

# EARLY MODERN SUBJECTS AND THE SELF-CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY IN GERMANY 1556-1599

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**Abstract.** The paper discusses the concept of a subject as an actor's category in early modern philosophy and asks whether contemporary notions of subjectivity can be meaningfully related to this early modern understanding of the concept. When thinking about the early modern subject as an actor's category, we must distinguish three different meanings: the subject as a bearer of properties, as a reference point for predication, and as the foundation of a discipline. The paper defends the thesis that crucial elements of subjectivity in the modern sense, namely reflexivity and self-awareness, are at the same time characteristic features of a certain understanding of the subject of philosophy as a discipline in the early modern sense: namely for conceptions of philosophy as a transformation of the soul, most notably as a 'medicine of the soul'. Such conceptions are, however, controversial: other early modern thinkers contend that such proposals do not conform to what we should expect from a definition of philosophy and that they are open to the objection of intellectualism: we need more than knowledge to better our souls, because knowledge in itself is not action-guiding. The paper traces conceptions of the subject of philosophy not only in various Ramist tracts, but also in writings of Melanchthon's son-in-law Heinrich Paxmann, the Helmstedt professor Duncan Liddell, and Reformed thinkers like Fortunatus Crell and Bartholomaeus Keckermann.

**Keywords:** meta-philosophy, early modern, Germany, Heinrich Paxmann, Bartholomaeus Keckermann, Fortunatus Crell, Duncan Liddell, Ramism

In this paper, I want to present a case study that allows us to understand more precisely how an understanding of the term 'subject', as it was used in the early modern period itself, can be related to what contemporary philosophers analyse under the same heading. The main claim of this paper can be summarised as follows: for some early moderns, philosophy *has* a subject that comes close to what present-day philosophical usage takes a subject to *be*.

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I will first provide a brief sketch of such present-day usage of the term 'subject', then argue that a prominent sense in which it was used by early modern philosophers is not captured in present-day interpretations of early modern theories of subjectivity, namely 'subject' as the subject of a discipline. I will then discuss in what sense the subject of philosophy in this specific early modern meaning of the term can be related to subjectivity in the early modern period as it is understood by its present-day interpreters. I will close with some remarks on the broader debate of the subject of philosophy as a discipline.

In the beginning of his very comprehensive history of what he takes to be the early modern subject, Udo Thiel provides a non-exhaustive list of topics that could be discussed under such a heading: "[...] the mind-body problem, questions concerning agency, self-determination, moral and legal responsibility, and also the possibility of knowledge of an external world of physical objects", but he then limits further discussion to the problems of self-consciousness and personal identity.<sup>1</sup> In her review of Thiel's book, Ursula Renz suggests that a different focus, e. g. on the subject of actions in early modern philosophy, would have been equally legitimate and could have produced interesting results.<sup>2</sup> But both Thiel and Renz agree that our analysis of early modern 'subjectivity' is shaped by our present-day concerns: in this perspective, it is the task of the historian of philosophy to isolate those aspects of the past that can be meaningfully related to our understanding of a given domain as it exists today.

Accordingly, Thiel does cover certain aspects of the 'pre-history' of subjectivity, namely those that can be meaningfully related to his own focus, e. g. scholastic debates on the concept of a person or of an individual.<sup>3</sup> But a discussion of 'pre-modern' notions of subjects is conspicuously missing.<sup>4</sup> Thiel shows no interest in exploring the concept of a subject as an 'actor's category', i. e. an investigation of its role as seen by early modern thinkers.<sup>5</sup> Thus he does not provide any account of a decisive feature of any 'pre-modern' conception of subjects, namely the ambiguity of the term: we can for example distinguish logical subjects, i. e. the subject terms of categorical propositions, from subjects as bearers of properties existing in the real world ('physical' subjects in Alain de Libera's terminology).<sup>6</sup>

To complicate the situation even further, a full analysis of 'subject' as an early modern actor's category must account for a third possible meaning: subjects play a role not just in propositions and, correspondingly, in facts of the matter about the relation between properties and their bearers. Propositions can be joined in syllogisms. Syllogisms can be synthesised into theories. Hence, there are also subjects of theories, because there must be one kind of things that serves as the bearer of those properties that a theory sets out to prove as essential properties of this kind of things. The totality of such proofs is then synthesised in what the tradition calls a 'science' (*scientia*).<sup>7</sup>

Traces of these connections can still be found in everyday language: a subject can be not only the "underlying substance or essence of a thing, as distinguished from its nonessential properties" or the "term or part of a proposition of which the predicate is affirmed", but also a "body of knowledge or particular department of art or science which one studies or is instructed in".<sup>8</sup> The meaning of 'subject' in this last sense preserves a sense of pre-modern conceptions of the subjects of science and

knowledge, denoting a discipline *pars pro toto* through a reference to that which counts as its subject.

The earliest text to be analysed in what follows was published in 1556, four years before Melanchthon's death, the latest in 1599, two years before the publication of Otto Casmann's *Philosophiae Et Christianae [...] Modesta Assertio*.<sup>9</sup> Melanchthon's 'metaphilosophical' stance has already received some attention.<sup>10</sup> The same is to some extent true for 'post-Ramist' thinkers like Goclenius, Keckermann, Timpler, and Alsted.<sup>11</sup> But for the period in between such accounts are still lacking. Moreover, though I cannot argue for this point in detail here, it should be noted that Casmann's text was an intervention in the infamous Hoffmann dispute, "[...] the most intense philosophical and theological debate of the period"<sup>12</sup> that influenced decisively the debate about the proper understanding of philosophy among 'post-Ramist' thinkers.<sup>13</sup> It thus seems appropriate to include only texts from this circle from before 1600: a dissertation with Goclenius as *praeses* from 1596 and Keckermann's *Praecognita logica*, published first in 1599.

The authors to be analysed in what follows can be sorted into two groups: some thinkers base their reflection on the Ciceronian definition of philosophy as cognition of Divine and human things (*cognitio rerum divinarum et humanarum*), others diverge from it.<sup>14</sup> In both groups, however, we find substantial reflection on the various dimensions of the notion of a subject of philosophy as a discipline. Melanchthon's son-in-law Heinrich Paxmann belongs to the first group and provides a particularly comprehensive analysis of this notion.<sup>15</sup> Other thinkers to be mentioned in this context are Friedrich Beurhaus, Nicolaus Daubenrock, Rudolph Goclenius, and Bernhard Copius all of which qualify to some extent as Ramists.<sup>16</sup>

Others did not follow Cicero: Duncan Liddell and his student Cornelis Martini,<sup>17</sup> Fortunatus Crell, Giulio Pace, Johannes Grün, and the young Bartholomaeus Keckermann.<sup>18</sup>

But besides this *prima facie* disagreement we can also locate aspects in which philosophers from both groups could find common ground: both Heinrich Paxmann and Duncan Liddell seem to agree that we should think about philosophy primarily as a discipline transforming, i. e. healing the human soul. Other thinkers believe that such an approach is misguided: we cannot use the function of philosophy as its defining trait (even if it may be acknowledged that philosophy does produce changes in the soul of its students – the issue is whether we can take this to be its defining feature).<sup>19</sup>

It may come as a surprise that for the thinkers under consideration here there is no apparent link between Cicero's understanding of philosophy as cognition of Divine and human things and his assessment of philosophy as a means to cultivate and heal the mind.<sup>20</sup> In what follows, we will see that for some, such an approach to defining philosophy was illegitimate, because it does not fulfil the requirements of a real definition in the Aristotelian sense.<sup>21</sup>

However, an understanding of philosophy as cognition of Divine and human things invites objections, too: cognition is not action-guiding *per se*. Lack of knowledge is not the only fault our souls may have. This may force us to acknowledge two subjects of philosophy: the subject of theoretical philosophy, cognition or contemplation, and the subject of practical philosophy, action.

In closing, I will discuss three strategies to deal with this duality of subjects. The first is to claim that philosophy is therefore undefinable. The second proposal defines philosophy as a composite habit, consisting of contemplative wisdom and action-guiding prudence. The third claims that in all disciplines knowledge and action are intertwined.

The aim of these analyses is limited. It is neither claimed that early modern Germans were the first to connect the definition of philosophy and the reflection on its subject in the manner described here. Nor should what follows be read as an argument that these early modern authors provided full-blown reflection on problems of subjectivity in the contemporary sense. Instead, this case study is meant to serve as a stimulus for further research on the early modern subject of philosophy as a discipline in various geographical and historical contexts, so that we may gain in time a fuller understanding of the concept of a subject of a discipline and as its implications for our present-day understanding of subjectivity.

### **Philosophy and Cognition of Divine and Human Things**

The first question that comes to mind when confronting the Ciceronian definition of philosophy as knowledge of Divine and human things is what exactly to count as Divine or human thing. Beurhaus explains the distinction as a dichotomy of eternal, unchangeable and temporal, changeable things and identifies such knowledge with philosophy. This in turn means that philosophy is identical to the sum total of the liberal arts, because it is the liberal arts that convey the required knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Nicolaus Daubenrock takes the same stand in his 1599 dissertation *De philosophia*: philosophy is concerned with what can be the subject of a liberal art.<sup>23</sup>

Whether or not philosophy in this sense is to be identified with wisdom or whether it should count only as the attempt to attain such wisdom (i. e. whether it is *sapientia* or *studium sapientiae*) is controversial. Beurhaus and Daubenrock leave this question open. Freigius asserts that there is a difference between philosophy and wisdom.<sup>24</sup> The same is true for the young Goclenius who maintains that the philosopher only strives for wisdom.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Copius identifies philosophy and wisdom explicitly.<sup>26</sup>

In Paxmann's 1556 dissertation, we find a similar approach to defining philosophy: philosophy is concerned with God and the totality of things (*rerum universitas*). In fact, in the beginning of the tract being in a broad sense (*ens quam late patet*) is designated as the subject of philosophy. The scope of such knowledge is, however, limited, because our cognitive capabilities cannot grasp the world as a whole: we cannot understand nature completely.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Subjects of Philosophy**

Paxmann then goes on to specify three different senses of the concept 'subject': it can refer to the *subiectum naturae*, the substance that 'is subjected' to its accidents. But species can also be 'subjected', namely to their genera: they are *subiecta praedicationis*. And a subject can also be the subject of a discipline as its *subiectum attributionis seu demonstrationis*.<sup>28</sup> In the context of reflections on the definition of philosophy, the *subiectum attributionis seu demonstrationis* holds, of course, special interest:

it is the unity or multiplicity of the *subiectum attributionis* that allows us to determine the unity or multiplicity of *artes*.<sup>29</sup> And the *subiectum attributionis* allows not only for the distinction of the arts, but also for their hierachisation. The subject of higher sciences or arts is more simple. The subject of subordinated arts or sciences is more restricted, because it is distinguished from the subject of the superior art by specific differences.<sup>30</sup> Finally, Paxmann distinguishes the *subiectum attributionis artis* from the *subiectum attributionis artificis*. This means that the subject of a discipline and the subject that is the target of activities of a practitioner of this discipline do not coincide: the *subiectum attributionis artis* of arithmetic is numbers. The *subiectum attributionis artificis* of arithmetic is the concrete application of numbers to things to be numbered and the addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of such concrete numbers.<sup>31</sup>

How do these distinctions fit together with Paxmann's contention that being in a broad sense is the subject of philosophy? For an answer to this question, we must first take into account what he has to say on our cognitive access to subjects of a discipline.

Subjects in general can only be known through the end of a discipline. In other words, we first need to know what a discipline sets out to achieve, before we can delineate its domain. Paxmann argues that ends directly relate only to accidents or properties of a thing, because ends refer to a perfection and, therefore, to a property that is to be perfected. But since we cannot conceive a property without a bearer, an accident without a substance, we implicitly conceive the subject of a discipline when conceiving its end.<sup>32</sup> So in medicine, we conceive health as its end – but health is an accident that can only be conceived as the accident of a substance, in this case the human body. So the human body, insofar as it can be healed, is the proper subject of medicine.<sup>33</sup>

If we now apply this method of knowing a subject in general to the specific subject of philosophy, we must first ask what the end of philosophy consists in. For Paxmann, the end of philosophy is the perfection of man and, in particular, the perfection of our rational capabilities, because it is only those capabilities that can be enhanced through instruction.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, or so Paxmann contends, the proper subject of philosophy are those capabilities that distinguish us from all other living beings.<sup>35</sup>

These vague remarks leave a lot of room for interpretation, especially if we wonder how they may fit together with Paxmann's thesis in the beginning of the tract that it is being in a broad sense that must count as subject of philosophy. We could presume that being in the broad sense is the *subiectum attributionis* of philosophy and our rational capabilities are its *subiectum naturae*. But in his discussion of how we get to know the subject of a discipline, Paxmann always talks about the *subiectum attributionis* (e. g. the body to be healed in the case of medicine). Yet, if we take a closer look, he always refers in this context to the *subiectum attributionis artis* of the respective discipline: the human body in the case of medicine,<sup>36</sup> the natural body, insofar as it is movable in the case of natural philosophy,<sup>37</sup> human action in the polity in the case of jurisprudence.<sup>38</sup> In all these cases, the *subiectum attributionis artis* and the *subiectum attributionis artificis* are different: the physician is not interested in the human body per se, but in those actions that heal the human body. The natural philosopher is not

interested in the natural body per se, but wants to explain its various changes. Lawyers and judges are not interested in human action as such, they want to evaluate it under the law.

But philosophy may be an exception: the end of philosophy is the perfection of man.<sup>39</sup> So we must ask through what actions the philosopher can contribute to this end, because it is these actions that would point to the *subiectum attributionis artificis* of philosophy. Paxmann assumes that our abilities can only be enhanced through knowledge. This suggests the possibility that it is knowledge of being in a broad sense that should count as the *subiectum attributionis artificis*. This means that the rational capabilities of humans are both the *subiectum attributionis artis* and the *subiectum naturae* of philosophy. So Paxmann claims that philosophical knowledge is applied by the philosopher to our rational capabilities. For this to be possible, philosophical knowledge must inhere in the philosopher. And in order to be able to use philosophical knowledge for our perfection, we must know our rational capabilities, so that we are able to perfect them.

What this may mean becomes clearer when we turn to Duncan Liddell, like Paxmann both a philosopher and a physician. In 1592 he presided over a dissertation at the university of Helmstedt that was defended by the young Cornelis Martini. The dissertation asserts that it is our rational capabilities that distinguish us from other animals.<sup>40</sup> But at the same time these natural capabilities are limited and must be complemented by instruction.<sup>41</sup> This is achieved in philosophy which is therefore a ‘medicine of the soul’, serving to perfect both our cognitive and practical abilities:

“Since philosophy is the medicine of our soul (*animus*) that helps to perfect as far as possible (*proxime*) the two main faculties of the soul, the disciplines that are concerned with action and contemplation are essential for philosophy (*philosophiae propriae sunt*).”<sup>42</sup>

If we read Paxmann in the light of this proposal, certain asymmetries between medicine and philosophy come to the light: whereas the physician usually applies the knowledge about healing the body to a different person, namely the patient, philosophical knowledge can only work, if its bearer is the same as the recipient of its beneficial effects. Whereas a patient need not know why a certain medication is effective, the perfection we strive for in philosophy is only possible if we know how and why philosophical knowledge perfects us. Conversely, philosophical patients must know that they are in need of philosophical help, so that they must be aware of the limitations of their own capabilities and their concomitant need for perfection: we strive to attain knowledge of being in a broad sense (the *subiectum attributionis artificis*), because we are aware of the inherent fallibility of our cognitive capabilities (the *subiectum attributionis artis*). But this can only lead to perfection, if both the knowledge of being in a broad sense and the knowledge of our own rational capabilities inheres in the person (the *subiectum naturae*) that is in need of such perfection.

Daubenrock had pointed out in his definition of philosophy that it is concerned with everything that is the subject of a liberal art.<sup>43</sup> In Paxmann’s terminology, this refers clearly to the *subiectum attributionis* of philosophy. But he also refers briefly to what Paxmann would have called its *subiectum naturae*. One of the

elemental preconditions for learning something is human nature (*physis*) or a natural aptitude for learning. This natural aptitude is more of a subject than a cause: the bearer of philosophical knowledge must be capable of receiving it.<sup>44</sup>

So those writers who could be loosely qualified as Ramists are not concerned with qualifying Cicero's formula. They may hesitate to identify philosophy and wisdom, but in the context of defining philosophy itself they do not address the problem of possible limitations of our cognitive capabilities. If such limitations come into view with Paxmann and Liddell, philosophy is turned – either explicitly or implicitly – into a means to overcome these limitations as far as possible: philosophy thus turns into a 'medicine of the soul' that is meant to compensate for the failure of the uninstructed mind. It differs from the 'medicine of the body' in that physician and patient must be one and the same person. This in turn implies that philosophical knowledge has two dimensions: knowledge of the world around us (in Paxmann's words the *subiectum attributionis artificis*) and knowledge of ourselves (according to Paxmann the *subiectum attributionis artis*). The first form of knowledge may heal us, but the second form of knowledge is required in order to know that we are in need of philosophical therapy.

### **Against Philosophy as a Transformation of the Soul**

Both Paxmann and Liddell agree that we must use the function of philosophy – namely to effect some transformation of the soul – as its defining characteristic. And since transformation presupposes some kind of reflexive awareness of the imperfect state of our soul, the soul or its rational capabilities are not just the bearer of philosophical knowledge, but also a subject of philosophy as a discipline. In this sense, we can conclude that attempts to define philosophy through its function contain some essential dimension of what we take subjectivity to be concerned with today, namely notions of self-knowledge and reflexivity.

But attempts to use the function of philosophy as its defining characteristic met with some resistance. The first argument is methodological: using function in this way does not provide a definition in the sense of Aristotelian logic. In 1587, Fortunatus Crell cites three *definientia* that focus on function, namely the meditation of death (*meditatio mortis*), the assimilation to God (*similitudo Dei*), and the perfection of the soul (*animae perfectio*). But for him, all these are at best descriptions of philosophy: they contain praises of philosophy (*mera encomia*), but cannot count as a definition in the strict sense of the word.<sup>45</sup>

Crell also criticises the idea that philosophy is in a relevant sense related to the cognition of Divine and human things in general. He believes that such an approach is misguided, because it only targets disciplines which are concerned with cognition and excludes those who are concerned with action, i. e. the practical disciplines.<sup>46</sup> Even if we know how to perfect our soul, this knowledge does not in itself contribute to its enhancement, because pure knowledge is not action-guiding.

Crell thus provides a criterion for measuring the adequacy of any purported definition of philosophy – it must include the practical disciplines.<sup>47</sup> Else, we are susceptible to the objection of intellectualism. But this means that there are two subjects of philosophy, namely the subject of the theoretical disciplines and the

subject of the practical disciplines.

But then it may simply be impossible to define philosophy. Different subjects (that is, different *subiecta attributionis* in Paxmann's terminology) none of which is subordinated to the other imply that the disciplines concerned with them are fundamentally different.<sup>48</sup> Giulio Pace states in 1596 that the disciplines that are subsumed under the heading of 'philosophy' are so heterogeneous that it is impossible to provide a unified definition of them. So the term 'philosophy' means different things when applied to metaphysics or ethics, mathematics or logic.<sup>49</sup> Pace is not explicit about this, but we can surmise that this heterogeneity of the single philosophical disciplines is at least in part due to the differences in the *subiectum attributionis* they are concerned with.

This stance goes against Johannes Grün's contention that a definition of philosophy is indispensable for reflection in general: only if we define a thing, can we have proper knowledge of what we are talking about.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, Grün does not accept the Ciceronian definition or functional characterisations as they were put forward by Paxmann and Liddell. He believes that the Ciceronian definition is too wide; regarding the sphere of the Divine, our reason is blind, we just persuade ourselves that our opinions are true – a case of self-suggestion. Regarding our purported knowledge of nature, we can learn from Socrates that such a science of perceivable entities is rarely successful either.<sup>51</sup> So according to Grün, the Ciceronian definition of philosophy overestimates the reach of our cognitive capabilities.<sup>52</sup> Grün's alternative proposal for defining philosophy consists just in an enumeration of its parts, namely logic, physics, and ethics, because such an enumeration represents all topics (*omnes materias*) that are relevant within philosophy.<sup>53</sup>

In 1599, Keckermann chooses a similar approach: He counts philosophy as one of the four highest 'objective disciplines'. 'Objective' disciplines are concerned with things as they are in nature which are treated as objects of our intellectual capacities (*intellectio*). There are four such major objective disciplines: theology, jurisprudence, medicine, and philosophy. Philosophy in turn contains metaphysics, physics, mathematics and its subdisciplines, and ethics and its subdisciplines.<sup>54</sup> So, in contrast to Daubenrock, Keckermann does not maintain that the whole circle of disciplines is to be identified as philosophy. But he agrees with Grün that the scope of philosophy can be fixated by simply enumerating its constituent sub-disciplines. Crell again has reservations against such an approach: it leaves out essential aspects of philosophy, namely metaphysics and mathematics. Instead, it allows the arts of the *trivium* as parts of philosophy. And it misconstrues the subject matter of ethics which, according to Crell, is not concerned with cognition, but action.<sup>55</sup>

But Crell makes his own, fairly original proposal how to define philosophy correctly. He starts from the observation that wisdom is a mixed habit, constituted by knowledge based on deductions (*scientia*) and the intuitive understanding of first principles (*intelligentia*).<sup>56</sup> As such it is purely cognitive. But, as mentioned, philosophy must include the practical disciplines (at least this is, according to Crell, the *consensus omnium*). Therefore, it cannot be identified with wisdom. But we could construe philosophy as a 'second-order' composite habit with wisdom and prudence as its parts. So philosophy is a habit, and it is distinguished from other habits by its

combination of the two elements wisdom and prudence.<sup>57</sup>

So according to Crell, function cannot serve as a defining characteristic of philosophy. Any valid definition of philosophy must include the practical disciplines. But this means that there is no unified subject of philosophy. This can either lead to the consequence that philosophy is undefinable, as Pace maintains. But if we accept Grün's contention that we do need a definition in order to know what we are talking about, this outcome is undesirable. Instead, Crell tries to define philosophy as a composite habit, consisting of wisdom and prudence. Grün and Keckermann are content to replace a proper definition of philosophy with an enumeration of its disciplines.

Whereas we have until now only taken into account the heterogeneity of the *subiecta attributionis* of philosophical subdisciplines, some of those authors who do not choose function as a defining mark of philosophy have also addressed the more general distinction between the subject of inherence and the subject as a delineation of the domain of philosophy (i. e. the *subiectum naturae* and the *subiectum attributionis* in Paxmann's terminology).

Grün refers briefly to the *subiectum naturae* of philosophy, namely the rational capabilities of man. These capabilities are at the same time the efficient cause of philosophy.<sup>58</sup> He then goes on to base his defense of a tripartite division of philosophy on the equally tripartite division of the relevant rational faculties.<sup>59</sup>

Crell only addresses the *subiecta attributionis* of philosophical disciplines. Philosophy must be a composite habit, because theoretical and practical disciplines are concerned with different kinds of things. From this difference in their subjects follows a difference in their goals: those disciplines that deal with necessary things are interested in cognition, because if a necessary thing changes, this change is necessary, too, so that it cannot be influenced by human action. Contingent things can be cognized, too, but we always expect to be able to translate these cognitions into action.<sup>60</sup>

Keckermann discusses both the *subiectum attributionis* and the *subiectum naturae*. He distinguishes three factors that are indispensable for acquiring knowledge: we need an object (that fills the role of the *subiectum attributionis*), a natural potency (that fills the role of the *subiectum inhaesionis*), and a *dispositio* to activate this potency in a structured and flawless way.<sup>61</sup> This notion of a *dispositio* seems to build a bridge between Ramist and Aristotelian ideas of a discipline, because it alludes at the same time to the notion of a discipline as an ordered whole (as it is current in Ramism) and the notion of a habit that informs a potency of the soul to perform certain acts in a reliable and foreseeable way (as it is characteristic for an Aristotelian understanding of disciplines). But for Keckermann the function of philosophy is in *all* disciplines action-guiding. This is obvious in his explanation of the distinction between 'objective' and 'directive' disciplines. *All* disciplines contain what he calls *artificiales normae*, i. e. standards that must be followed by those who want to be proficient in a certain *ars*. That means that in all disciplines knowledge and its application (which must be guided by norms) are intertwined.<sup>62</sup> So the distinction between theoretical and practical disciplines is spurious. And this is why he distinguishes instead between those disciplines that are concerned with the knowledge of things and those who are concerned with the

proper formation and expression of this knowledge.<sup>63</sup> So Keckermann, too, acknowledges, like Grün, fundamental differences between the domains of different groups of discipline. But he is also in agreement with him that this difference in the subjects of disciplines does not stand in the way of an enumerative definition of what the system of knowledge as a whole and philosophy in particular are concerned with.

### Conclusion

So it is in fact possible to identify a connection between a basic feature of present-day theories of subjectivity (namely reflectivity and self-awareness) and the notion of a subject as an early modern actor's category. Such an understanding of the early modern subject presupposes a self-conception of philosophy as effecting a transformation of the soul that we find articulated in theories of philosophy as a 'medicine of the soul'. Reflexivity in this sense has two dimensions: we must reflect on our rational capabilities in order to cure them; they are, in Paxmann's terminology the *subiectum attributionis artis*. And before that we must have become aware of the fact that our rational capabilities do need to be reformed: the prospective philosopher herself needs to know about these deficiencies in order to accept the necessity of therapeutic intervention. In early modern terms, this means that the bearer of philosophical knowledge (the *subiectum naturae*) and its domain (the *subiectum attributionis artis*) must be identical. This identity distinguishes the medicine of the soul from the medicine of the body. Ciceronian wisdom, knowledge of Divine and human things, is then only a means to an end: the *subiectum attributionis artificis*.

This conception invites two objections: the first is methodological – a proper definition of philosophy cannot be based on its function. The second objection aims at the purported intellectualism of the Ciceronian definition. Mere knowledge cannot be action guiding. This can either mean that philosophy cannot be defined, because the heterogeneity of its subjects prevents a unified definition. Or it can be tried to join both parts of philosophy in a single definition by construing philosophy as a composite habit. Finally, the objection can be refuted by showing that the distinction between theoretical and practical disciplines is spurious: in all disciplines, theoretical and practical aspects are intertwined.

**Acknowledgments.** I am grateful to Heinrich C. Kuhn, Lucian Petrescu, Charles T. Wolfe, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful discussions.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Thiel, U., *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.
- <sup>2</sup> Renz, U., "Review: U. Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*", *Kant-Studien* in press.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Thiel, U., (2011), 35, 19f.
- <sup>4</sup> In fact, 'subject' is not a lemma in the index. Cf. Thiel, U., (2011), 482.
- <sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, I have defended the notion of methodological pluralism. Cf. Heßbrüggen-Walter, S., "Mogens Lærke, Justin E. H. Smith, Eric Schliesser (eds.), *Philosophy and its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 384 pp. (review)", *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 3/1 (2014): 145-149. Since the choice of contexts used for the elucidation of historical sources is inevitably arbitrary, we should allow for many

different interpretative strategies focusing on different interests and audiences. Hence, what follows can be read as the attempt to complement a dominant 'presentist' narrative of the early modern subject with a story based on the subject as an actor's category. This does not imply the claim that the presentist narrative is in some sense misleading or incomplete. It is just different.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. de Libera, A., "When did the modern subject emerge?", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82/2 (2008): 181-220, 194.

<sup>7</sup> Bos, E. P., "Marsilius of Inghen on the Subject of a Science" in *Knowledge and the sciences in medieval philosophy: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Medieval Philosophy (S.I.E.P.M.)*, eds. S. Knuuttila, R. Tyorinoja, S. Ebbesen (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 1990), 12-20: 14 provides a very succinct overview of medieval positions on the subject of a science.

<sup>8</sup> "subject, n." *OED Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, March 2015, [Online] Available via <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192686?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=HBxGkM&>, cited 21.03.2015.

<sup>9</sup> Casmann, O., *Philosophiae Et Christianae [...] Modesta Assertio* (Francofurti: Palthenius, 1601).

<sup>10</sup> On Melanchthon cf. Frank, G., "Einleitung: Zum Philosophiebegriff Melanchthons", in *Der Philosoph Melanchthon*, eds. G. Frank Mundt (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2012), 1-11, and Kusakawa, S., "Introduction" in Melanchthon, P., *Orations On Philosophy and Education*, ed. S. Kusakawa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xi-xxxi. Melanchthon's specific understanding of philosophy as knowledge of law (cf. Kusakawa, S., (1999), xviii) plays no role in the sources to be examined here.

<sup>11</sup> I owe the term 'post-Ramist' to Hotson, H., *Commonplace Learning: Ramism and its German Ramifications, 1543-1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 135.

<sup>12</sup> Hotson, H., (2007), 112.

<sup>13</sup> Hotson, H., (2007), 133ff, offers some insights into post-Ramist achievements in defining philosophical subdisciplines, but does not analyse in depth the question of how they defined philosophy itself.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De Officiis*, ed. W. Miller (London: William Heinemann Ltd. and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), II.5, 172.

<sup>15</sup> For biographical information on Paxmann cf. Bauch, G., *Valentin Trozendorf und die Goldberger Schule* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1921), 176ff.

<sup>16</sup> The eclectic leanings of Ramism make it difficult to provide a foolproof list of criteria for justifying this attribution. Cf. Hotson, H., (2007), 106. Further complications stem from the encyclopedic thrust of Ramist method that prompted Ramists to extend the range of their inquiries into disciplines Ramus himself did not write about. Cf. Hotson, H., (2007), 114ff.

<sup>17</sup> On Liddell cf. Platts, C., Molland G., "Liddel, Duncan (1561-1613)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), [Online] Available via <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16639>, cited 14.03.2015.

<sup>18</sup> On Crell, Pace, and Keckermann cf. Hotson, H., (2007), 139f. For an overview of Keckermann's biography cf. Freedman, J. S., "The Career and Writings of Bartholomew Keckermann (d. 1609)", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141/3 (1997): 305-364, 306ff. On Grün cf. "Grün, (Joann.)", *Johann Heinrich Zedlers Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* (Halle/Leipzig: Zedler, 1735), vol. 11, col. 1147.

<sup>19</sup> This may help to understand why, even though Hotson, H., (2007), 286ff is right to emphasise that Ramists wanted to reform pedagogy and to bring about an educational revolution, the formal definition of philosophy as a discipline to be found in Beurhaus, Freigius, or Copius is fairly conventional:

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, ed. Pohlenz (Leipzig: Teubner, 1918), II.11ff, 285ff.

Corneanu, S., *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern Cultura Animi Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 46ff provides a comprehensive overview of relevant traditions, particularly in the British and French context, but does not address the question to which extent this function of philosophy could serve for its definition.

<sup>21</sup> See below, note 45.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Beurhaus, F., *De P. Rami Dialecticae Praecipuis Capitibus Disputationes Scholasticae, & cum iisdem variorum Logicorum Comparationes [...]* Pars secunda (Tremoniae: Sart. & West., 1581), 35: “Quemmodo igitur Philosophia definiri solet: Philosophia est rerum divinarum et humanarum (hoc est, rerum sempiternarum, et earum quae ortui ac interitui subjectae sunt) cognitio seu scientia. Itaque Philosophiae nomen generatim omnes artes ac disciplinae, quae libero homine dignae sunt, suo ambitu complectitur.”

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Daubenrock, N., *Theses de philosophia in genere, deque artium liberalium principiis & causis, & de earundem distributione* (Jenae: Steinmannus, 1599), Thesis XXIV: “[...] definimus quod sit [sc. philosophia] ordinata Entium quatenus artibus liberalibus subiecta sunt, disciplina.” Unpaginated texts are referenced by thesis or paragraph when possible. Daubenrock apparently matriculated in Jena in 1589. Cf. Mentz, G., Jauerling, R., *Die Matrikel der Universität Jena* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1944), vol. 1, 75. He is listed neither in Beier, A., *Syllabus Rectorum, et Professorum Jenae* (s. l.: C. Freyschmid, 1659) nor in Günther, J., *Lebensskizzen der Professoren der Universität Jena seit 1558 bis 1858* (Jena: F. Mauke, 1858).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Freigius, J. Th., *Trium Artium Logicarum, Grammaticae, Dialecticae & Rhetoricae, breves succinctive Schematismi* (Basileae: Henricpetri, 1568), n. p., “Philosophia est nihil aliud quam studium sapientiae. Sapientia autem est rerum divinarum et humanarum, causarumque quibus hae res continentur scientia.” On Freigius in Altdorf cf. Hotson, H., (2007), 61.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Goclenius, R., Vietor, C., *Disputatio philosophica, continens Philosophiae synopsis & hominis in utero materno conformationem* (Marpurgi Cattorum: Egenolphus, 1595), Thesis I, §6: “Sophiae autem σοφια seu adumbrata definitio sit: sapientia est divinarum ac humanorum legitima doctrina”, and Thesis I, §10: “Quanquam in dubiis interim et obscuris magis adhuc studium est sapientiae, unde etiam Philosophia dicta.”

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Copius, B., *Idea sive partitio totius philosophiae, ex Platone potissimum & Aristotele collecta* (Marpurgi Cattorum: Egenolff, 1588), fol. 12v: “Philosophia est ipsa Sapientia, id est, rerum omnium cognitio, quatenus ratione percipi poterit.” On Copius and Beurhaus cf. Hotson (2007), 25ff.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., *Themata ad disputandum proposita de philosophia, subiecto et fine* (Witebergae: Crato, 1556), Thema I: “[...] menti materia quam tractet, et in qua versetur subiectum est Ens quam late patet, hoc est DEUS et tota rerum universitas, [...]. Tamen penitus perspicere naturam non potest [...].”

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XVII. The distinction between *subiectum attributionis* and *subiectum naturae* can already be found in medieval nominalism. Cf. Bos, E. P., (1990), 23ff. It resurfaces in Erfurt at the end of the 15th century in discussions on the scientific status of psychology. Cf. Kärkkäinen, P., “Psychology and the Soul in Late Medieval Erfurt”, *Vivarium* 47 (2009): 421-443.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Paxmann (1556), Thema XVIII: “Cum autem in initio artium vel disciplinarum de subiecto quaeritur sermo est de subiecto ultimo modo accepto, quod attributionis vulgo vocatur, et est id in quo explicando versari aliqua ars, et eius principia, passionem, et proprietates inquirunt, et a cuius unitate et multiplicitate unitas et multiplicitas artis sumitur.”

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XX: “[...] quanto scientiae vel artes sunt superiores, tanto habent simplicius subiectum formale, minus constrictum seu limitatum notatumque differentis seu formis, quanto vero inferiores tanto quoque habent subiectum magis limitatum et contractum [...].”

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XXII: “Subiectum quoque attributionis aliud est artis, quod praeceptis explicatur, aliud artificis quod ab eo tractatur et expeditur, qui artem descriptam cognitamque exercet. Nam Arithmeticae genus subiectum est numerus, cuius proprietates inquiri et explicat, Arithmeticus autem versatur circa omnes res numerandas in quarum supputatione utitur numeris ad addendum, subducendum, multiplicandum, dividendum.”

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XXX: “Est autem Methodus [sc. inveniendum verum subiectum in qualibet arte] haec. Intellectus non potest in cuiusque certae rei contemplatione vel actione versari, nisi proposito fine et idem intellectus pro vario concepto fine nunc speculativus nunc activus nunc factivus appellatur. Fit enim denominatio a fine. Finis autem omnis quia perfectio quaedam est (nam quod assequitur finem suum perfectum esse dicitur, quod autem finem non assequitur, nulla ex parte perfectum, sed rude et inchoatum ad huc esse iudicatur) alicuius perfectibilis est perfectio, eique adiungendus est, et sic concepto fine, una nobiscum concipitur subiectum, fitque subiectum copulatum cum fine et notatum sua forma seu differentia.”

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XXXI: “Constat eos qui primum de arte Medica constituenda cogitationem susceperunt, concepisse aliquid ad omnem speculationem dirigerent, cumque viderent corporum nostrorum naturam innumeris affectibus obnoxiam esse, quibus corrumpi et viciari sanitatem contingit, eaque nunc aegrotare, nunc recte valere, quaesiverunt quibus auxiliis sanitas sua cuique vel praesens conservetur, vel amissa recuperetur, et ita sanitas fuit causa omnis speculationis ipsorum, quae cum accidens sit, necesse fuit ut subiecto annexeretur alicui, nempe humano corpori, atque ita corpus humanum fecerunt subiectum artis Medicae.”

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XXXIII: “Nec vero alia ratio fuit Inveniendi subiectum verum Philosophiae universae ex fine proposito: Est. n. Philosophiae finis institutio et perfectio hominis, quoad natura eius patitur et quidem earum in homine virium quibus brutorum conditionem exuperat, cum sola natura rationalis ita fit divinitus condita ut sit doctrinae capax et possit ad virtutem flecti.”

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XXXIII: “Unde constat subiectum Philosophiae esse eas vires hominis, quibus is reliquis animantibus antecedit et praestat.”

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XXXI.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XXXII.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XXXIII.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Paxmann, H., (1556), Thema XXXIV: “Est enim Philosophiae finis institutio et perfectio hominis, quoad natura eius patitur [...]”

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Liddell, D., Martini, C., *Disputatio de Philosophia eiusque instrumentis* (Helmaestadii: Iacobi Lucij, 1592), Th. I, §1: “Cum universa humanae vitae perfectio in mente sita sit, ad cuius imperium corporis animaeque inferiorum facultatum servitio utitur, brutalibus corporeisque affectibus mancipari non debet, sed illius sui domini cura habita, a brutali sorte ad divina quam proxime aspirare, ac, vitiosis affectibus depositis, in veri cognitione, bonique adeptione acquiescere.”

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Liddell, D., Martini, C., (1592), Th. 1, §2: “Verum cum mens ipsa, nisi aliunde ad hunc suum scopum dirigatur, adeo caeca sit, ut ad veritatem verique boni consecutionem, non aliter quam vespertilionum oculi ad solem se habeat, praeter oracula divinitus patefacta, humana quaedam remedia, disciplinae nimirum, instinctu lucis naturae [...] inventae et perpolitae sunt.”

<sup>42</sup> Liddell, D., Martini, C., (1592), Th. 1, §5: “Cum vero animi nostri medicina Philosophia sit, cuius adminiculo duae praecipuae facultates animae proxime perficiuntur, disciplinae, quae in  $\pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota$  et  $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\iota\alpha$  consistunt, Philosophiae propriae erunt.”

<sup>43</sup> See above, note 23.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Daubenrock, N., (1599), Thesis XLVII: “Causae addiscendarum artium sunt quarum

adminiculo artes sive scientiae transferuntur ad intellectum et usum. Harum vulgo numerari solent φύσις μάθησις καὶ ἄσκησις: quarum prior potius subjecti quam causae rationem obtinet, cum nihil sit aliud quam naturae quaedam habitus et aptitudo, quae ad eruditionem parandam non parum habeat momenti; [...].”

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Crell, F., *In octo acroamaticos Aristotelis libros commentarii: et eorundem librorum è Graeco in Latinum per eundem conversio* (Neostadii in Palatinatu: Matthaeus Harnisch, 1587), 1: “[...] quaedam mera encomia sunt [...].”

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Crell, F., (1587), 1: “[...] quia partem duntaxat Philosophiae quae in contemplatione versatur, non totam Philosophiam, quae etiam in actione consistit, definit.”

<sup>47</sup> Conversely, Toletus believed that only this definition can do justice to the role of practical philosophy. Cf. Heßbrüggen-Walter, S., “Die Begriffsbestimmung der Philosophie im spanischen Aristotelismus der frühen Neuzeit”, *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 54 (2012): 73-83: 80.

<sup>48</sup> See above, note 30.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Pace, G., *Naturalis auscultationis libri VIII* (Francofurti: Gl. Marnius, 1596), 337: “Philosophia late accepta, suo ambitu complectitur metaphysicam, mathematicam, physicam, politicam, et logicam. Et in hac significatione, ut opinor, definiri non potest: quia non est verbum synonymum, sed continet scientias omnino diversas et separatas: utcumque variis modis describatur ab Ammonio in praefatione in Isagogen Porphyrii. Recte autem dividitur in contemplativam, activam, et rationalem seu logicam.”

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Grün, J., *Philosophiae origo, progressus, definitio, divisio, dignitas, utilitas*, (Viteberga: Welack, 1587), 70: “Vocabulo explicato methodi series definitionem Philosophia nos constituere iubet. Omnis enim [...] quae cum ratione suscipitur de aliqua re institutio, debet a definitione proficisci, ut intelligatur, quid sit id, de quo disputatur.”

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Grün, J., (1587), 74: “Atque haec est Ciceronis definitio, [...] quam tamen aliqui improbant, quod aliquantum arrogans sit et definito suo latius vegetat. Non tantum enim in divinis, si vim et naturam Numinis intelligas, ratio humana caeca est, et opinione magis quam ratione in plerumque nititur, aut falsa at impia comminiscitur, [...] sed etiam in iis, quae sensibus obvia sunt, tam elementaria, quam coelestis, aut nihil aut parum assequitur, ut a Socrate proditum fertur.”

<sup>52</sup> On a related debate in early modern Iberian scholasticism cf. Heßbrüggen-Walter, S., (2012): 80.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Grün, J., (1587), 74f: “Altera igitur Philosophiae definitio ex partibus collecta traditur, quod sit cognitio artium dicendi, totius rerum natura et doctrina virtutum tanta, quantam mens humana in hac caligine assequi potest. Et haec quidem definitio Ciceronianam illam, non tantum intra modestiae limites revocat, [...] Verum etiam partium enumeratione [...] omnes, circa quas Philosophia versatur, materias oculis subiicit, [...]”

<sup>54</sup> The 1599 edition is quite rare, so I quote the second edition: Keckermann, B., *Praecognita logica: Tractatus 3* (Hanovia: Antonius, 1604), 48f: “Quid vocas obiectivas? Sic voco eas, quae res ipsas in natura positas tanquam obiecta intellectionis nostrae tractant. Quotnam sunt illae? Quatuor maiores et principales. 1, S. S. Theologia. 2, Iurisprudentia. 3, Medicina. 4, Philosophia, quae in se continet Metaphysica, Physicam, Mathematicam, [...] et denique Ethicam; [...]”

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Crell, F., (1587), 1: “[...] quia [...] tum contemplantis Philosophiae duas nobilissimas partes, Metaphysicam et Mathematicam omittit: tum artes dicendi, quae Philosophiae pars [...] non sunt, admiscet: et quidem primum illic locum assignat: tum denique genus, a fine petitum, cognitionem ponit: quae contemplantis tantum, teste ipsomet Aristotele, non practicae Philosophiae finis est.”

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Crell, F., (1587), 2: “Sic enim sapientiam Philosophus definit: 'ut sit intelligentia et scientia', id est, habitus, ex duobus istis habitibus intelligentiae et scientiae, compositus.”

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Crell, F., (1587), 2: “[...] quo sapientiam Philosophus definivit: eodem fere modo definienda nobis Philosophia, utpote habitus compositus, erit: ut scilicet dicamus: Philosophiam esse habitum, sapientia et prudentia constantem: hanc Peripateticam totius Philosophiae definitionem esse statuo: [...] Genus habitus est: differentia, sapientia et prudentia constans. genus ex Logicis notum est: [...]”

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Grün, J., (1587), 78: “Subiectum et causa efficiens est, suprema praestantissimaque animae hominis potentia Rationalis, cui informandae expolendaeque Philosophia servit.”

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Grün, J., (1587), 78.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Crell, F., (1587), 2: “Ceterum sicut duplicis generis res sunt: ita duplex disciplinarum genus est, quae res illas tractant: et duplex illarum disciplinarum finis et scopus. Quae res necessarias tractant Scientiae contemplantes dicuntur: quia finis earum contemplatio et cognitio est: idque propterea, quia de illis rebus agunt, quae non fieri sed cognosci duntaxat a nobis possunt. [...] Quae res contingentes tractant practicae [...] appellari possunt: quia finis earum actio et effectio est. [...] Agunt quidem istae quoque disciplinae de rebus ut illas cognoscant: sed non ut in cognitione subsistant: sed ut ad actionem cognitionem transferant quae ultimus et primarius earum finis est.” This formulation of the dichotomy between the domains of the theoretical and practical subdisciplines of philosophy resembles the way Beurhaus had glossed the distinction between Divine and human things. See above, note 12.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Keckermann, B., (1604), 47f: “Quaenam vero ad eiusmodi cognitionem praecipue requiruntur? Tria. 1, id quod cognoscendum est sive obiectum. 2, potentia naturalis intelligendi fluens ab anima rationali. 3, Dispositio certa, per quam illa naturalis potentia in actum ordinate et sine errore deducatur.”

<sup>62</sup> This notion was common to Ramism and neostoicism. Cf. Abel, G., *Stoizismus und frühe Neuzeit: zur Entstehungsgeschichte modernen Denkens im Felde von Ethik u. Politik* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), 239.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Keckermann, B., (1604), 49: “Quotuplices ergo sunt Disciplinae, quae ad Rerum intellectionem Hominem disponunt? Duplices: obiectivae, et Directivae. Quotnam sunt Hominis operationes, quae egent eiusmodi normis artificialibus? Duae praecipue. primo quidem intellectio sive cogitatio de rebus: post cogitationem significatio, quae fit locutione et scriptione.”