the modern world picture, Heidegger describes man as precisely having, for the first time, a position, such that man himself expressly takes up this position as one constituted by himself: ‘Man makes depend upon himself the way in which he must take his stand in relation to whatever is as the objective.’²⁵ Man is the measure of all things because he represents the world to himself from the standpoint of himself. But this humanisation of thought obscures a certain kind of questioning: ‘Anthropology is that interpretation of man that already knows fundamentally what man is and hence can never ask who he may be.’²⁶ As Ricoeur puts it: ‘With objectivity comes subjectivity, in the sense that this being-certain of the object is the counterpart of the positing of a subject. So we have both the *positing* of the subject and the *proposition* of the representation.’²⁷ When Descartes, according to Heidegger, makes the move to limit the more open elements of ‘subjectness’, its distribution across passivity and activity, that move allows Descartes not only to centralise the position of man in thought, history and the world, but also to come down heavily on the side of activity. It is this last point that allows Heidegger to make the claim that the freneticism of modern life is ‘Cartesian’.

The co-presence of representation with humanised subjectivity is key. It is not that there really was an Ancient world picture, or a Medieval world picture, but it is the fact that the world becomes a picture at all which distinguishes ‘the essence of the modern age [*der Neuzeit*]’. The capacity to objectify, to technologise and measure are incorporated, according to Heidegger, in a total picture of the world that places man at its centre and makes the world and everything in it instrumental. He traces the origins of the term subject from the Greek *hypokeimenon*, which he translates as: ‘that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself.’²⁸ He contends, too, that this metaphysical meaning of the concept of subject ‘has first of all no special relationship to man and none at all to the I. And yet man has become the primary ‘and only real’ *subjectum* in the ‘modern world picture’ [*Weltbild*]. Nevertheless, if the Cartesian cogito is too enmeshed in a logic of representation and humanism from the very beginning, Heidegger does not simply advise abandoning it or refusing its centrality. As Ricoeur puts it: ‘the kind of ontology developed by Heidegger in ‘The Age of the World Picture’ gives ground to ... a *hermeneutics of the ‘I am’*, which is a refutation of the *cogito* conceived of as a simple epistemological principle and at the same time is an indication of a foundation of Being which is necessarily spoken of as grounding the *cogito*.’²⁹ By shifting the focus away from the thinking activity of the I and back towards that of the ‘am’, the ‘foundation of Being’, Heidegger attempts to destroy and reconstruct both the conception of man and the ontological aspects of the subject.

Nevertheless, Heidegger, in one brief comment, does provide us with an interesting clue as to the nature of the *political* subject in the modern world picture: ‘Certainly the modern age has, as a consequence of the liberation of man, introduced subjectivism and individualism. But it remains just as certain that no age before this one has produced a comparable objectivism and that in no age before this has the non-individual, in the form of the collective, come to acceptance as having worth.’³⁰ Heidegger here opposes the ‘non-individual’, namely the collective, to the interiorisation of man qua subject, but *not* to the liberation of man itself. He indicates, rather, that the question of the liberation of the collective is implicated in the reformulation of the terms subject and subjectivity. Ultimately, for Heidegger, this political ‘liberation’ of man is ultimately no liberation at all, but rather a disguising of man’s ontological possibilities, and, furthermore, ‘the modern freedom of subjectivity vanishes totally in the objectivity commensurate with it.’³¹ Nevertheless, Heidegger does acknowledge that in the ‘modern age’, ‘the collective’ also takes on a qualitatively different nature and evaluation, and that this question precisely concerns the liberation of man in his very essence. He notes that the very essence of (modern) man changes when he becomes subject, and, we must therefore extrapolate, also when he or she becomes ‘collective’. It is this revealing, if brief, linkage that indicates to us the full consequences and radicality of the very thing that

Heidegger most opposes, namely the privileging of humanity in the historico-philosophical gaze: 'Being subject as humanity has not always been the sole possibility belonging to the essence of historical man, which is always beginning in a primal way, nor will it always be.'³²

Paradoxically, Heidegger views the oppositional pairing of the subject/object, individual/collective as that which both permits access 'back to events more profound', and as the modern problematic that philosophy must think beyond (or before):

Only because and in so far as man actually and essentially has become subject is it necessary for him, as a consequence, to confront the explicit question: Is it as an 'I' confined to its own preferences and freed into its own arbitrary choosing or as the "we" of society; is it as an individual or as a community; is it as a personality within the community or as a mere group member in the corporate body; is it as a state and nation and as a people or as the common humanity of modern man, that man will and ought to be the subject that in his modern essence he *already is*? Only where man is essentially already subject does there exist the possibility of his slipping into the aberration of subjectivism in the sense of individualism. But also, only where man *remains* subject does the positive struggle against individualism and for the community as the sphere of those goals that govern all achievement and usefulness have any meaning.³³

This positive struggle for the community can only take place from within the logic of an anthropic and representational world picture. But why does 'community' become the privileged term here? If the 'collective' is previously positioned (negatively) on the side of the 'objective', why, if we cannot escape the modern world picture, is 'community' the term worth fighting for instead? The shift in registers between the philosophical and the historically possible indicates a distinct and underacknowledged slippage between the political and philosophical registers. Unless Heidegger can argue why community should be the ontologically privileged term, we must acknowledge that this term is a deeply problematic insertion, itself political, into a dialogue that purports to be less concerned with the 'ontically' political than it really is.

While Heidegger attacks Descartes primarily for humanising thought, Ricoeur, who shares Heidegger's concern with the project of fundamental ontology to some extent, is nevertheless more cautious in his investigation of the implications of the cogito. By declaring that 'the *crisis* of the cogito is contemporaneous with the *positing* of the cogito,'³⁴ Ricoeur attempts to discover a way out of the problems of self-certainty and the seeming impossibility of grounding certainty on a doubting subject. In his own reading of Heidegger's critique of the subject, he suggests that 'a retrieval of the cogito is possible only as a regressive movement beginning with the whole phenomenon of "being-in-the-world" and turned toward the question of the *who* of the being-in-the-world.'³⁵ By locating the question of the (as yet unknown) subject in the world, Ricoeur circumscribes the locus of the question drastically: the subject is already in the world, enmeshed in its very fibres.

What is most revealing, however, is his explicit declaration of how he construes the 'philosophy of the subject':

I hold ... as paradigmatic of the philosophies of the subject that the subject is formulated in the first person – *ego cogito* – whether the "I" is defined as an empirical or a transcendental ego, whether the "I" is posited absolutely (that is, with no reference to another) or relatively (egology requiring the intrinsic complement of intersubjectivity). In all of these instances, the subject is "I". That is why I am considering ... the expression "philosophies of the subject" as equivalent

to “philosophies of the cogito”.³⁶

By equating philosophies of the subject with philosophies of the cogito (i.e. by limiting all discussion of the subject to that of the first-person ‘I’), Ricoeur repeats and shores up the post-Cartesian phenomenological idea that the subject is always first and foremost a question of an individuated entity (be it ‘intersubjective’ or otherwise). Thus the question of the subject is a question of the ‘self’. Differences in the French and English translation of self are worth noting here. The French ‘*soi-même*’, literally ‘self-same’, carries the implication of a reflective equality; the English ‘oneself’, on the other hand, implies a unity. It is for this reason, perhaps, that when we discuss the problems of the self and the cogito in English-language philosophy, it is difficult to avoid thinking in terms of a unified entity, of an agent, which might go some way to explaining the relative centrality of agent-based thinking in questions of the subject in analytic English-language philosophy in contrast to the French. It is clear, to take the current example, that Ricoeur wants to think through what the ‘*même*’ (the same) in *soi-même* implies. Although his ambition is to fill out this cogito with a reflection on kinds of worldly practicality and embodiment, it is hard not to think that Ricoeur has already assumed too much about the cogito from the outset, precisely because he takes the *même* of *soi-même* to imply a kind of equality or harmony, both with others and with the world.

This making-worldly of the cogito, and the ultimate reconciliation of Descartes’ radical doubt with the possibility of intersubjectivity, finds resonance in some ‘post-analytic’ readings of scepticism (particularly Cavell), whereby scepticism is read back into Descartes and Kant as if this were their major concern, and a ‘solution’ sought in the ‘acknowledgement’ of the other, or in embodied intersubjectivity. This reading of the cogito, like the phenomenological and Heideggerian ones, too closely aligns the Cartesian and Kantian projects, whereby the latter is a radicalising, or emptying out, of the earlier cogito.³⁷ But Kant’s subject is a function, not an existing being. It removes any references to ancient conceptions of the subject as that which accidents ‘happen to’, unlike Descartes’ analysis. As Descombes puts it: ‘The scholastic-Cartesian subject is defined by opposition to the accident, not by opposition to the object.’³⁸

Because of the potential emptiness of the Cartesian subject (and even more so in the case of the Kantian one), Ricoeur, as well as other interpreters, have been tempted to make up for this lack, to *substantialise* the cogito, and to assume that there is ultimately, or at a prior level (a level usually before philosophy proper) a kind of harmony between the self and the world. This move depends upon conflating or underplaying the Kantian separation between transcendental apperception and the empirical subject of experience. As Ricoeur puts it: ‘The fact that the self and being-in-the-world are basic correlates seems indisputable to me.’³⁹ If subject equals self, and the self is enmeshed in the world, we are dealing with a fundamental project of harmonisation, at odds both with the more radical ontological concerns of Heidegger, and also, as we shall see, with Kant’s own speculative work on the subject and its relationship to the world. The *voided* nature of Kant’s transcendental apperception is seen as something to be rectified:

In order to avoid slipping into a subjectivist idealism, the “I think” must be divested of any psychological resonance, all the more so of any autobiographical reference. It must become the Kantian “I think,” which the transcendental deduction states must be able to accompany all my acts. The problematic of the self emerges magnified, in a sense, but at the price of the loss of its relation to the person who speaks, to the I-you of interlocution, to the identity of a historical person, to the self of responsibility.⁴⁰

The question of the *quality* of what it means to be a subject, the weight of its being-in-the-world, are fundamental to this corrective interpretation of Kant: ‘Positing and subjectivity go hand in hand to the degree to which the reference to the world and self-reference ... are symmetrical and reciprocal.’⁴¹ It is here, before we turn to Descombes, that a discussion of Kant and the ‘world’ is crucial. There is another way of articulating the subject-world relation in Kant’s work that tends to get overlooked by those seeking to portray him as a thinker more concerned with judgement, morality or duty than with politics, society and history.

In twentieth-century readings of Kant that try to extract a politics from his critical works, the over-riding tendency has been to look to the *Critique of Judgement* and to locate a reflection on the social through the idea of *sensus communis* and judgement itself (Arendt, Lyotard). Alternatively, Kant's contribution to social thought has been read through his moral philosophy. Admittedly, there is more basis for this in Kant's own texts, given his own normative and anthropological reflections on the practical in the second Critique. Because the approach that takes 'judgement' as its guiding term begins with the relationship between the faculties and then politically hypostatizes this relationship (in terms of harmony, dissonance or community), it avoids answering or even acknowledging Kant's fourth question, namely, 'What is Man?'. But Kant *has* an answer to this question, albeit an answer that explains why it is *constitutively unanswerable*, yet nevertheless politically and socially regulative. It concerns precisely the relationship between the subject, humanity and the world.

In the Preface to the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, a course modified over the twenty-five years of its teaching and finally published in 1798, Kant writes 'the most important object in the world to which he [the human being] can apply [acquired knowledge and skills] is the human being: because the human being is his own final end ... to know the human being according to his species as an earthly being endowed with reason especially deserves to be called *knowledge of the world*, even though he constitutes only one part of the creatures on earth.'⁴² Humanity takes itself to be simultaneously subject, object *and* species. The relationship to the world here is not the embodied, inter-subjective one proposed by Ricoeur and others but a practical-rational one which privileges the human qua rational terrestrial being. The argument Heidegger makes in 1938 concerning the 'the world picture' seems at first glance to be borne out in Kant's admission that if man's object is himself, this is at the same time a kind of knowledge of the world. Indeed, Heidegger's critique is conceptually better aimed at Kant than at Descartes, given the relative lack of the term 'subject' in the latter's analysis. Heidegger does in fact wonder in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* whether the fourth question, 'what is Man?', retroactively grounds the Critiques (as, indeed, does Foucault in his Introduction to the *Anthropology*).⁴³ But Kant nowhere in the *Anthropology* makes this claim, nor does it seem likely that he intended the *Anthropology* to perform such a role. The speculative nature of the work entails that the discussion of man is pragmatic and cosmopolitan, not ontological or foundational.

Kant argues that knowledge of the human being is either physiological or pragmatic. It concerns either what nature makes of the human being, or what he as a free-acting being makes of himself. Observation of the physiological is a futile project if it does not follow scientific and empirical protocols; therefore Kant in the *Anthropology* restricts himself to those particular anthropological questions he describes as 'pragmatic'. This has an immediate political implication that would be ignored by an (illegitimate) foundational interpretation of Kant's project in the *Anthropology*. This is because Kant's 'object' is restricted to those 'pragmatic' questions that concern history, society and man's common existence from the outset, and, as such, is not intended to form any ontological basis upon which the critical works could be retroactively 'anthropologised'. The *Anthropology* may well be necessarily peripheral in relation to the Critical works, but this very marginality makes it important in any broader account of what Kant intends by subject, humanity and the world. The cosmopolitan sense of the project is important precisely 'when we are concerned with the application of philosophical principles ... when we talk about the role of function which philosophical principles can assume in the world.'⁴⁴

Writing in 1961, Foucault argues that 'Man, in the *Anthropology*, is neither *homo natura* nor the subject of freedom; he is given within the already operating syntheses of his relation with the world.'⁴⁵ It is certainly the case that Kant locates man in the world, but this is a relationship to the world that is different both from more classical ways of positioning that would link man's existence to that of God's or to the

cosmos, and from the later phenomeno-hermeneutic substantialising that would seek to reveal the constitutive ties between our being and that of the world's: 'The *Anthropology* is pragmatic in the sense that it does not envisage man as belonging to the moral city of spirits (that would be named practical), nor to the civil society of the subjects of law (that would be named juridical); he is considered a citizen of the world.²⁴⁶ This 'citizen of the world' is a formulation that appears almost contradictory – how can one be a citizen of anything other than a republic? The question I'm posing here, namely, 'What is the political status of the world such that one could be a citizen of it?' is only briefly addressed in Kant's text, and only towards the very end. But there is a marked difference here between being in a political social world and being 'at home' in the world. Kant does not seek to find harmony for man on any level: 'the character of the species ... is that taken collectively it is a multitude of persons, existing successively and side by side, who cannot *do without* being together peacefully and yet cannot *avoid* constantly being objectionable to one another.'²⁴⁷

The second part of the *Anthropology*, entitled 'Anthropological Characteristic' is significantly shorter than the first (the 'Anthropological Didactic'). The former is defined by Kant in marginal notes as 'the doctrine of elements of anthropology', and the latter as 'the doctrine of method'. In the second part Kant discusses 'the way of cognizing the interior of the human being from the exterior'²⁴⁸ and introduces a four-part division in the characteristics of the human: the character of the person, the character of the sexes, the character of the peoples and, most crucially, the character of the species. In this final section, Kant indicates a certain impasse in thinking about the 'characteristic property' of humanity. Species classification, he argues, generally depends upon a differential comparison: if the highest species concept is that of a *terrestrial* rational being, we lack an adequate point of comparison. In other words, 'we shall not be able to name its character because we have no knowledge of *non-terrestrial* rational beings that would enable us to indicate their characteristic property and so to characterize this terrestrial being among rational beings in general.'²⁴⁹ Thus the question of humanity is a problem of *comparison*. Returning to Heidegger for a moment, it appears that his reformulation of Protagoras's 'Man is the Measure of All Things', which he presents as paradigmatic of the modern world picture, actually ignores the inherent unknowability of man's place in the universe at the heart of Kant's thought, and thus at the centre of the modern conception of man. Kant's appeal to the non-terrestrial (which is not the 'other-worldly' in a theological sense) demonstrates the limits of a response to the question 'what is Man?' and demonstrates why the fourth question can only be answered in a speculative fashion. What it also means, furthermore, is that there is a certain flexibility in Kant's understanding of the species: 'The species can be considered collectively as a whole or distributively as the logical unity of the concept of the human being.'²⁵⁰

To return to the question of the 'world citizen' for a moment, the flexibility of Kant's conception reveals the ambiguous status of the *Anthropology* as a document that is in part a descriptive formulation of a discipline, and in part an educational tool for the moral and cultural improvement of its readers. The centrality of the human, not just as world citizen but as subject, is established at the very beginning of book one in a section entitled 'On Consciousness of Oneself': 'The fact that the human being can have the "I" in his representations raises him infinitely above all the other living beings on earth ... this holds even when he cannot yet say "I," because he still has it in thoughts ... this faculty (namely to think) is *understanding*.'²⁵¹ However, the arguments against taking this I egoically, in contrast to the critical texts, are social rather than philosophical: 'The opposite of egoism can only be *pluralism*, that is, the way of thinking in which one is not concerned with oneself as the whole world, but rather regards and conducts oneself as a mere citizen of the world – This much belongs to anthropology.'²⁵² The temptation to [egoism] on the part of the subject is to be resisted in the name of the world: 'From the day that the human being begins to speak by means of "I," he brings his beloved self to light wherever he is permitted to, and egoism progresses unchecked'. Similarly, the valuation of the species, although never completed, takes place trans-generationally, and concerns the species-rationality of the human, rather than the sum total of currently existing human individuals: 'its [the human species] volition is generally good, but achievement is difficult because one cannot expect to reach the goal by the free agreement of *individuals*, but only by a progressive organization of citizens of the earth into and toward the species as a system that is cosmopolitically united.'²⁵³

What is crucial, apart from the relative newness of the concept of anthropology⁵⁴ is Kant's idea that the question of humanity understanding itself as subject is part of the definition of what it means to be a subject, and thus this question is always, albeit regulatively, tied up with what it means to be a 'citizen of the world'. Kant's subject is simultaneously a moral, political and social creature, rather than a primarily philosophically conceptualised subject (as the opposite of an object) which only afterwards has a relationship to the world (and is thus 'filled in' after the fact). We see in Kant another way of conceptualising the modern subject. But what if we remain at the level of the linguistic ambiguities of the term and refuse to draw further consequences for philosophy and politics? This is, in essence, the claim of Vincent Descombes.

In his recent comprehensive conceptual study of the notion of 'the subject', *Le Complément de sujet*, Descombes describes what he calls the 'European quarrel of the subject'. This quarrel, he argues, marks the whole of twentieth-century thought. Although his approach is ultimately marked by a Wittgensteinian impulse to 'dissolve' the metaphysical impasses at work in any question of 'the subject', Descombes begins by marking out the major episodes in its recent evolution. He notes the particular reception of the terms 'subject' (*sujet*) and 'subjectivity' (*subjectivité*) in the French context: 'the great controversy concerning the notion of the subject which has occupied a good part of the discussion in France in the second half of the last century, and which we are not yet entirely free from.'⁵⁵

The question of the subject for Descombes is predicated on a frustration with the myriad uses of the term 'subject' across disciplinary registers. His aim is to severely limit the meaning of the term, so as to untie the knots of this broader usage: 'That which one often calls the "philosophy of the subject" or the "metaphysics of subjectivity" presents all the signs of a thinking suffering from a *conceptual entanglement*.'⁵⁶ More radically, he hopes to make it impossible to reunite in a single concept all employment of the words *sujet*, *subjectif*, *pour-soi*, *ipséité*, *moi*, *soi*. In other words, Descombes wants to sort through all the terms that 'the philosophers use to treat the question of self-consciousness,⁵⁷ and to force philosophy to radically restrict all speaking of 'the subject'. Although his project is first and foremost linguistic, in that it follows in the footsteps of the aims of modern 'language philosophers', he admits that it also entails returning to an earlier philosophical conception of the subject, namely the Aristotelian one of subject as *hypokeimenon*. If the subject is to be understood only as a complement of an agent, 'such a subject must have the required traits to play the role of an agent: it must be not only identifiable as an individual, but present in the world like a causal power. This subject thus has all the characteristics of a substance or ... of a support (*suppôt*). In other words, the subject which it is necessary for us to discover is more Aristotelian than Cartesian.'⁵⁸

Despite Descombes' claim here about the 'world', however, these traits seem to remain categorical rather than actual: 'If we admit that the concept of the subject that we need is that of the agent, then we must also recognise that the subject is designated in the phrase as a complement "like the others", therefore a complement which must signify ... an entity coming under the category of supports of action and of change.'⁵⁹ If this is the case then Descombes really only takes up one side of the Aristotelian sense, namely, the logical one, and neglects the ontological aspects that Heidegger, for one, would wish to preserve in the notion of *Subjektheit*. This is of course one way of avoiding the philosophical problems and consequences, as demonstrated throughout this article, of taking up a conception of the subject that runs through Descartes and Kant. But it seems that the benefit to be drawn from this reduction is so minimal as to be unhelpful. The attempt at a linguistic logical resubstantialisation does not bring us any closer to a decision about who or what the subject, political or otherwise, might be. This problem was of course the content of the French discussion of the term, and it is to this reception that we now turn.

4. THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY FRENCH RECEPTION OF THE PROBLEM OF THE SUBJECT

Turning now to the French reception of questions of the subject, we must mark, as a crucial event in theoretical history, the *reintroduction* of the Cartesian subject, via a phenomenological reworking, into twentieth-century French thought. This can be located rather neatly in the lecture series given by Husserl in Paris in 1929, and immediately translated by Levinas. The *Cartesian Meditations* explicitly lays down the terms in which it will effect a particular reintroduction of Descartes into his native country: When Husserl states that ‘one might almost call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism’, because its principles are that of a ‘science’ that is ‘absolutely subjective’, it is apparent that we are in for a specifically post-Kantian reading of Descartes, and thus a tracing of the Cartesian ‘subject’ through a particular reading of Kant. Husserl argues that one must follow Descartes in imagining philosophy to begin in ‘introspection’, ‘a philosophy turned towards the subject himself.’ This ‘subject’, however, if one is to move ‘from naïve Objectivism to transcendental subjectivism’, is not even the thinking subject in general, but is specific to a certain kind of thinker: ‘Philosophy ... must arise as *his* wisdom, as his self-acquired knowledge tending towards universality.’⁶⁰ What Husserl proposes is that the subject in his sense is synonymous with a particular kind of thinking subject, namely the philosopher.⁶¹ Thus Husserl inaugurates an explicitly philosophical (i.e. non-psychological) investigation into the subjective constitution of intentional objects (hence, ‘the world is a universal problem of egology’⁶²). As Reiner Schürmann puts it: ‘By methodically falling back on the cogito, the phenomenology of transcendental subjectivity accomplishes a step backward that leads from the immediately and naturally given world to the world given for and by consciousness’.⁶³ We see the attempt to inaugurate an ‘egoic’ philosophy of the subject that is diametrically opposed to Kant’s attempt to counter the temptations of egoism in the name of social pluralism, as described above. Even though both Heidegger (on the German side) and Sartre (on the French) will attempt to temper Husserl’s philosophy via a certain *critique* of the subject, an aspect of which we have already seen in Heidegger’s ‘The Age of the World Picture’, the ‘subject’ as the *object* of critique for both will remain the same phenomenological-Cartesian subject, and attempts to usurp, transcend, existentialise, humanise or socialise the term will depend upon the assumption that Husserl was in some sense fundamentally *correct* in his assertion that the introspective, transcendental subject is the only justifiable starting point of and for philosophy and ‘the philosopher’.

This ‘modern’ subject thus circumscribes any post-Husserlian investigation, and can be described as a (still-current) Continental doxa amongst both supporters and critics of ‘the subject’: a subject that is more or less synonymous with the ‘self’, inter-subjectivity and the foundational, if paradoxical, role of self-consciousness. Of course, one element of the phenomenological take-up of this project is the explicit attempt to distance itself from the conflation or link between this ‘subject’ and the ‘human’, and thus from any form of philosophical anthropology (for example, the way in which *Dasein* functions in Heidegger to avoid such ontic over-determinations by the ‘human’).⁶⁴ However, the absoluteness of this philosophically generated difference is muddled because the phenomenological project does, at various points – and particularly in its French variants following the influence of Kojève’s anthropologised Hegelianism in the 1940s – lend its vocabulary to the articulation of determinations of ‘man’ (here understood as the consciousnesses of individual men and women). Sartre’s tortured ‘self’ of the early works, for example – who is never quite able to come to terms with his or her potential overdetermination as an object by the other – is a reworking of the Hegelian dialectic of recognition in a limited, ‘humanist’, mode, without the resolution of the social-individual relationship in civil society (Heidegger will attack Sartre’s ‘humanisation’ or anthropology of phenomenology as a stand-in for this French tendency as a whole in his ‘Letter on Humanism’). When Merleau-Ponty writes in 1960 of the so-called ‘modern’ usage of the term ‘subject’ as the self-conscious first person singular (the so-called ‘Cartesian subject’) which, at the same time, refers to a ‘power’ of acting based on the presence of a *percipiens* ‘without which no world would appear,’⁶⁵ he is referring to the widespread conflation of Cartesian and phenomenological projects, a prevalence of the project of the merging of thought and action starting from the basis of consciousness. Post-existentialist critiques of the subject, including Merleau-Ponty’s own, which dispute its supposed ‘centrality’, are thus criticising a specific version of an already particular reading of the subject.⁶⁶

5. DESCARTES IN FRANCE, AGAIN

Merleau-Ponty's summary of the active, self-conscious 'first person singular' reveals much about the French reinterpretation of Descartes, though it is a highly modified version of his conception of the subject. Balibar argues that:

There is no doubt whatsoever that it is essential to characterise, in Descartes, the "thinking thing" that I am (therefore!) as substance or as substantial ... But it is not essential to attach this substance to the representation of a *subjectum*.⁶⁷

The 'representational' understanding of Descartes is thus predicated on a confusion of the drive of the *cogito* to seek a foundation via the identification of the 'substance' of the thinking thing 'that I am' – what gets philosophically substantialised, ironically, is the 'non'-substance of the cognising subject. On Balibar's reading, Kant will historically prioritise this conflation by '*discover[ing] the subject in the substance* of the Cartesian cogito, and *denounc[ing] the substance in the subject* (as transcendental illusion).' If the subject is the initially substanceless ground for freedom in Hegel ('Subjectivity constitutes the ground of existence for the concept of freedom'⁶⁸), this is because the subject had already been stripped of its metaphysically foundational role by Kant, although it is still transcendently the empty logical condition for apperception.

However, if we accept that the *cogito* is not co-extensive with the *subjectum* in Descartes' work, but was given this interpretation only later by his many commentators, another question about the Cartesian subject emerges. Namely, 'in what sense the human individual ... is the "subject" (*subjectus*) of a *divine sovereignty*.'⁶⁹ If Descartes' discussion of substances establishes anything, it is that God is a substance which the human being can only approximate. The subject in Descartes is subject to God. In his *Treatise on Man* (one half of the *Treatise on the World*), published posthumously in 1666, he writes 'I suppose the body to be just a statue or a machine made of earth, which God forms with the explicit intention of making it as much as possible like us.'⁷⁰ Descartes arguably retains the older political notion of subject-sovereign and *formalises* it, making its structure of dependence interior to the subject-substance. This reading of Descartes is absolutely crucial if we are to claim that the concept of the subject in Descartes is at its very heart intricately tied up with questions of hierarchy and the subject-sovereign opposition which gets worked out in the analogous understanding of the relationship between man and God. To extract the cogito from this framework and to declare that modern thought must always begin from it (either for or against it) is to radically and illegitimately mistake what Descartes understands by 'man'.

In many ways, this history of the distortion of the term 'subject' is the philosophical story that has shaped practically all discussions of post-Husserlian thought – if Descartes is the progenitor of the modern subject, it is not because, as Balibar points out, we find in his work the 'the category "subject" as an equivalent for an autonomous self-consciousness', but because there is a retroactive identification of the *ego cogito* with the material bearer of this thinking. This 'self-subject' in turn becomes, misleadingly, the ideal figure upon which political thought turns in the contemporary context: hence the existence of such all-too-prevalent confections as the 'the relationship of the self – the subject of politics – to modernity'.⁷¹

If the 'self of modernity' is thereby also made the subject of politics, this is perhaps not only because of the peculiar politicisation of an originarily de-politicised "Cartesian" subject, but also because of the influence of a non-French strand of thought, grafted onto the idea that self is equivalent to subject. The German 'tradition' (from certain elements of Kant to Hegel) indicates this influence: 'The various theoretical perspectives of classical German philosophy are distinctive in that they take up, in very

different ways, justified criticisms of subjectivity and justifiable claims of its decentralization, but without thereby giving up the notion of the self.⁷² Rather than the subsumption of subject into self as in the phenomenological-existentialist strand, German Idealism posits the prioritisation of a certain *experience* of self as the revelation of freedom. As Véronique Zanetti states, '[s]elf-consciousness is the first principle of Kant's first two *Critiques*: it serves as the condition of the unification of the categories and therefore of objective judgements in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; it is the essential condition of freedom in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.'⁷³ The self as the subject of self-consciousness is thus created as the centre of the experiential perspective of an autonomous, moral, individual. Of course, historically we know that this is not the whole story: Balibar is correct to situate Kant's philosophical project within a broader context, namely that of emergent republicanism and the reaction to the French Revolution: 'The moment at which Kant produces ... the transcendental "subject" is precisely that moment at which politics destroys the "subject" of the prince, in order to replace him with the republican citizen.'⁷⁴

Far from testifying to the emergence of a politics concerned with what we might call the modern 'self'-subject from out of this philosophical and historical context, the political component that haunts both Descartes and Kant in the form of sovereign and theological 'substantial' dependency is indicative of an entirely other tradition of thinking about the subject, one which philosophy separates itself from and disavows. This is what we might call the 'political subject'.

6. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE

Apart from the obvious depoliticisation of the term subject in its 'modern' (post-Cartesian) philosophical formulation, there is a further implication we can initially note: that the subject is in some sense always individuated by its being (self-) realised qua subject. It is, of course, 'the only thing' that, by virtue of thinking, thinks itself. As Ricoeur puts it with reference to Descartes' innovations: 'there is a kind of complicity and identification between the two notions of the *subjectum* as ground and *subjectum* as "I".'⁷⁵ The reworking of the passive and active elements of the original term (the foundational role of the subject as 'what lies beneath' and the active element as in 'what makes possible') in modern thought produces a peculiar split: the active aspect is often subsumed by what we might call 'the self-subject', and the passive by the political subject.

The double career of the term 'subject' influences another strand of thinking. This strand concerns the subject of the subject-predicate reversal as discussed by Feuerbach and the early Marx. Again, there is a kind of conflation of two meanings of the word – the grammatical (and logical) and the philosophical (specifically, the speculative relationship between subject and object). In an exemplary passage from Feuerbach's Introduction to the *Essence of Christianity* he argues the following:

What the subject is – its being – lies only in the predicate; the predicate is the truth of the subject; the subject is only the personified, existing predicate. The distinction between subject and object corresponds to the distinction between existence and essence. The negation of the predicate is therefore the negation of the subject. What remains of the being of man if you take away its attributes? Even in the language of ordinary life one speaks of the divine not in terms of its essence, but in terms of its attributes – providence, wisdom, omnipotence.⁷⁶

Taking as his point of departure the idealism of speculative philosophy, Feuerbach proposes a method of salvaging 'man' (qua actual men and women) from the alienation of its capacities and powers in theology, politics and philosophy.⁷⁷ It is Feuerbach's analysis of the grammatical sense of the term 'subject', the replacement of essence by attributes, that characterises his *reversal* of the idealist occlusion of man's capacities and powers. We can see how Feuerbach provides one major element in the early Marx's own project of undoing the pretensions of idealism and replacing them with a properly active and sensuous conception of man:

The method of the reformative critique of *speculative philosophy* as such does not differ from that already used in the *Philosophy of Religion*. We need only turn the *predicate* into the *subject* and thus as *subject* into *object* and *principle* – that is, only *reverse* speculative philosophy.⁷⁸

Of course, this mere reversal, if it *also* takes place at the theoretical level, does not suffice to negate the implications of abstract idealism, as Marx will point out in the critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. This is the brunt of Marx's argument both in the 'Theses on Feuerbach' and *The German Ideology*. Marx's idea of the subject as 'sensible practice', which comprehends the subject as being both social and actively producing (rather than the passive opposite of the object), undermines the reversal of idealism by both realising it and transforming it. On the theoretical level, the transformation comes about by understanding this new 'subject' in all its social, sensual, concrete, productive and economic relations. Thesis One of the *Theses on Feuerbach* reads as follows:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. Hence, in *Das Wesen des Christentums*, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judaical manifestation. Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical", activity.⁷⁹

The subject's own objectifying activity, its sensible practice, is here raised to the level of theoretical activity. The subject as revolutionary practice clearly involves recognizing the active capacity in the historically subordinated political subject; while Marx's definition of the proletariat as *substanzlose Subjektivität* (substanceless subjectivity) recovers, as many present day thinkers do not, the meaning of the subject in the Greek term *hypokeimenon*. Žižek makes the following observation with regard to the relationship between Marx, Hegel and the subject:

Marx conceives of the proletarian revolution as a "materialist" version of the Hegelian reconciliation of subject and substance [because] it re-establishes the unity of the subject (labour force) with the objective conditions of the process of production, yet not under the hegemony of these objective conditions (where individuals figure as mere subordinated moments of their social totality), but with collective subjectivity as the mediating force of this unity.⁸⁰

What Žižek's claim doesn't take into account, however, is the peculiarly *empty* element of Marx's definition of the proletariat as subject, taking it instead to be another reversal of the subject-predicate proposition, and thus open to criticism from within a Hegelian standpoint ('It was possible for Marx to imagine "dis-alienation" as the reversal by means of which the subject reappropriates the entire substantial content. However, such a reversal is precisely what Hegel precludes⁸¹). Contra Žižek, though, Marx doesn't mean that the subject is 'substanceless' in the same way that idealist notions of the 'self' are substanceless (i.e. cut off from the original Greek meaning of the term and based upon reflection), nor that the subject is foundationless *per se* (as anti-Aristotelian notions of the subject would have it). It plays instead on a double meaning of the word as not only 'substanceless' in the political sense (i.e. the proletariat is united in a set of egalitarian economic aims and not selfish individual 'interests') but also in the sense of without (possessing) substance, i.e. without *property* (compare this point with Marx's discussion of the proletariat in the *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* where he argues that 'when the proletariat

proclaims the *dissolution of the existing world order*, it is only declaring the secret of its own existence, for it is the *actual* dissolution of that order⁸²). Marx does not simply reverse the Hegelian terms of the subject/substance opposition (thus mistakenly assuming a totality in Hegel that is absent, as Žižek points out), but rather invokes the older weight of the idea of a political subject and extracts a power from a part of it (the proletariat) that is precisely based on its radical lack ('the total loss of humanity'⁸³).

Alain Badiou's notion of the 'subject' similarly concerns a certain form of purification and, in keeping with the three major strands identified above (if not the further Feuerbachian move that depends upon a grammatical conception of the term), he will persist in the attempt to decouple subject from substance. Badiou's claim that 'Man is *not* a political animal: the chance of politics is a supernatural event'⁸⁴ is a clear statement of the idea that there is no substrate or 'substance' to man's political being. It is extremely revealing to compare Badiou to Marx on this point, for example, when Marx states that: 'man is only individualised through the process of history. He originally appears as a *generic being, a tribal being, a herd animal* – though by no means as a "political animal" in the political sense.'⁸⁵ For both Marx and Badiou (despite the former's alleged debt to Aristotle), there is a certain *unnatural* quality to the relationship between humanity and politics; it is something that must be created from within a particular situation (the *historical* emergence of the proletariat in Marx's case; the rare 'event' of politics in Badiou's). In Badiou's earlier works (*Théorie du sujet* in particular), politics will consist of an eminently *destructive* conception of the proletariat, whereas in later texts he will move to a more generic (yet still 'militant') conception of the political subject: 'political sequences take no account of any particular interests. They bring about a representation of the collective capacity on the basis of a rigorous equality between each of their agents.'⁸⁶

Badiou adopts another strategy of opposition to the major tendencies in thinking the subject presented here. His work involves the radical evacuation of the subject from all representation, experience and consciousness (against phenomenology); the removal of the subject from any transcendental system of the constitution of objects of possible experience (against Kantianism); and the ultimate collapse of any experiential, epistemological or ontological 'subjects' whatsoever, leaving only processes of subjectivation. He thus ultimately separates his analysis from a Marxism that would recognise the potentially revolutionary subject as the active element of an already existing class. The political subject for Badiou can only be constituted by the political process itself. His is thus a theory of subjectivation, and not of the subject *per se*. At the same time, he postulates that the 'collective political subject', in its emergent rarity, is neither the subject of law (as in Rousseau), nor of history (as in late Sartre), nor the individual before his or her superior or God, but is the *consequence* of a kind of 'rupture' in being.

7. CONCLUSION

Whilst it is clear from our reading of Kant's *Anthropology* and Balibar's reading of Descartes that both of modernity's foundational thinkers hint at other ways of conceptualising the relationship between the subject, humanity and the world, it is also clear that these hints have not inflected the most prevalent ways of understanding either the two philosophers or the relationship between the three terms. The French reception of a phenomenologised (supposedly) Cartesian subject set the conditions for the debate concerning the subject in terms that encourage covering over more entwined questions of the relationship between the political subject and the philosophical subject, an occlusion that nevertheless makes its presence felt at strange points, and beyond the French reception (in Heidegger's discussion of the community, for example). But we know that there are other, broader, conceptions of the subject whose meanings linger in the term, the most crucial among these being the projection of the Cartesian active subject, as we can see towards the end of the 18th century, from a passive conception of the term (as in 'subject to') and an active meaning (as in 'collective' or 'revolutionary subject'). It is this conception of a collectivized, political subject that haunts all attempts to reduce the philosophical notion of the subject to an individuated consciousness or a primarily moral being. It is the haunting of philosophy itself by the political outside that persistently both shapes and eludes it.

Nina Power is Lecturer in Philosophy at Roehampton University, and the co-translator of Alain Badiou's *On Beckett*

NOTES

1. 'The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology', *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde, trans. Willis Domingo et. al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974 [orig. 1969]), p. 232.
2. Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998 [orig. 1963, 1969]), p. 246.
3. 'The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology', *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 232.
4. Vincent Descombes, *le Complément de sujet: enquête sur le fait d'agir de soi-même* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2004), p. 9.
5. *Sujet* entry by Étienne Balibar, Barbara Cassin and Alain de Libera, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, ed. Barbara Cassin (Paris: Seuil, 2004), pp. 1233 – 1254, p. 1233.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 1243.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 1243.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 1245.
9. '*Sujet*' entry, 'Philosophie Occidentale', Tome II, *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*, (Paris: PUF, 1998), p. 2498.
10. '*Sujet*' entry, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, p. 1233.
11. Étienne Balibar, 'Subjection and Subjectivation', *Supposing the Subject*, ed. Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1994), p. 8.
12. As de Maistre puts it in his 'Study on Sovereignty' from 1821 in *The Works of Joseph de Maistre*, trans. Jack Lively (London: Unwin, 1965), p. 311.
13. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: NLB, 1971 [orig. 1970]), p. 157.
14. Deleuze will also speak of an Individual-individuation opposition, though his conception of individuation is clearly markedly at odds with Althusser's notion of ideology.
15. All quotes *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994 [orig. 1968]), pp. 133-134.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
17. 'Individuation ... has nothing to do with ... the continued process of determining species ... It involves fields of fluid intensive factors which no more take the form of an I than of a Self. Individuation as such, as it operates beneath all forms, is inseparable from a pure ground that it brings to the surface and trails with it. The individual distinguishes itself from this ground, but it does not distinguish itself', *Ibid.*, p. 152.
18. In translations of Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'subjectivation' has been more widely used in the case of the former, and 'subjectification' for the latter two.
19. '*Sujet*' entry, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, p. 1247.
20. Translations of Ricoeur's work on Heidegger render this title as 'The Age of the World as View'. Cf. *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 220.
21. Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, trans. Christine-Marie Gros (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987 [orig. 1982]), p. 79.
22. Gilles Deleuze, 'Kant' Cours Vincennes, 28/03/78, available here: <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=68&groupe=Kant&langue=2>
23. 'The Age of the World Picture', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. William Lovitt (Harper Torchbooks: 1977), p. 126.
24. 'With the interpretation of man as *subjectum*, Descartes creates the metaphysical presupposition for future anthropology of every kind and tendency'. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 152. Similarly, 'Humanism ... in the strict historiographical sense, is nothing but a moral-aesthetic anthropology'.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

-
28. Ibid., p. 127.
29. 'Heidegger and the Question of the Subject', *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 219.
30. Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', p. 127.
31. Ibid., p. 152.
32. Ibid., p. 152.
33. Ibid., p. 132.
34. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992 [orig. 1990]), p. 5.
35. 'Heidegger and the Question of the Subject', *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 227.
36. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 4.
37. Admittedly this reading is in part encouraged by Kant himself: '[Kant] ascribes to Descartes a nominalisation of the statement *cogito* or 'I think', so as to make it the name of a self-referential operation whereby thought takes itself as its own object ... [it] suggests to his successors that the only conceivable subject is a subject that thinks itself, and whose predicates are its thoughts', 'Sujet' entry, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, p. 1246.
38. Vincent Descombes, *le Complément de sujet*, p. 55.
39. 'The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology', *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 254.
40. *Oneself as Another*, p. 11.
41. 'The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology', *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 254.
42. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ed. Robert B. Loudon, with an introduction by Manfred Kuehn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [orig. 1798]), Preface, p. 3.
43. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990 [orig. 1973]), p. 144. See fn. 45 for Foucault ref.
44. Manfred Kuehn, Introduction to Kant's *Anthropology*, p. xiii.
45. 'Introduction to Kant's Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View' by Michel Foucault, trans. Arianna Bove, available here: <http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpfoucault1.htm>
46. Ibid.
47. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, p. 236.
48. Ibid., p. 183.
49. Ibid., p. 225. Cf. p. 65 'It is noteworthy that we can think of no other suitable form for a *rational* being than that of a human being... we populate all other planets in our imagination with nothing but human forms, although it is probable that they may be formed very differently.'
50. Ibid., fn., p. 235.
51. Ibid., p. 15.
52. Ibid., p. 18.
53. Ibid., p. 238.
54. Anthropology as a discipline only comes into its own only during the early nineteenth century, although its roots can be traced back to the last third of the eighteenth century (Voltaire, Montesquieu, Condorcet in France), but particularly to Herder, Kant and Platner in Germany. This point is argued by Manfred Kuehn in his introduction to Kant's *Anthropology*, where he also mentions that Kant was one of the first thinkers ever to lecture on anthropology as an independent academic discipline at university level, *Anthropology*, p. vii.
55. Vincent Descombes, *le Complément de sujet: enquête sur le fait d'agir de soi-même*, p. 7. This and all other passages by Descombes are my translation
56. Ibid., p. 13.
57. Ibid., p. 15.
58. Ibid., p. 15.
59. Ibid., p. 14.
60. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by Dorion Cairns (Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff, [orig. 1929]), pp. 2-4; p. 30.
61. Perhaps we should thus understand 'transcendental ego' in both senses.
62. *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 53.
63. *Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, p. 68.
64. 'The explicit reasons for which Heidegger always "distrusted" the subject, that is, always "condemned" the modern oblivion of being in and as the ontology of subjectivity or "subjectivity" in all its variants (Cartesian, Leibnizian, Hegelian, Schellingian, etc.) and in all its consequences (anthropology in general, historicism and psychologism, the theory of images or of worldviews, etc.), are well known.' Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Subject of Philosophy*, ed. and with a foreword by Thomas Trezise (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota: 1993 [orig. 1979]), p. 80.
65. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern, 1988 [orig. 1960]), p. 125.

66. When a post-Heideggerian writer like Lacoue-Labarthe takes issue with 'the subject of philosophy', the assumption is that what one is undermining is a particular set of 'certainties' inherent in Western thought: 'what interests us here is neither the subject nor the author. Nor is it the "other" – whatever this may come to mean – of the subject or the author. Rather (and to limit ourselves for the time being to the question of the subject alone), what interests us is what is also at stake in the subject, while remaining absolutely irreducible to any subjectivity (that is, to any objectivity); that which, in the subject, deserts (has already deserted) the subject itself and which, prior to any "self-possession" (and in a mode other than that of dispossession), is the dissolution, the defeat of the subject in the subject as the subject: the (de)constitution of the subject or the "loss" of the subject – if indeed one can think the loss of what one has never had, a kind of "originary" and "constitutive" loss of (of "self").' Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Subject of Philosophy*, p. 81. This 'defeat of the subject in the subject as the subject' plays on a series of ambiguities, admittedly – the grammatical subject, the reflexive subject, even the subject in the sense of topic (what is the subject of philosophy after all?) – however, what is most revealing about Lacoue-Labarthe's text is the assumption that the subject is more or less interchangeable with the 'self' (the constitutively 'lost' self, admittedly, but self nonetheless).
67. Étienne Balibar, 'Citizen Subject', *Who Comes After the Subject?*, ed. by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy (London, Routledge: 1991), p. 35.
68. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [orig. 1821]), §152, pp. 195-196.
69. 'Citizen Subject', p. 37.
70. René Descartes, 'Treatise on Man', *The World and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Stephen Gaukroger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [orig. 1666]), p. 99.
71. *The Political Subject: Essays on the Self from Art, Politics and Science*, ed. Wendy Wheeler (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2000), p. 2.
72. 'Editors' Introduction', *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. by Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), p. 2.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
74. 'Citizen Subject', p. 39.
75. 'Heidegger and the Question of the Subject', *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 224.
76. Ludwig Feuerbach, 'The Essence of Religion in General', Introduction to *The Essence of Christianity*, *The Fiery Brook*, trans. Zavar Hanfi (New York: Anchor Books, 1972 [orig. 1841]), p. 116.
77. See, for example, the following claim: 'The theist represents to himself God as a *personal* being existing outside reason and man; as a subject, he thinks God as an object. 'Being is something in which not only I but also others, and above all the *object* itself, *participate*. Being means *being a subject, being for itself*', 'Principles of the Philosophy of the Future', *The Fiery Brook*, p. 181.
78. 'Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy', *The Fiery Brook*, p. 154.
79. Karl Marx, I, 'Concerning Feuerbach' (1845), *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin, 1975), pp. 421-422.
80. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press: 1993), p. 26.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
82. Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 256.
83. 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction', *Early Writings*, p. 256.
84. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, 'Meditation Thirty-Two: Rousseau', trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005 [orig. 1988]), p. 345.
85. Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, trans. Jack Cohen, ed. and with an Introduction by Eric Hobsbawm (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1964 [orig. 1857-8]), p. 96.
86. Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005 [orig. 1998]), p. 97.