

## It's me again

Étienne Balibar, *Identity and Difference: John Locke and the Invention of Consciousness*, trans. Warren Montag, edited and introduced by Stella Sandford, Verso, London and New York, 2013. xlvii + 158 pp., £51.98 hb., £14.99 pb., 978 1 78168 135 0 hb., 978 1 78168 134 3 pb.

In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in questioning the distinction between analytic and continental philosophy. Although there are many different components to emerging post-analytical and post-continental philosophies, there are two dominant and overlapping themes that return time and again. On the one hand, there are investigations into what Livingstone, in *The Politics of Logic* (2012), has called 'the consequences of formalism'. Proceeding as if the analytic/continental divide never took place enables a focus on the formal structures of thought and being that creates unusual alliances across the divide and novel ways of interrogating those, such as Badiou, who have done much to stake out this territory in the first place. On the other hand, a good deal of ink has been spilled considering the ways in which the brute objectivity of objects or the brute facticity of things may be thought without invoking a range of subjective presuppositions as the conditions of thinking. Attempts to escape what Meillassoux terms the 'correlationist two-step' of the subject-object bond have led to a rebirth of speculation on the subject-independent reality of things.

Both of these trends can be read as attempts to puncture the overinflated role of the subject as traditionally understood in modern European philosophy (even if Badiou then pumps a lot of air into a purely formal conception of militant subjectivity). Nonetheless, whatever tool is used to burst the bubble, there is broad agreement that it is Descartes's *cogito* and its legacy in Kant, Hegel and Heidegger that must be deflated if the recently separated analytic and continental traditions of philosophy are to find some common ground. Yet, what if this understanding of the central role of the Cartesian subject in the continental tradition is based on some fundamental misconceptions and omissions? Not only would it be incumbent upon those who defend the continental tradition to rethink what it is that they are defending; it might also be the case that those seeking to undermine it from within have missed their target. Such are the stakes surrounding the appearance of this book in English. That it is a translation of a

significantly different book published in French in 1998 only amplifies these stakes in the here and now, as will be explained below. But, first, it is important to lay out the 'heretical' provocation at the heart of Balibar's text.

Balibar puts it like this:

I was increasingly led to question a traditional image of Descartes as the father of the idea of subjectivity qua 'consciousness' ... and to fully picture Locke as a theorist of 'self-consciousness', whose ideas and problems irrigate every philosophy of the 'inner sense' and the 'reflective self' from Kant to modern phenomenology.

There are two components to this claim: a challenge to the received wisdom regarding Descartes's role in inaugurating the modern European tradition of philosophical reflection and the proposition that Locke is the inventor of the idea of self-consciousness that 'irrigates' all the fertile lands of the modern philosophies of the subject. Balibar's careful reading of Descartes opens the substantive discussion of the main essay in this text. It proceeds from the claim that 'Descartes, with two possible exceptions ... never uses the word "consciousness" to the more telling argument that no matter how 'rich' the soul's experience of everyday life, for Descartes 'it was a matter of providing the same demonstration every time: thought can only be referred to the "thing that thinks" whose action it is'. In Sandford's useful gloss: 'What is important, then, is not so much that I am a *thing* that thinks, but that *I* am the thing that thinks – that it is *me*.' The 'domain' of Descartes's 'thing that thinks' therefore extends to everything, but in every extension it is the same 'I' that is presumed in thinking. Therefore there is no possibility of interrogating the richness of subjective experience itself in any other way than endlessly reflecting upon the fact that every new experience simply leads to the same conclusion: 'it's me again'.

The richly textured internal experience that sets off the modern European tradition, according to Balibar, is found in Locke's discussion of personal identity not Descartes's appeal to the *cogito*. More

precisely, it is found in Chapter XXVII of Book II of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, entitled 'Of Identity and Diversity'. In a hint of the textual complexity to which I will shortly return, it is important to note that this chapter was an addition to the second edition of Locke's essay, published in 1694, four years after the first edition. The addition, Balibar tells us, was partly at the behest of one of Locke's friends, William Molyneux, and partly as an attempt to clear up problems remaining within the first edition. The result is a lengthy chapter that many commentators and critics recognize as both a cornerstone of Locke's epistemology and one that also stands apart from it, in significant ways. Embracing the 'autonomy' of this chapter, Balibar presents in the first instance a careful reading of it that focuses on the detailed twists and turns of argumentation that lead Locke to establish consciousness as the criterion of personal identity.

While it is not possible to do justice to this complex analysis here, Balibar's principal interpretive gambit can be easily summarized. He recognizes that the standard reading of Locke's chapter has led most commentators to attribute a vicious circularity to his treatment of personal identity; if I know what I am thinking then I must be a self, but to know that I am a self I must know what I am thinking. Rather than treat this as the cul-de-sac of Locke's argument, however, Balibar presents this circularity of personal identity as the real discovery of self-consciousness; a consciousness that is more than a stuck Cartesian record and that is instead open to the constant influence of the richness of sensation in the constitution of inner sense. Balibar argues that, understood in this way, Locke's treatment of consciousness presents a theory of personal identity that incorporates the possibility of becoming someone different. The last section of the main essay develops this idea through the notion of 'topography', and it gives rise to provocative claims that situate Locke firmly in the heart of the (post-)phenomenological tradition of modern European thought. For example, according to Balibar, Locke's conception of interiority is based on a principle of identity that 'perpetually remains over-determined by the multiple figures of its other (or to put it another way, by the equivocality of the world)'. This is not the Locke we know from introductory classes to personal identity, but it is Locke as the great-great-great grandfather of the plasticity of the brain.

This is enough of a claim to establish this book as a welcome addition and corrective to current debates

in and about analytic and continental philosophy. But the heretical claim at the heart of this book is only one aspect of its radicalism. The other aspect is the way that the book is framed: in itself, in relation to the French version from 1998 and then further still in relation to the initial French translation of Locke's text (which then has a complicated relation to translations of the Bible and work by the French Cartesians, such as Malebranche). It is almost harder to do justice to this complex layering of texts and the subtle overlapping of frames of reference than to the claim that Locke should unseat Descartes as the inventor of consciousness. In a nutshell, however, in his exemplary presentation of Locke's chapter Balibar declares that he does not owe his reading of Locke primarily to philosophical argumentation but to 'a particular philological encounter with Pierre Coste, the French translator of Locke's *Essay* in 1700'. The subtleties of this encounter are provided by Balibar (and Sandford in her Introduction), but in essence amount to a series of puzzles in the French translation about why consciousness was translated at certain moments of the *Essay* in one way and at other moments quite differently. This realization draws Balibar into a compelling narrative about the relationship between Coste and the French Cartesians (which involved co-lingual terminological creativity between English, French and Latin). It was these complexities that led Balibar to include in the original French version of *Identity and Difference* the original English text of Locke's chapter, the Coste translation from 1700 and a new translation by Balibar. It also explains why the French text contained Balibar's contextualization of the chapter within Locke's *œuvre*, which he presents as an additional 'philosophical and philological glossary' of Lockean Concepts. This current English version, however, only retains some of this material: the extracts are not included and the glossary is trimmed down. In their place are a new Preface and Postscript by Balibar (the latter of which is a text on Spinoza originally published in 1992) and an indispensable Introduction by Sandford that synthesizes the arguments, updates the relevance of Balibar's book to Locke scholarship and draws out the political consequences of the reading he develops. It turns out, therefore, that this is both much less and much more than a simple translation of the 1998 French text. Given that it also required a new translation of Balibar's own contributions by Warren Montag, it is hard to imagine just how complicated the dealings between publishers/authors/translators must have been.

The point of explaining this textual complexity, however, is not to wonder at the effort involved in producing the book (considerable though this must have been). It is to make the case, first, that the book itself exemplifies the complexities of the claims about personal identity that Balibar excavates from Locke. Each rendition of the original text by Locke is informed and inflected through a different context; maintaining its identity and yet changing as it does so. The 1998 version of this text brought this to the foreground with the inclusion of the three translations but then framed these through the main essay and the glossary. This English version has been trimmed but also considerably enhanced by Sandford's introductory essay and the additional material by Balibar, but also by the translation of Balibar's text, which, in large measure, is a text about the philosophical importance of translation. As such, this 2013 version reframes the whole debate again, engendering a substantially different text from the 1998 French version, even though it remains in other senses the same

text worthy of the same title. Second, however, it is a text that exemplifies philosophical practice. Each translation and framing of Locke's chapter becomes the site of a new philosophical encounter that forces the reader to embrace the role of language, time and place in the emergence and consolidation of philosophical ideas. Those attempts to overcome the analytic/continental divide that prioritize form and object in ways that strip both of their intrinsic linguistic, historical and geographic conditions can only look barren in the shadow of this multilayered and richly textured engagement between philosophers past and present. Indeed, rather than seek to bury the modern subject under the weight of formalism or speculation about objects, this quietly revolutionary book invites a 'new chapter for investigation' into its emergence; to which the only adequate response, as Sandford declares in almost Beckettian mood at the end of her introduction, is to 'read on'.

Iain MacKenzie

## Socialism or Balibarism

Étienne Balibar, *Equaliberty: Political Essays*, trans. James Ingram, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2014. 365 pp., £15.99 pb., 978 0 82235 564 9.

The essays collected in *Equaliberty* span twenty years, yet attest to a singularly dogged set of pursuits. Balibar's desire to interrogate the kernel of the most readily accepted but in fact singularly ambiguous and paradoxical political concepts has generated some extraordinary thinking, particularly around notions of citizenship, exclusion/inclusion, rights and the hybrid concept of 'Equaliberty' (*l'égaliberté* in French) which gives this collection its title. Yet Balibar, unlike many in the Althusserian tradition to which he still partly belongs, is careful to contextualize his thinking with reference to those whose thought usefully overlaps with his own. Thus the essays here are scattered with references to thinkers in diverse traditions: Arendt, Agamben, Brown, Derrida, Laclau, Mouffe, Poulantzas, Rancière, Sassen, Spivak, Wallerstein, but also De Sousa Santos, Giddens, Hobsbawm, Mbembe, Samaddar, Wacquant, Yuval-Davis. Balibar makes no special case for ontology over social, anti-facist, feminist, history or political approaches, which give all these essays a synthetic, wide-ranging and multilayered cast, a kind of methodological open-endedness, as if keeping a watchful eye out for new

approaches and insights that might yet come along. It is this expansiveness that ensures that even some of the older essays here, or some of the more specifically historical or journalistic essays (the pieces on the French 'uprisings' of 2005, or the headscarf law), remain relevant to global readers today.

A willingness to stay with conceptual complexity, to really untangle constellations of ideas, is the cornerstone of Balibar's contribution to contemporary political thought. Terms that are the most familiar in the Western political imaginary – democracy, freedom, equality, universality, revolution – come in for the most scrutiny, precisely because they are often used without attention to their unsteady or contradictory bases. In 'The Antinomy of Citizenship', the introduction to the collection, Balibar argues that 'at the heart of the institution of citizenship contradiction is ceaselessly born and reborn in relation to democracy.' The constructed, fluctuating and unstable nature of the tie between citizenship and democracy frames everything that follows: 'the name "democratic citizenship" cannot conceal an insistent problem, the object of conflicts and antithetical

definitions, an enigma without a definite solution.' Yet Balibar's stress on the paradoxes, conflicts, antinomies and tensions of political thought and practice does not lead him, as it does so many others, to wallow in political aporias for their own sake, or to a kind of mystical fuzziness regarding institutions and ideologies. On the contrary, it is only by picking apart the supposed 'obviousness' and 'transparency' of terms such as 'citizenship' and 'democracy' that their revolutionary underpinnings can once again be revealed. Balibar's identification of the 'dialectic of insurrection and constitution' that he demonstrates underpins the French revolutionary constitution with its intertwining of 'man' and 'citizen' entails that the 'community of citizens' remains 'essentially unstable, problematic, contingent'. Rather than understand this community as overdetermined either by institutions or by individuals in the last instance, Balibar stresses throughout the essays how essential it is to understand the relational, communal aspects of political life. Invoking what he describes as the 'trace of egaliberty' (the unstable pairing of equality and liberty we find at the heart of republicanism, particularly in its French mode), he reminds us that 'the rights of citizens are borne by the individual subject but won by social movements or collective campaigns that are able to invent, in each circumstance, appropriate forms and languages of solidarity' and that the finitude of 'insurrectional moments' should make us understand that 'there are no such things as "absolutely universal" emancipatory universalities, which escape the limits of their objects.'

The period covered by the essays coincides with the most vicious onslaught against what Balibar terms 'social citizenship', and he raises the question of whether certain forms of social protection and the prevention of insecurity (the welfare state) are a mere 'blip' or are integral to the 'history of citizenship in general'. Balibar stresses the impact of nineteenth-century socialism on the relation between capital and labour, and the construction of a public sphere, but also seeks to analyse the ravages of neoliberalism through a reading of Brown and Foucault which focuses on the idea of 'antipolitics' or 'apolitics' – has the social citizen been displaced or destroyed by neoliberalism such that politics itself has dissolved or disappeared? Balibar adds nuance to the discussion by describing a situation in which it is no longer helpful to think of 'empirico-transcendental' types – 'the Worker, the Proletarian, the Colonized or the Postcolonized, the Woman, the Nomad' – or to think of political 'subjects' in the way that we might have

before. Instead, Balibar argues, the concept of the subject 'is not sufficient to think the constitution of politics, and we need many operative ideas ... bearers, subjects and actors'.

While social citizenship remains potentially explosive, or at least carries within it the seeds of insurrection, even in its fragmented neoliberal mode, Balibar is careful to understand the way in which 'citizenship' is also founded on a series of constitutive exclusions. A lengthy discussion of Arendt's 'right to have rights' in which the relational character of these rights is stressed ('Rights are not properties or qualities that individuals each possess on their own, but qualities that individuals confer on one another as soon as they institute a "common world" in which they can be considered responsible for their actions and opinions') gives way to a thorough investigation in the latter part of the book as to who is excluded, and how, from the right to have rights. In a chapter entitled 'What are the Excluded Excluded From?', originally given at a sociology conference in South Africa in 2006, Balibar explores ideas of 'social' and 'internal' exclusion, taking as his starting point postcolonial 'neoracism' and the 'real complexity of "racism after race"'. Picking up on the idea of 'internal exclusion' Balibar describes a situation in which 'the excluded can be neither really accepted nor effectively eliminated or even simply pushed into a space outside the community'.

Here he sees two overlapping logics at work: a logic of commodification of individuals on the capitalist market, and a logic of racialization that drives from 'the essentialist representation of historical communities, where intolerance of the other ... is all the more virulent for being undermined by ongoing processes of communication and transnationalization.' It is this double logic that generates a form of internal exclusion 'characteristic of the contemporary world'. Such a model of 'European apartheid' generates both the transformation of human beings into things and the generation of 'absolute others' and racialized enemies (this also plays out, as Balibar points out in later essays, across religion, particularly via Islamophobia). This duality of exclusion generates forms of poverty and political resistance that are multivarious and heterogeneous, and Balibar invokes Fraisse's concept of 'exclusive democracy' to make it clear that these forms of inclusive exclusion are a central feature of (particularly) European democracy. National and supranational borders (like the Schengen area) thus play 'a central role in the real operation of what we call democracy'.



Balibar may accept the frameworks and language of really existing capitalism, but he does so in order to pull at their threads and to refocus critique upon tired concepts. But a revolutionary fervour (although this too does not escape theorizing) runs throughout these essays. It is not because these structures and institutions have succeeded that they must be critiqued, but because failure and consequently resistance to them runs like a thread throughout their historical iterations: it is because, historically, democracies have never ‘completely or durably’ instituted equality and freedom that they still contain the seed of these ideas and practices. Balibar concludes with a rousing defence of ‘active citizenship’ – ‘not ... she who by her obedience, sanctions the legal order or the system of institutions ... materialized in her participation in representative procedures that result in the delegation of power. She is essentially the rebel, the one who says *no*, or at least has the possibility of doing so.’ It is Balibar’s persuasive analysis of who counts as a citizen and who does not, and who is granted rights and who must take them another way, that makes these essays simultaneously relevant, realistic and rigorous.

**Nina Power**

## Sub rosa

Jennifer Mensch, *Kant’s Organicism: Epigenesis and the Development of Critical Philosophy*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2013. 256 pp., £31.50 hb., 978 0 22602 198 0.

‘Subreption’: this inauspicious term from Kant’s pre-Critical period is in fact of great relevance to current concerns with inter- or trans-disciplinarity. In its first appearance in Kant’s *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766), subreption (*Erschleichung*) refers to the error of illegitimately transmitting concepts between different bodies of knowledge. Looking back on his work prior to *Dreams*, Kant considered himself to have committed this error, having taken concepts from physical natural science to use them in metaphysics: notably, his attribution of attractive and repulsive forces to spirits and monads in the *New Elucidation* (1755) and *Physical Monadology* (1756).

The concept of subreption would change in Kant’s *Inaugural Dissertation* (1770) to designate the confusion of sensible concepts with those of the understanding, thus prefiguring the Amphiboly of the first *Critique* (1781/87). In its original meaning in *Dreams*,

however, it is one of a number of lesser-known Kantian themes put to effective use in Jennifer Mensch’s new book, *Kant’s Organicism*. Mensch investigates the significance that biological theories of ‘epigenesis’ had for Kant’s account of experience and cognition in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this sense, Mensch’s entire book is about Kant’s subreptive transfer of a biological concept to the domain of metaphysics, or, more accurately, to Kant’s innovative transcendental philosophy. Perhaps just as interestingly – because covertly – Mensch’s book also *enacts* a subreption across modern academic disciplinary boundaries.

Mensch conducts a striking and radical rereading of the first *Critique* through the concept of ‘epigenesis’. The early chapters provide the context, describing contemporary accounts of biological generation and classification and of natural history, before going on to narrate Kant’s consistent interest in the origin