

Citizen Balibar

An Interview with Étienne Balibar

Who comes after the subject? According to Étienne Balibar, it is the citizen—grasped not in her isolated sovereignty, but as a member of an emerging community. Yet the equality of rights that modernity proclaims does not preclude the possibility of segregation and equality. In this long interview, the philosopher Balibar explores this paradox, which fuels his method of analysis.

The title of Étienne Balibar's book, *Citoyen-sujet et autres essais d'anthropologie philosophique* [The Citizen-Subject and Other Essays in Philosophical Anthropology] (PUF, 2012), is an answer to the question that Jean-Luc Nancy posed in 1989 to a group of French philosophers of different leanings: who comes after the subject? The way one understands this question predetermines one's answer. It can be grasped as a quasi-post-structuralist query, asking what replaces or relieves the subject once it has been philosophically deconstructed. Étienne Balibar replies: "after the subject, comes the citizen." He explains his answer in a series of essays that demonstrate how the subject is contested from within by an otherness that undermines its isolated sovereignty, but through which, at the same time, it forms an always incomplete community. The essence of Balibar's answer lies in the dialectic between, on the one hand, a subject with two dimensions—one anthropological (the subject of consciousness or affect), the other political (being subject to power and the subject of rights)—and, on the other hand, the citizen—or, better still, the "fellow citizen." Consequently, it becomes impossible to conceive of the subject becoming a citizen (the subject as being-with-others) without at the same time imagining the citizen becoming a subject (the citizen emancipated through a process of subjectification).

Thus after the subject, comes the citizen—or rather, the citizen-subject—of a political community in which universalism (i.e., equal rights) is simultaneously redemptive and exclusive: anthropological differences (of class, race, sex, etc.) are "both *disqualified* as justifications for discrimination from the standpoint of the fundamental rights of 'human beings' (the first—or last—right, the one encompassing all others, being the right to citizenship) and *disqualifying* as the privileged means for legitimating internal segregations and exclusions that deny citizenship (at least of complete or 'active' citizenship) to some of those human beings endowed with formally 'equal rights.' In other words, they embody the living paradox that is the unequal construction of egalitarian citizenship" (p. 27).

In asking Étienne Balibar to reflect on this paradox, we started with a methodological question: how does he read the philosophers (Descartes, Locke, and Rousseau, as well as Marx, Hegel, Freud, and Kelsen) who inform his essays? What is his writing strategy? This strategy is simultaneously somewhat unsettling and highly stimulating. It is less an analysis of doctrines consecrated by the history of ideas or great works than of specific, particular texts in which "points of heresy" can be located and put to work...

What is a “point of heresy”?

Étienne Balibar: In *The Order of Things*, [Foucault] uses the term maybe four or five times. If one reads the text carefully, it becomes apparent that it is not used randomly and that it has, moreover, an architectonic and organizational function. Indeed, it is always used in a secondary way. It determines and fine-tunes the method that Foucault employs to analyze the discursive spaces he calls “epistemes” for each of the epochs he describes and, within each episteme, the kind of structured opposition found within each discipline between the discourses or scientific works that opt for one of two contrary terms, one of two possibilities that in each instance are available for elaborating a rational program to advance the discipline. The best example—and I believe that in this case he uses the term itself—is the opposition between Linnaeus’ and Buffon’s approach to nature from within the classical episteme. One sees—this was Foucault at his most structuralist—that, in using the term, he systematically sought parallels between the various disciplines comprising each episteme. His system and method consist, on the one hand, of dogmatic rationalism and, on the other, of what one might call daring empiricism: the same approach can be found in general grammar and again in the theory of wealth. When one turns to the other great historical cluster that interested him, the nineteenth-century episteme—the emergence of the question of man—in which everything is redistributed between general grammar, political economy, and biology, he again organizes things in this way—according to what would seem to be a kind of classificatory method. Yet I have always believed that there is something in the idea of the “point of heresy” that exceeds the classificatory and, in a sense, taxonomic use that Foucault makes of it in *The Order of Things*.

To understand it—and this idea probably comes at least as much from Althusser as from Foucault—I assigned this term a major source, as a way of understanding much of what French philosophers of this generation said and wrote, which, incidentally, is more than a little connected to the question of humanism and anti-humanism: that source is Pascal. Needless to say, when Pascal speaks of heresy he uses the term in a strictly theological sense. But it is very interesting that he goes back to the term’s roots and, in *Writings on Grace*, meticulously explores the idea that what characterizes heresy is that, regarding each of the mysteries that are constitutive of the Christian faith and which are always founded on the unity of opposites—the most fundamental of all being, obviously, the belief that Christ is both God and man—the heretic is someone who is incapable of accepting both sides of the contradiction and who *chooses* (*haireisis*) one of the two possibilities in order to make the belief rational rather than absurd or incomprehensible. Moreover, one finds in Pascal a further idea, one that is clearly political—all this is also a way to try to understand the political meaning of theoretical writing, be it philosophical or even theological—which is that the orthodox or correct position is not a third discourse [in relation to the two contradictory discourses]: in other words, one can speak of Christ’s humanity and one can speak of Christ’s divinity; the only thing you can do about the fact that Christ is both God and man is, paradoxical though it may sound, to hold two contradictory discourses simultaneously.

All this is a long detour, but it brings me back to the idea that Foucault’s text manages and uses theoretical contradictions to a far more powerful effect than is suggested by the simple classification of doctrines corresponding to one another at every level: in a way, they explode the boundaries of what Foucault calls “episteme,” appearing not as a particular determination of the episteme, but as the generative element that makes something like an episteme possible. The idea, in short, is that epistemes exist not because people adopted a

common research program—the famous “historical a priori”—and then pursued more or less different paths, while obeying the same axioms, but rather because a common discursive space (or whatever one wants to call it) was formed as a result of generative conflicts. This leads to the question: where does one find these generative conflicts? One can find them in the traditional manner of the history of ideas or even, to some extent, in the manner of Foucault in *The Order of Things*, or in the manner of Marx, contrasting the materialist to the idealist tradition and classifying authors and their respective systems in relation to particular lines of demarcation and points of divergence.

I am indebted to Althusser’s symptomatic readings and Derrida’s deconstruction of philosophical texts, even if I approach them in my own way. Things became much more interesting for me—this began some time ago, and this is how I’ve always lectured about philosophers—once I became interested in the feedback effects and the repercussions of conflict or points of heresy within philosophical works themselves. This brings us back to the closely related issue of aporia. At my habilitation defense, [Alexandre] Matheron said: “you are always looking for contradictions!” He always sought to reconcile—very admirably, I might add—every one of a philosopher’s claims, whereas I always sought to understand—inspired by the teachers I just mentioned—why a philosopher never writes the same text twice. There are philosophers who write the same text twice; but they are not good philosophers. They are just cutting and pasting. To my mind, a good philosopher—and this is why the question of writing cannot be separated from argumentation and demonstration—one cannot be analytical without lacking rigor—is a thinker; I believe that I once said that philosophers think only because they write—because they look at what they wrote and realize that it doesn’t work. This is why they need to write a second text. When I say “they realize that it doesn’t work,” I don’t mean that they automatically reverse their position, becoming “for” what they were “against.” Descartes didn’t write *Metaphysical Meditations* to repeat what he wrote in *Discourse on the Method* and he didn’t write *Principles of Philosophy* to repeat what he wrote in *Metaphysical Meditations*. Descartes is especially admirable and I’m particularly attached to him, first because every French philosophy professor wants to have his own ideas about Descartes and Rousseau and, secondly, because I spent my entire youth convinced that we had to break away from Descartes as quickly as possible in order to come to Spinoza. You can imagine my pleasure when I realized that, in reality, we need to come to Descartes ... My ambition—I say this jokingly so that no one thinks I take myself too seriously—was to do the opposite of [Martial] Guérout, however great my admiration for *Descartes’ Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons*: not to select one text in order to extract from it the system that encompasses all his other texts, but, on the contrary, to diagnose, in the way that the writing of the text unfold, the claim that, from Descartes’ own perspective, presents problems and produces unexpected effects.

Books and Ideas: So what is the “point of heresy” in Descartes?

Etienne Balibar: The great philosophical question that was debated in my youth by French—and not only French—philosophy was: how can we move away from solipsism and become intersubjective? The commonplace explanation was that the Cartesian ego was a monad, which in many respects was absurd, since one then had to explain why Leibniz had to invent the concept of the monad in order to move away from Descartes. The idea that the Cartesian ego was isolated had become a commonplace in philosophical teaching. What I have tried to show—if I had the time and could organize conferences on these issues, we could discuss them for a long time, as much remains to be said—is that the ego referred to in the Second Meditation finds itself in a violently negative relationship with an Other and that the text of

the Second Meditation accentuates and realizes this negation and produces this distance. The problem is not one of intersubjectivity, as the Other that is in question here is absolutely not a subject in the sense in which the ego is a subject: it is God. But this negative relationship is by definition extraordinarily ambivalent, as it has both the idea that I introduced in a subtitle (*Solitary Humanism*), that of a proclamation of autonomy and self-sufficiency, one that is indeed humanist, while still being compatible with a theology of creation in which the finite depends on the infinite. The relationship is not only negative, but powerfully ambivalent.

I was, I think, able to read the symptom of this ambivalence in the blasphemous way that Descartes reproduced a statement that is less theological than it is theophanic: “*ego sum* or *sum qui sum*.” This puts us on the razor’s edge: did Descartes use the phrase intentionally or unintentionally? My thesis, in short, is that it can’t be completely unintentional, or that in any case it can’t be due to chance. I was comforted in my opinion by the fact that a number of Descartes’ readers, notably Gouhier, who is brilliant on this point, and Mariafranca Spallanzani, who has since written a long book, but at the time had written an extraordinary article entitled “*Bis bina quatuor*”—“two plus two equals four”—in reference to the passage in the First Meditation in which Descartes calls into question mathematical truths, demonstrating that this was a quote from a famous blasphemer who was debated throughout the seventeenth century. It is mentioned in Molière’s *Don Juan*: if I understand you correctly, your religion is arithmetic, “I believe that two and two are four and four and four are eight.” Yet its historical roots are close to Descartes, as it is the sentence attributed to Maurice de Nassau on his deathbed and which all seventeenth-century writers regarded as the libertine’s proclamation of faith. This all suggested a context that I did not invent and which put me at loggerheads with very good and important readers of Descartes, since I have inflated the claim somewhat in order to increase the plausibility of my symptomatic reading, which maintains: “*ego sum, ego existo* echoes the Gospel not in order to acknowledge God’s existence but to accentuate the difference between Him and me.”

From Points of Heresy to Anthropology

Étienne Balibar: I did not try to construct an anthropology. Again, I started with Foucault: instead, I sought to accentuate and complicate the question Foucault asked in *The Order of Things* relating to the possibility or conditions of possibility of anthropological discourse. My own answer differs from Foucault in a number of ways, two of which are essential. First, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault was primarily interested in epistemological conditions of possibility. Ultimately, Foucault said: there is an anthropological discourse in late modernity, in the nineteenth and even the twentieth century, because there are disciplines that consider man as an object of knowledge and because these disciplines transpose onto the plane of empirical knowledge the question formulated by Kantian criticism, which is the question of finitude. What happened, quite simply, was that each discipline came up with a new name for finitude. They called it “language” or “life” or “work.” Compared to this way of formulating things, I say: anthropological discourse has other conditions of possibility, notably, political conditions. It is interesting that Foucault quickly moved onto the meticulous study of the disciplines that are constitutive of modern politics, “bourgeois” politics—but by then, he had, at least in appearance, set aside the question he had been led to ask by structuralism and his reading of Heidegger, namely the question of the possibility of philosophical anthropology.

That is one displacement; the disagreement implied by this displacement was already explicit in my answer to Jean-Luc Nancy, though I had yet to see its full implications: the modern anthropological question arises from the fact that the subject is conceived as the

citizen's Other—as both what the citizen abolishes and what she recreates, at the price of a displacement or a change of contents. Next, there is a second transformation that consists in pluralizing what we mean by “anthropology” or “the anthropological question.” Thirty or forty years ago, our discussion was profoundly guided by the way in which the famous fourth Kantian question—*was ist der Mensch?* what is man?—was seen between the twenties and the fifties and sixties as a transcendental question, and even as an “ultra” or “hyper” transcendental question, as it was the question that made every other critical question possible. Because we read this all in the context of a debate on humanism in which Marx played a role, notably through his famous sixth thesis on Feuerbach, with its injunction to abandon the question of human essence for the question of social relations, we were strongly inclined to think that the question “what is man?” was one of the clearest ways of proposing something like an anthropology of man's essence or nature.

I believe that anthropologies of man's essence are not the only anthropologies. There are also anthropologies of condition—“condition” is a term that has a long history, it is not at all the same thing. Bertrand Ogilvie is right to return to it—his interpretation is radically negative, but it is not incompatible with what I'm trying to say—Pascal does not enquire into human nature, he enquires into the human condition. So does Aristotle in a way. Arendt wrote *The Human Condition*. I was very interested to learn that she encountered problems when she wanted to rewrite it in German, since she wrote the German version of her own book. On the one hand, she used the German equivalent of “conditioning,” of being conditioned, that is, of being dependent of a situation or being thrown in the world, which is *Bedingtheit*. But on the other hand, she was obliged to use French—*condition humaine*—to reference the problem's ontological dimensions. I myself wrote—and others used it in similar contexts, at times in relation to Spinoza, at times in relation to Marx and others—that the sixth thesis on Feuerbach prescribes or anticipates something like an ontology of relationships.

At one point, I felt obliged to ask myself if it was an *ontology* of relationships or an *anthropology* of relationships. They're obviously not the same thing. But I'm prepared to maintain that there is indeed an anthropological discourse that is primarily tied or wedded not to the question of essence, nor to the question of condition or being-in-the-world or being-in-situation, but to the question of *relationship* itself. Obviously, it can be conceived according to different modalities, some of which are subjective, even psychological, whereas others, to the contrary, are political, as with Marx, or sociological. What interested me most was the shift from one point of view to another. When you consider that each text, in seeking to highlight the points of heresy found in a particular philosopher in relation to the subject or man, has a direct or oblique relationship to the anthropology of differences, my answer is that this results from the fact that philosophers and in particular (but perhaps not uniquely) modern philosophers worry about whether one must speak of human essence, the human condition or situation, or human relationships. The third perspective is the one that interests me the most.

This does not mean that I myself am trying to propose an anthropology of relationships. What is a relationship if not an essence? In keeping with Marx, “relationship” means conflict or contradiction or antagonism. But if we follow the often contradictory and antagonistic fate of the stated principles of bourgeois politics, herein lies the bone of contention, I dare say. The irreducibility of difference. Anthropological discourse is not one that affirms universality against difference or difference against universality; anthropological discourse, in any case in its most philosophically interesting form, is one that interrogates the modalities of difference and the reasons it cannot be simply reduced to or subsumed under the universal.

The Paradox of Bourgeois Universalism

Étienne Balibar: I would like it to be immediately clear that what I call “bourgeois universalism” is not something I oppose. Naturally, we owe the terms “bourgeois,” “bourgeois revolution,” “bourgeois society,” and the “bourgeois age” to Marx, and before Marx, to Hegel, and before Hegel, to Rousseau. Some of us were raised, I dare say, in a perspective that made us critical of such ideas. To put it harshly, I gradually became aware of the fact that Marx’s critique of bourgeois universalism was itself completely bourgeois—that is to say, it was part and parcel of it. This is also Foucault’s final revenge, or the ultimate development of his thought. Althusser may be turning in his grave, but the fact of the matter is that while Marx was not saying the same thing as Guizot, Tocqueville, Kant, or Mill, his critique accentuated a tension lurking within bourgeois political discourse. In this respect, neither socialism nor communism transcends this discourse. If there is a historical-political question that underpins all of this and that lacks a clear answer, it is something like: are we still part of it? The answer itself is no doubt complex. On the one hand, it would have to be “no,” to the extent that our political-philosophical discourse is still completely dependent on its origins, but on the other hand we also have to say something like this: if globalization and the age of telecommunications constitutes an anthropological transformation, then the way Marx asks questions is as outdated as Hegel or Auguste Comte. I continue to grant Marx a heuristic privilege. But to return to the question of disqualifying and disqualified differences, it would be dishonest of me to pretend that this problematic arises solely from a reading of philosophical texts. It obviously arises from the ten or twenty years I have spent grappling, partly as an activist and partly as a theorist, with questions of racism, culturalism, social control, and others I could mention.

The heart of the problem is knowing how to grasp simultaneously the political and performative power of the discourse of human rights, which affirms, not for the very first time but for the first time from within a completely immanent framework, from within a purely political field, with no theological or cosmological reference points, the idea that every being that can be called “human” has equal dignity or equality or equivalence in principle. A friend and colleague of mine, who is, as he likes to put it, an historian of the constitutionalization of human rights, Gérald Sturtz, always refers to a line from Fichte, which itself comes from French revolutionary discourse, affirming that everything that wears a human face is in principle equal or of equal dignity. This is one side of the coin; the other side is the frenetic impulse to classify and hierarchize that is characteristic of what Foucault called knowledge-power disciplines, that is, the scientific and administrative disciplines of the so-called bourgeois age. In other words, they are obviously linked to the fact that human rights are the legal and political discourse of the bourgeois age. There is obviously a way out: the two easy solutions are [first,] to say that human rights discourse is simply a masquerade, a hypocritical veneer hiding the reality of a bourgeois age characterized more than ever by discrimination and exclusion; the other maintains that these discriminations and exclusions are of merely contingent significance. History’s sad reality contradicts these principles.

Obviously this is very interesting from my perspective, this is why I cite such emblematic figures as Franz Fanon and why the resistance to interpellation, as [Judith] Butler would say, expresses itself not—and the same is true of Marx, incidentally—as ignorance of universalizing discourse, but on the contrary as the ferocious demonstration of its internal contradictions, which is in itself a political weapon. In this way, I have indeed become furiously Hegelian: I told myself that one must not sever the terms of the contradiction, but try

to grasp them together. This does not at all imply that a theology is at work in these ideas, nor that there is a predetermined end towards which we are heading, but simply that we must try to understand the discrepancy or the conflict as such. My view is not that exclusions or discriminations are more serious today than they have been in the past. I don't know if they are. It's the same as the debate over the perpetual question of whether bourgeois society is more violent than slave societies. That isn't the problem; the problem is the way in which discrimination is inscribed within equality itself.

The idea that I have put forward, and which I obviously do not consider to be the final word on the matter, is that once this foundational correspondence between the universality of human rights on the one hand and political equality (or an equal amount of liberty for each citizen) on the other is established, there is essentially no other way to justify excluding people from citizenship than to exclude them from humanity itself, or in any case to disqualify particular individuals and groups on the grounds of their humanity. In this way I was deeply inspired by a trend in feminism that has concentrated on the way in which the nineteenth century developed the idea that women, naturally, biologically, physiologically, and intellectually, represented a kind of diminished humanity – then commenting on the complementarity of the sexes...

But this was just a first step, as things become more interesting for me—and here too I advanced a hypothetical generalization—once I realized that this “solution,” which paradoxically makes it possible to hold together universality and discrimination, is itself essentially untenable, from an institutional as well as a discursive perspective. I thus tried very approximately, I realize, and provisionally, to apply to all anthropological differences the idea that, on the one hand, integration is just as violent as exclusion, denying difference is as violent as using difference to classify or hierarchize human beings, and that, on the other hand, at the heart of the dialectic of bourgeois universalism's inner contradictions lies the permanent application or implementation of a contradictory injunction: there can be no differences, or differences cannot be ignored, yet at the same time one cannot say where their boundaries lie, i.e., what constitutes them—as if these differences were essential or natural in a way that Aristotle might have explained them. It is this sort of dialectic of aporias that I use successively, though not in a completely mechanical or uniform way, in several contexts. The natural starting point is the question of the normal and the pathological. I used it as my guiding thread. I'm not entirely sure that it works. I've been told that you cannot recklessly equate sexual difference or cultural difference to this model. This is no doubt true, but it's something almost tangible or visible. It works well when you're teaching a philosophy lesson. You tell your students: I am going to make you understand exactly what I have in mind, when I address you like legal or institutional discourse and ask all of you who are normal to move to one side of the class and all those who are sick and abnormal to move to the other side. You will immediately grasp how impossible and inherently violent this injunction is. Yet it does not follow from this that we can purely and simply say that the normal and the pathological have no political, moral, or philosophical relevance.

Can the analysis of class antagonisms be reconciled with the visibility of anthropological differences?

Étienne Balibar: I prefer not to handle this problem in an eclectic or conciliatory way, one that says: “well, it's too bad Marx overlooked something so we'll just make up for it.” No one can grasp all the possible implications of the questions one asks oneself. And we have other limitations and blind spots, some of which are personal and some of which are social. We

have enough histories of the workers' movement to know that sexism was deeply rooted in nineteenth-century union organization and working-class politics. We have enough psychological studies of Marx to realize that, unlike Engels, he was not inclined to recognize the importance of women's exclusion in the same way that he was inclined to recognize the irreconcilable character of class conflict in relation to the production and the distribution of surplus value. For twenty years or more all the good theorists of radical or emancipatory politics, of feminism, or of post-colonialism have insisted on the multiplicity of forms of domination, correcting Marx without purely and simply abandoning him.

I'm not really interested in transposing into philosophy this rather abstract problematic, which I find excessively eclectic. If I could contribute, even indirectly, via a long "theoretical" [laughter] detour, to the reiteration of the question of class, somewhat differently to the way it was articulated in the last century's Marxist or anti-Marxist traditions—I would be very happy ... providing that something and perhaps something very fundamental changed, compared to what I or we, in my generation, considered the most interesting and creative approach to theorizing social relationships, which in France (because in Spain and Italy it was a little different) was the idea of structure. What needed to be changed? To come back to Marx: to change something means to change the way we define or even conceive of social relations. This is why I keep my distance from eclecticism of a certain kind. It means neither getting rid of social relations, nor adding other kinds of social relations, saying "you know, they're just as important." This solution could be tempting, whether from the perspective of a politics of hegemony à la Laclau and Mouffe or from the more philosophical perspective of a theory seeking to exterminate social conflict, in the style of Althusser. We must carve difference into and force a displacement within the very idea of social relations.

From this perspective, I think it is interesting to work our way back to Marx himself, to two critical moments that might be points of heresy or that signal the existence of points of heresy, in the sense we were discussing them earlier. The first is *The Communist Manifesto*. The background to *The Communist Manifesto* is romantic socialism. The Saint-Simonians in particular (but not exclusively) had already proposed a classification of forms of domination. Marx at first borrowed it almost literally, with one exception: the romantics assigned a central place to the domination of women by men and the transformation of sexual difference into a relationship of domination. It is well known that for Saint-Simon and his heir, Auguste Comte, this was as important as the capitalist's domination of the proletariat. If you look at *The Communist Manifesto* from this standpoint, it is striking that this consideration has completely disappeared. It completely disappeared not only because of sexual prejudice or blindness, but because if he had included it, the historical genealogy that Marx was trying to construct would have gone to hell. He would not have been able to establish an evolutionary line leading from slavery to the *corvée*, from the *corvée* to surplus-value, and from surplus-value to communism. Not only are the temporalities [between sexual domination and class domination] different, but some things persist even as others change. At this moment, a certain way of combining the problematic of social conflict with that of anthropological difference was repressed. The consequence was that the question of sexual difference was not able to resurface within Marxism in discussions about exploitation except by imitating the discourse of class struggle—by describing the exploitation of women by men as another form of class exploitation. It appeared as a kind of supplement—a utopian last resort, as I once called it, for a conception of communism that goes even further in reconciling humanity with itself than the abolition of wage labor.

Now there is a second, rather interesting moment in Marx, when the question of anthropological difference contributes to the understanding of social relations, particularly to class antagonism, but in a different form. It is the question of manual and intellectual labor. If one reads not only about subsequent developments in Marxism (this question lay, for example, at the heart of sociological critiques of new form of line work and of the division of labor in the twentieth-century technological revolution), but even in *Capital* itself—which, from this standpoint, is an absolutely astonishing text, as it actually accomplishes far more than it claims or theorizes. There is an extraordinary description of the way in which large capitalist industry produces different kinds of men. It describes, moreover, an extremely violent process, the moment when the question of surplus labor and surplus value is no longer simply conceived in terms of a compatibility of values, but in terms of bodily disciplines and the worker's psycho-physiological transformation. Foucault was very interested in this.

I am tempted to say that we must at present reconceive antagonism, in all its inescapable reality, as a social relationship, but as a social relationship that harbors within itself, as one of its modalities of realization and development, the fact that social relationships produce different kinds of men or differentiations within human nature or the human condition. Philosophy provides all the resources you need to think about this kind of thing. What prevents Marx from consciously and deliberately going in this direction? We come back to the problem of universalism. I think it's because Marx never abandoned the idea that the proletariat is a universal class—the proletariat, in other words, not as it really is, not as part of the human race, but as, in a sense, its own future. In this respect, there is a kind of tension in Marx's thought between the anthropology of differences (and these differences, like those I mentioned earlier, cannot be situated, they are not fixed) and an eschatology of the future of humanity. Yet we again encounter the problem that I discuss somewhat hastily at the end of my book, which results from the fact that there is a certain way of realizing difference that makes the individual simultaneously the whole and the part.

I am fully aware that all this is a bit enigmatic. I hope to return to it. One might say, to begin with, that this is a way of relativizing the importance of class relationships, of saying that they are just one social relationship among others. Furthermore, one might say: in this social relationship, in its historic reality, in the modalities of its experience and in the historical effects that it can produce, one can see a unique form of the contradiction that is characteristic of the relationship to the universal as such, the form of the universal that can exist in history: not the history of the communist hypothesis or the humanist hypothesis, in the Platonic sense of the term, but history in the sense of immanence itself—or, in any case, on the level of politics and history.

Why do we feel solidarity with the excluded?

Étienne Balibar: This question does not interest me because rightly or wrongly I consider that it has already been settled. My goal is not to offer a moral or political argument that would justify revolt, political commitment, revolution, or insurrection. There are different possible terms that partially overlap with one another and that one could try to relate to slightly different circumstances or types of activities. My goal is rather to pose the following question, using the philosophers I've read and re-read and what I think I've learned from them: to the extent that we are bourgeois, that is, that we are indeed individuals and communities fighting for freedom under the conditions of the bourgeois age, from whence do we derive the energy and force to fight and reject exclusion? The first answer—which can be made in an idealistic or a materialistic mode, but I wonder if this difference isn't ultimately

relative, since between Kant and Marx there is no shift in philosophical foundation, but rather great continuity, as evidenced by the fact that they share the language of world transformation—the first answer says that exclusion is *contradictory*. It contradicts liberty and it contradicts survival. The two are not absolutely equivalent. I am not saying this is untrue, but it does not seem to me sufficient for understanding subjective energy, *conatus*. In the context of my discussion, my response was as follows: energy derives from the fact that the subject cannot find a stable place in social relationships. Its position in social relationships is untenable. This is what I call “ill-being” (*mal-être*). I do not claim that this is an absolutely unprecedented invention in the history of thought. One might say: “he didn’t want to choose between the dialectical language of contradiction and the postmodern language of difference.” I hope this is not simply negative: I have tried to articulate the two concepts without simply subsuming one under the other. I see my answer strikes you as a little hasty, but I will continue to think about it...

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