

Introduction

European Liberal Discourses

Conceptual Affinities and Disparities

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The term ‘liberal’ occupies a special place in European culture. Its detractors and opponents may rail about its paternalism, its elitism, its oft-deplorable colonial record and, occasionally, its monadic individualism, but liberalism has been associated with emancipation, openness, reform, tolerance, legality, political accountability, the removal of barriers to human interaction and, above all, humanism, values on which most Europeans pride themselves – despite the horrendous events that struck at the heart of European civilization during the twentieth century. If that account may seem too starry-eyed, one has also to recall that many liberals themselves approached their creed from other, extra-humanist angles: the lifting of material economic constraints, a passport to modernization and a constitutional guarantor of a stable, conservatively inclined polity. Nor is that all when a conceptual story of Europe is undertaken. It is not only that many non-European societies have embraced and developed these liberal ideas further; contrary to the perspective adopted by many historical studies, as Javier Fernández-Sebastián demonstrates in his chapter, these ideas were preceded or paralleled in parts of Hispanic America, occasioning an early two-way transmission of liberal languages across the Atlantic.

For many thinkers, liberalism is neither just an ideology nor a philosophical-political theory like any other, such as socialism, anarchism or conservatism, but rather a set of basic cultural postulates that opens the possibility of debate among all modern ideologies. In that sense, liberalism has often been equated with the mainstream of modern Western civilization and even with modernity as such. Just as it has been said in the sphere of contemporary art that ‘Cubism is not just one “ism” among many, but the condition for all the others’, in the political arena one might also say that

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‘liberalism is not just one “ism” among many, but the condition for all the others’. Whether that is indeed the case, or whether liberalism is nonetheless a (multi-)provincial construct is for its students to judge.

Conceptualizing and Reconceptualizing: The Liberal Maze

In this book we have chosen to put aside our own definitions in order to explore some of the descriptions, interpretations and conceptual constellations of liberalism that have been advanced by a number of historical actors, mostly liberals, in Europe over the past two centuries. Instead of the usual question ‘What is Liberalism?’,¹ as posed by politicians and academics, we will attempt to answer two alternative questions. The first question is central to the practice of conceptual history: ‘What did they mean by liberal or liberalism?’, when ‘they’ refers to a transgenerational collective of historical agents who lived in different European countries, from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. As far as we know, this question was first posed in a traditionalist Spanish newspaper in 1813,² since which time it has been periodically rephrased. The second question has in recent years been included within the remit of conceptual history: ‘Which diverse conceptual collocations and cognates have imparted and fine-tuned the competing and coalescing meanings that liberalism has exhibited throughout its history?’ This reflects the multiple dimensions that have generated a loosely shared body, or family, of liberal languages, yet one that interacts with continuously changing political vocabularies. These languages have drawn sustenance from a common substratum, and their mutation not infrequently reveals mutual exchanges, linguistic borrowings and grafts. The concept of liberalism is thus liberated from the misleading confines of a uniform definition, since no definition is capable of delivering a satisfactory account of all aspects of such a vast and complex ideology-cum-movement. In parallel, the study of conceptual morphology indicates the inevitability of selective choices among different conceptions of any political concept, given the inescapable incompatibility of many of these conceptions with one another.³

Our volume restricts itself to the terms ‘liberal’ and ‘liberalism’, though – particularly in Franz L. Fillafer’s chapter on liberalism under the Habsburgs – it acknowledges liberalism’s immediate European prehistory as it emerged in a swirl of Enlightenment and religious argumentation at the end of the eighteenth century. We cannot of course cover the conceptual history of the past 200 years in any given chapter, nor can we do justice to all European countries. Together, these studies proffer a measured spatial and temporal cross-cut of the conceptual history of European liberalism in each of

the selected countries, through diverse, dedicated analyses of broad segments of that history: as initiating periods, as periods of maturing complexity or as turning-points. In so doing, they reflect the various layers and conceptions that have fermented and matured in liberalism's embrace from its inception as liberalism two centuries ago, and whose continuous internal jostling has produced a powerful and imaginative dynamic. In the tug-of-war between space, time and context, 'liberal' and 'liberalism' have undergone such remarkable mutations that it becomes a challenge to determine whether we are dealing with the same concepts or whether seismic shifts have occurred beneath the surface of the words. If this indicates nothing else, it dismisses the abstract universalism that many political philosophers have conferred on liberalism, even though, unsurprisingly, the contents of that universalism are themselves contested among such philosophers.

Historiographically, too, we are beginning to understand that the idealized concept of 'Western liberalism', so frequently invoked by the historians who have contributed to that grand narrative, is in fact highly dependent on the archetypal story of the origins of liberalism invented and promoted by the first European liberals themselves almost 200 years ago in order to give their political programme a prestigious prehistory and intellectual pedigree. We are aware that in order to analyse the conceptual indeterminacy of ideologies adequately, it is necessary to break with the inertia characterizing old-style histories of political thought. We wish to investigate historically how specific political forces came to be through the use of particular languages and concepts, giving themselves at the same time an ad hoc intellectual and political past. Our starting point is the history of actually existing liberals, although we must bear in mind that the concepts used by liberals were in no way exclusively theirs; as is well known, one of the characteristics of political modernity in linguistic terms is that, to a great extent, adversaries use the same concepts, interpreted in a discordant and often antagonistic manner.

Yet although the incipient epistemic entity called liberalism gradually converted into an increasingly variegated set of interconnected currents, it contains sufficiently intertwined semantic elements for those to be considered components of the 'same' concept. Beyond the concrete movements, ideologies and political parties labelled 'liberal', it is possible to identify liberalism as a great current of thought, with some imbricated – and partially contradictory – features, mutating over time. Consequently, we have opted to use the phrase *European liberalisms* in the plural in order to emphasize the multifaceted spectrum of understandings nested under the liberal umbrella and to offer an 'empirical-conceptual' approach to those liberalisms.

The comparative perspective endorsed in this volume underlines the claim that the study of liberalism passes through multiple heuristic filters: not only

as a concept or cluster of concepts, but as a political vocabulary, a colloquial language, an ideology, an array of practices, a compendium of human values and a plethora of concrete experiences. Nor is liberalism solely about politics; its reach also encompasses morality, the economy, culture and religion. All this raises profound methodological issues. For as one attempts to engage with the divergent universe of meanings that ‘liberal’ and ‘liberalism’ have accrued in Europe, meanings that mix with local understandings wherever they alight – both within the continent and far beyond its physical borders – one is led to reflect on the paths that a conceptual history of liberalism should tread. Should we locate its concepts and collocations in certain cultural practices, in linguistic and rhetorical verbal usage, in vernacular discourse, in the political theories of eminent individuals, in religious faiths and cultural dispositions, in the institutions of political parties, in the diverse disciplinary traditions of politics, economics and philosophy, in a social transition from small scale human conduct – being personally ‘liberal’ – to large-scale social phenomena, an ideology of liberalism? Does liberalism have a prehistory that conceptual historians need to take into account? Do the uppercase ‘L’ and the lowercase ‘l’ indicate a distinction of importance or is there – as in so many other instances – a permeable boundary problem?

Liberal Pluralities and Academic Viewpoints: A Medley of Abundance

The approaches in this volume illustrate the fruitfulness that a conceptual history of European liberalisms can display. It can focus on a geocultural story of origins. Its diverse exemplars can indicate clear cross-cultural impact, semi-coincidental parallelisms or the equivalence of ‘false friends’. It confronts the question of whether the regional subgroupings recognize and acknowledge each other, though often with universal pretensions, airs and graces, or whether the flow of perceived influence is disrupted through the discourses and activities of distanced observers and misinterpreters – in which case, the broader continental parochialism that is liberalism may be transformed into a series of even smaller discrete national parochialisms. And a conceptual history of European liberalisms needs to engage with the manner in which the imaginations and fantasies of the past stamp their imprint on what liberals can think, utter and write, as well as with determining whether liberals possess a distinct facility for projecting the future and subscribing to a distinctive horizon of expectations.

The various chapters in this volume touch, collectively if not individually, on most of the above issues. The contributors all share a deep-seated interest in the historical analysis of the concepts, discourses and ideological features

that have characterized European liberalisms, and their chapters are all linked by the common purpose of finding the key concepts that mattered in particular cases. At the same time, they offer a broad sample of approaches, reflecting on the one hand the multiple historical understandings of the concept of liberalism that past discourses and thinkers have employed, and revealing on the other hand the methodological plurality that today inhabits the domain of conceptual history. The authors have been encouraged to exercise their freedom to focus on their own research and understandings, and their analyses provide a differently weighted set of perspectives the student of liberalism might adopt. Their chapters range across different timespans, affording the reader windows into diverse European experiences of liberalism over more than 200 years, although most chapters focus on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As will be seen, some of the following chapters are closer to the history of political thought, while others are closer to the history of concepts. Furthermore, within this latter modality, there are authors more attentive to vocabularies, while others try to take into account practices and even, as in Michael Freeden's final chapter, attempt to reduce the motley outlook and morphological complexity of British/European liberalisms to a repertoire of historical layers. While it is certainly not easy to combine the historical-conceptual approach with the methodology of ideal types, Freeden's endeavour to delineate the major temporal strata of liberalism offers a heuristic tool to find a middle way between idiographic and nomothetic perspectives, a proposed method for synthesizing and dissecting the changing conceptual constellations historically present in liberal ideologies into a circumscribed range of types and strata. In sum, we see this book as an opening gambit in developing a rich and intricate understanding of European liberalism's conceptual history, in the hope that it will encourage further studies in this field.⁴

A central aim of this book is to restore the historicity and substantivity of European liberalisms rather than framing them in some grand enterprise of evolutionary momentum or philosophical truth, which all too often results in flattening the differences and varieties of liberalism. The usual approaches, especially when referring to nineteenth-century European liberalism, tend to reduce it to only one version: that of so-called 'classical liberalism', which is often equated with a short list of British political philosophers. At worst, this perspective could lead to the absurdity of maintaining that, until the twentieth century, the only relevant form of liberalism was that in Britain. Ironically, the words 'liberal' and 'liberalism' when applied to a party were first employed in other countries of Mediterranean Europe, whereas in Britain it was initially perceived as a foreign term, and entered British political discourse only later and with difficulty.

Despite the many differences between the cases examined here, some basic similarities emerge from this comparison. In the final chapter in this volume, Freeden offers an overall morphological–evolutionary view that, although referring mainly to British liberalism, *mutatis mutandis* could serve as a general scheme and as a counterpoint to other particular cases. These prepolitical similarities emanate from a common cultural and semantic substratum that, long before liberalism took shape as a political ‘ism’, and even before the first of the five layers identified by Freeden had completed their sedimentation, was already shared in large areas of Europe. Thus, the excellence of the virtue of liberality, essentially understood as generosity and open-mindedness, was recognized almost everywhere. This enduring substratum accounts for the frequent practice of numerous liberals throughout the last two centuries – as emphasized by several authors in their respective chapters – of invoking the echoes of the ancient moral virtue of liberality, echoes that still resonate in our day. Moreover, the fact that the term ‘liberalism’ refers to such an overarching nonspecific concept surely has much to do with the ambiguity and polyvalence of the concept of freedom, on which liberalism ultimately rests. As Portuguese historian Oliveira Martins demonstrated in 1881, and as most of the contributors to this volume note, freedom is one of the most complex, contested and difficult-to-grasp concepts of the entire political vocabulary. This is evident in the Polish case, as Maciej Janowski shows in Chapter 8, and in Chapter 11, where Freeden illustrates some of its changing interpretations.

Entering the Age of the ‘Isms’

Within the ‘great age of “isms”’ that was the nineteenth century, its first decades saw the advent in the West of the initial and most important political ‘isms’. If we take up the much-discussed Koselleckian notion of *Sattelzeit*, the first half of the nineteenth century could be described from this perspective as a crucial extension of the threshold period of entry into full modernity, during which a special type of neologisms crystallized, relating to ‘concepts of movement’ (*Bewegungsbegriffe*). The rapid coinage in English of terms such as liberalism, radicalism, socialism, conservatism, nationalism and communism in a short period of time allows us to date the critical phase of that advent as occurring between 1819 and 1840.⁵

This chronological enumeration of half a dozen of those key modern ‘isms’ shows that liberalism was the forerunner of the great ideologies, and therefore the most durable ‘ism’, because through many ups and downs, it continues to accompany us today. And, given that in the series of which this book is a part, other volumes dedicated to different ‘isms’ may be

published in the near future, let us pause a moment to consider a little more closely the place occupied by liberalism in the context of the political ‘isms’.⁶

We suggested at the beginning of this introduction that this first political ‘ism’ of modernity could be seen as a prototype and precondition of all others, if only because of its ability to ignite public debate about the best policies for society in different spheres, thus opening up a struggle between ideologies that would never be extinguished. In any case, there is no shortage of critics of all stripes that affirm that the other ideologies harbour to some extent a development and a sequel of liberal principles – either by extension and deepening or by negation and rejection. It is not uncommon for the harshest critics of incipient liberalism to accompany their attacks with a diatribe against ‘isms’ in general.

As a political ‘ism’, liberalism emerged precisely at the pivotal moment of the turn from religious ‘isms’ – most of them derogatory – that had proliferated since the Reformation towards the new ideological-political ‘isms’ oriented towards the future.⁷ In fact, in the second decade of the nineteenth century, when the word ‘liberalism’ was coined, the majority of the most common ‘isms’ still remained religious and philosophical in nature.⁸ No wonder, then, that the earliest discussions on the meaning of the word liberalism – originating from publicists hostile to that emerging ‘ism’ – hesitated to label it as a heresy or as a new political faith.⁹

Two scholars who have recently written on this topic remark that when analysing ‘isms’, it is advisable to examine the root and the suffix, since ‘the -ism suffix often adds a particular claim of “ownership” to the use of a concept due to the generalising and universalising effect of the suffix’.¹⁰ The semantic effects of this suffixation were already noticed and passionately discussed in the mid nineteenth century by Prince Metternich in an exchange of letters with the Marquis of Valdegamas on the occasion of the publication of the latter’s *Ensayo sobre el catolicismo, el liberalismo y el socialismo* (1851). In that correspondence, Metternich strongly states his ‘aversion to isms, when I see them applied to any noun that expresses a quality or a right’. According to the Austrian politician, when the suffix ‘ism’ is added to abstract names such as God, reason, constitution, society or common to turn them into deism, rationalism, constitutionalism, socialism and communism, that simple ‘grammatical transmutation’ perverts the meaning of the original concepts and lends the new isms thus formed a ‘dangerous elasticity’. Donoso responds by acknowledging the evils derived from the ‘abuse of that termination’, although he excludes Catholicism from that will of appropriation and falsification that characterizes most of the ‘isms’. On the other hand, liberalism would be for Donoso, and years later was still for his disciple Tejada, a

dangerous and condemnable falsification of freedom, the true source from which all modern errors spring.¹¹

It is interesting to note in this regard the obsessive aversion of antimodern authors to political ‘isms’, and also the fact that the debate to which we have just referred was triggered by the publication of a book very critical of liberalism such as Donoso’s *Essay*, widely circulated among reactionary groups throughout Europe. The strong dislike of these groups for liberalism stems from their belief that liberalism was ultimately the origin of all other political ‘isms’ – including socialism – and responsible for all evils of modernity (an ‘accusation’ that, incidentally, would reappear in the second half of the twentieth century under very different circumstances, when some well-known authors – several of them German Jewish intellectuals who took refuge in the United States – blamed the Enlightenment and liberalism for incubating the serpent’s egg of totalitarianism). While this accusation is clearly exaggerated, there is no doubt that fundamental elements of liberal ideology have permeated and have been absorbed by other ideologies to variable effect. Moreover, some of these ideologies present their own projects as the true fulfilment of some of the unfulfilled promises of liberalism. On the other hand, it is evident that liberalism has powerfully contributed to shaping many modern practices and institutions in Europe and beyond.

The enormous breadth that the semantic field of liberalism has come to exhibit over time is best understood if one takes into account that the concept fits into each and every one of the six categories proposed by Höpfl to classify ‘isms’, namely: doctrines, traditions, rhetorics, attitudes, ethos and movements.¹² The same can be said about most types of ‘isms’ according to the classification proposed by Cuttica, inspired by Höpfl. Liberalism would fit into at least four of these types: ‘isms’ referring to group conduct; generated in ideological conflicts, be they politico-religious or politico-intellectual; and adapted to scholarly use.¹³

A final aspect that deserves special consideration in this section is the position of liberalism in the context of the ‘isms’ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The variable relations of opposition, affinity, competition or complementarity that it has maintained with the other great ‘isms’ of modernity reveal much about the evolution of the liberal mainstream. Its antagonists have been changing over time, successively labelled in various contexts and circumstances as absolutism, servilism, conservatism, democratism (or simply democracy), socialism, communism, authoritarianism, collectivism, statism, totalitarianism, fundamentalism, republicanism or communitarianism. These and other purportedly antiliberal positions that constitute the broad array of what we might call the ‘counter-isms’ of liberalism – as the political spectrum was expanded and new political ‘isms’ emerged on its

right, and especially on its left – also account for why, in certain places and moments, liberalism could be conflated with, and sometimes be opposed to, radicalism, utilitarianism, Jacobinism, internationalism, conservatism, progressivism and ultimately identity particularisms.

That is not all. To add complexity to this analysis, we must bear in mind that, under the umbrella term ‘liberalism’, there is room for not a few other ‘isms’. From this perspective, the word ‘liberalism’ can be seen as a hypernym that shelters a cluster of more specific hyponyms under its broad aegis, several of which may in turn take the form of minor, sectorial ‘isms’ (though no less abstract and complex). Contractualism, constitutionalism, parliamentarism, *librecambismo* (free trade), individualism, iusnaturalism, rationalism, egalitarianism and developmentalism are some of those subordinate ‘isms’ that at one time or another have been part – totally or partially – of the liberal creed. Just as Freeden has shown how the variable weight and disposition of some core, adjacent and peripheral concepts, as well as their diverse ways of decontestation, explain different ideological constellations, we could say that the emphasis on, or demoting of, some of those ‘isms’ with which liberalism intersects provides a good indication of the predominance of one aspect or another of liberal ideology at a given moment.

The Phases of European Liberalisms

While liberalism was still a vague and diffuse term, and its early meanings were under construction, the apostles of that first liberalism could understand the concept as a vast international movement. This explains why in the first decades of the nineteenth century, a number of political actors talked of European, American (referring mainly, *pace* Hartz,¹⁴ to Spanish American countries) and even universal liberalism.¹⁵ However, as the term ‘liberalism’ was applied to more diverse realities and circumstances and was loaded with particular expectations, the meanings of the word became ever more diversified. Over time, the concept was adapted to the peculiar contexts and specific problems of each society, allowing us to witness a certain ‘nationalization’ of liberalisms.¹⁶ The dissemination and internationalization of the concept increased its presence in a variety of political arenas and thus led by the same token to its growing nationalization. However, it is no less true that some authors and currents of liberalism – mainly British and French – achieved a great international impact in much of Europe. Jeremy Bentham, Benjamin Constant, François Guizot, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer and Leonard Hobhouse, among others (also, later on, the Austrians Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek and Karl Popper), were widely known and read beyond the borders of their respective countries. And, as the

reader will see in several chapters of this volume, the French *doctrinaires* and British new liberalism are two currents that circulated widely in Europe, the former in the first half of the nineteenth century and the latter since the end of that century. (Ironically, as we will see later, French doctrinarism came to be considered by some critics as a systematization of Whig principles.)

As the nineteenth century unfolded, the concept and language of liberalism gradually gained ground, expanding its semantic field. This expansion and increasing complexity has left its mark on some lexical and grammatical changes. Phrases such as ‘liberal ideas’, ‘liberal constitution’, ‘liberal party’, ‘liberal system’ and so on became more frequently used and acquired conceptual and intellectual thickness as new experiences and expectations impacted on them. The word/concept ‘liberal’ and its cognates went through a series of phases that were not necessarily sequential and, indeed, partly overlapped. Six such phases may be identified from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century.

The Emergence and ‘Substantivization’ of the Word

The transfer of the liberal adjective from the realm of morality to that of politics occurred conspicuously in France, coinciding with the Brumaire coup of Napoleon Bonaparte, although that rhetorical move was preceded in the 1790s by a heated discussion in Britain about the extent to which the French revolutionaries’ way of conducting themselves was or was not consistent with ‘liberal principles’. This transfer metaphorically shifted positive connotations usually associated with certain noble and generous acts and conduct – usually attributed to eminent individuals and to God himself – to a handful of abstract ideas. Conversely, qualifying certain ideas and principles as ‘liberal’ gave them a presumption of magnanimity and concern for the common good that could not but arouse the respect and sympathy of the majority of the public. This moral sympathy then reverted to the bearers of such ideas, who could be presumed to have attitudes of altruism, benevolence, inclusiveness, moderation and patriotism. The emergence of the word ‘liberal’ in politics was followed shortly afterwards by its transformation from adjective into noun: in addition to ‘a liberal mind’ or ‘a person with liberal ideas’, it was possible to say ‘a liberal’ when referring to a person who possessed a particular ideology – in mainland Europe chiefly a supporter of constitutionalism,¹⁷ but also one advocating reform and individual liberty, as in Britain. It is worth noting that this small grammatical leap – from adjective to noun – that, as far as we know, took place around 1809–10 almost simultaneously at two extremes of the continent – in Sweden and in Spain – heralded a considerable change in the evolution of the concept. This change involved nothing less than the application of human agency to liberal political conceptions, which

could thus descend from the lofty world of ideas to materialize in the political praxis of flesh-and-blood human beings. The emergence of a new political identity attributable to real actors – the liberals, the liberal movement and the liberal party – made it more difficult for further developments of the concept and its diversification to be conceived as mere speculative games of disincarnated ideas, detached from the concrete actions of that ideology’s supporters. The passage from the old moral virtue of liberality – with strong classical and Christian undertones – to a new liberal political identity could be described as a circular process: the adjective began by qualifying a personal virtue to a series of ideas and principles, and from there it descended again, substantivized, towards people, which made it possible to speak of *liberals* as a new kind of political label. That political label began to appear from 1812, usually referring to Spanish *liberales*, with increasing frequency in European and American newspapers.

Ideologization, Temporalization and Transformation into an ‘Ism’

The movement here is from ‘liberal’ to ‘liberalism’. The ‘ismization’ of the word ‘liberal’ was in all likelihood the work of its enemies. They were the ones who urgently needed to encapsulate in a denigrating shorthand the whole set of ‘liberal’ people, doctrines and practices they were preparing to fight. In any case, since the ‘friends of freedom’ did not reject the name imposed on them by their adversaries – thus converting, as has happened so many times, a derogatory hetero-designation into a self-designation borne with pride – this move made it possible for the vague ‘liberal ideas’ to be later ordered and assembled into an initially relatively structured system of political thought by some ideologists. Once the term ‘liberalism’ was coined, one can observe – beyond divergences among some liberal groups and others – various attempts to determine the principles of the new doctrine/ideology more or less systematically. One of the first attempts of this kind occurred in 1820. A Spanish journalist, citing the opinions of the French politician Carrion-Nisas, wrote that ‘liberals across Europe’ agree on half-a-dozen basic points, namely: individual freedom, respect for property, freedom of expression, equality before the law, equitable distribution of taxes and equal access to public office based on personal merit. Out of those six principles that constituted one of the first definitions of European liberalism, the first and the third refer to freedom, the second to individual possession and the last three to equality or fairness. Hence – the journalist concluded – any representative government founded on such principles, whether monarchical or republican, is liberal.¹⁸ Alongside these ‘constitutionalist’ definitions, which broadly coincide with layer one as suggested by Freeden in Chapter 11 below, we find other definitions that insist instead on the temporal dimension of liberalism, understood both as a

political ideology and a set of institutions capable of ensuring the progress, development and continuous improvement of the individual and of society¹⁹ (Freeden, layer three, see Chapter 11). Little by little, other definitions would be added. However, as is the case with all the great abstract political concepts, no definition of liberalism could ever settle the then initiated discussion about its ‘true meaning’. Its meanings were and are multiple, changing and controversial. Conceptual historians, instead of adding another definition, try to exhume, gather and systematize these meanings so that the current reader can better understand the parameters of politics and thought of past times. In the previous section, we have alluded to the vanguard location of liberalism within the emerging ‘isms’ of modernity. In this sense, we could regard the word liberalism as a *mot-témoin* (‘word-witness’)²⁰ whose appearance testifies to a profound shift taking place in the mentality of an entire epoch, a shift referred to above as the entry into the age of the ‘isms’. It is revealing, in this respect, that in little more than a decade – around 1820, a decisive date that marks the irruption in the European scene of that new actor called ‘liberalism’ – the first books and pamphlets containing the word ‘liberalism’ in their title began to be published in various European languages.²¹ In some of those books, several of them frankly hostile to liberalism, this brand new ‘ism’ appears as a personified acting subject, endowed with a will and purposes of its own, as if it were an entity capable of planning and performing autonomous actions.

Partisanship and Pluralization

The term ‘liberal party’ now appeared. However, since initially the idea of a party was loaded with negative connotations and was not easily accepted, liberals presented themselves as defenders of the common good, claiming to speak on behalf of the whole nation. The party frequently split into several tendencies or wings, moderate and radical, conservative and progressive. Often the very word ‘liberalism’ became a disputed and controversial label, as each (sub)group claimed its own interpretation for itself and each understood it as the only ‘true liberalism’, while accusing its rivals for the liberal label of being ‘false liberals’. In addition to a coherent set of political principles – which nonetheless would change markedly, depending on time and place – liberalism also reflected a series of shared political and personal experiences. Some countries hosted several parties that, under different names, regarded themselves as liberal. In several of these countries – Britain, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Denmark – the majority, or at least a good part of the groups represented in their parliaments, considered themselves liberal in one way or another. Yet far from settling disputes over meaning, it enlivened them. At any given moment, each country witnessed several

lines of fracture between conservative and progressive liberals, beginning with the varying degrees of radicalism and the speed of the reforms that each group intended to introduce. The attitudes of the various liberal subgroups to revolutionary tactics were often a bone of contention that led to the rupture between different factions. Thus, the close association of the term ‘liberalism’ with the revolution explains that in some countries, as in the Netherlands, liberalism continued to be a radical and threatening term even in the 1830s.²² From a very early stage, these differences of valuation became evident with respect to the French Revolution – the origin of liberalism for some and a perfect example of illiberalism for others. As early as the last decade of the eighteenth century, Burke, Jovellanos and other European conservative intellectuals had branded the French revolutionaries as illiberal. In 1814, M. Lorenzo de Vidaurre, an official of the Spanish Crown in Peru, carefully distinguished between two very different meanings of the noun ‘liberal’. Vidaurre willingly declared himself to be a liberal, if that name was understood as a synonym for ‘constitutional’ and ‘defender of civil rights’, but roundly refused to be so if liberal was understood to entail ‘a supporter of the revolution’.²³ In the light of the new rhetoric, the split between a moderate and a revolutionary liberalism could be seen as a duplication or rupture of the concept, which was divided into a good and a bad version.²⁴ These types of fissure were to occur again and again throughout the history of liberalism, giving rise to numerous subdivisions.

However, the greater or lesser radicalism of the proposed reforms is not the only reason for the internal rupture and diversification of liberalisms. The multiplicity of spheres (political, economic and religious) to which liberal thinking could be applied is also an important factor in this pluralization. It also signals, as is evident in the case of the Habsburg lands, the existence of different political sensibilities arising from the mixture of liberal ideology with nationalist tendencies.²⁵

Historicization and Canonization

In the 1820s, a number of writers and publicists began to articulate a grand narrative of the origins of liberalism (a current they equated with Western civilization), accompanied by a tentative list of great thinkers held to have contributed historically to shaping the liberal doctrine. This canon of those considered to be the founders of liberalism and the authors of its classics grew with the passage of time to include newer names of nineteenth-century theorists and also – retrospectively – of the early modern period. ‘European Liberalism’ could thus be understood largely as a historical-intellectual narrative constructed by liberal actors and later endorsed by historians of political thought. Comparing the various lists of theorists and presumed forefathers

of liberalism drawn up in the same country at different times (or even the alternative assessments of the same episodes and characters offered at a given time by different segments of liberalism),²⁶ as well as between different countries and continents, is a very instructive exercise. It says much about the national and international processes of historical – and historiographical – construction of liberalism and the gradual establishment and ‘negotiation’ of the prevailing canon in the West, a canon that today is above all enshrined in, and reinforced by, the list of classical ‘liberal’ authors studied in history of political theory syllabi in Western universities. We will return to this point below.

The crystallization of the liberal canon is of course partly a product of shared intellectual traditions, but also of the ‘elective traditions’ that result from selecting those elements of the past that best fit the needs of present predicaments and the expectations of a particular group or community.²⁷ Hence, alongside the grand narrative of liberalism as the backbone of Western civilization, liberals also generally constructed a series of national historical accounts, starting at least in the Middle Ages, in which the most significant advances of freedom in their respective countries were glorified. In several countries, liberals even argued that their original freedoms were reminiscent of a kind of national ancient constitution. Needless to say, the so-called Whig interpretation of history is the most perfect example of this kind. Especially controversial was the historicization of the Enlightenment, which in many countries – as, for instance, in Austria – went hand in hand with the historicization of liberalism. It gave rise to political-intellectual conflicts among rival groups, each of which claimed to be the legitimate heir of the legacy of an Enlightenment tailor-made to their political requirements.²⁸

Systematization and the Crisis of Bourgeois Liberalism

From the 1830s onwards, several theorists began to realize that a system characterized as liberal extended over much of European society: “The new system by which people have been working for three centuries in order to replace the previous one is that based on freedom. It is the truly liberal system which, conceived by philosophy, later applied to the reform of Church and State, has now been extended to almost all spheres of social activity.”²⁹ One of these spheres emerged as the economy: economic liberalism became an increasingly employed formulation (Freeden’s layer two, see Chapter 11), to the extent that over time some would fallaciously identify ‘classical’ liberalism with the doctrine of laissez-faire. In that respect, it is revealing that the word ‘liberalism’ gradually began to make an appearance in encyclopaedias in various European languages and countries. By the middle of the century, following the Revolution of July 1830 in France and even more after 1848,

liberalism began to be seen by its left-wing critics as a bourgeois movement. The so-called ‘social question’ posed a challenge to liberal governments, parties and theorists who were wondering how to tackle the serious problems of the emerging working class in a society undergoing profound transformations, such as industrialization, secularization, and urbanization. Under these conditions, as Helena Rosenblatt shows in her chapter, liberalism came to be described by some of its enemies, in a sense completely contrary to its original meaning, as a ‘pernicious form of individualism’ wholly devoid of generosity.³⁰

Renovation and Resemantization

By the end of the nineteenth century, a fundamental shift took place in the way in which liberalism was understood, especially in relation to the role of the state in the economy, the expansion of fundamental human rights and the widespread enablement of human opportunity. New liberalisms emerged, aware of social responsibilities towards individuals in tandem with the protection of their liberties, and paving the way for the modern welfare state (Freeden, layer four, see Chapter 11). Among the different versions of this reinvented progressive liberalism – *solidarisme*, *Kathedersozialismus*, *krausoinstitucionalismo* and social liberalism – that distanced itself from the old elitist liberalism of notables and middle class and was further extended in the twentieth century, undoubtedly the most influential was the British new liberalism.³¹ L.T. Hobhouse’s book *Liberalism* (1911), in particular, was translated into Swedish, Spanish and other languages, and achieved a significant impact on the continent (in the Netherlands, Sweden, Poland, Portugal³² and Spain,³³ though not in other countries, such as Denmark).

The six phases add internal complexity, both accumulative and selective, to liberalism that results in a remarkable diversification of the concept. Interestingly enough, as we move away from the origins, the line of demarcation between the political facets of the concept and the tendentially academic uses that some authors make of it becomes more and more blurred. For example, Hobhouse and other representatives of the new liberalism – like Posada, Almagro or Elorrieta – were both rigorous scholars and public intellectuals, and it is difficult to say whether, when they wrote about liberalism and its history, they did so as politically active citizens or as scientists (the two vocations on which Weber famously lectured in those same years). Most of the time, they did so on the basis of their dual status as teachers and ideologists. The result, then, is that at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between liberalism as an ideological concept and as an analytical tool.

Academic and Philosophical Traditions

The academic and philosophical understandings of liberalism deserve separate attention. They have played, and still play, a major part in a somewhat different conceptual trajectory – a parallel orbit of ‘liberalism’ that nonetheless intersects frequently with more colloquial and vernacular discourses. In that intellectualized and university-supported domain, a divergence of opinions and definitions abounds in no less intensity than in other contestations over the term ‘liberalism’. It has commanded a pronounced presence of its own in Europe, while also interacting with, and being receptive to, American academic debate. A few instances are chosen here to represent some of the nodal points of contention displayed by major philosophical and ideational claims about liberalism, magnified by the reputation of their authors and the widespread readership of their analyses. That prominence singles them out as important events in liberalism’s conceptual history. Guido de Ruggiero’s *Storia del liberalismo europeo* (1925) was for many years the seminal history of its subject matter, particularly in its 1927 English translation as *The History of European Liberalism*. In the preface, its translator, the noted British philosopher R.G. Collingwood, observed that the ‘aim of Liberalism is to assist the individual to discipline himself and achieve his own moral progress’, leading to a view of the state ‘not as the vehicle of a superhuman wisdom or a superhuman power, but as the organ by which a people expresses whatever of political ability it can find and breed and train within itself’.³⁴ While alert to the ‘diversity of [liberalism’s] national forms’ within Europe, de Ruggiero believed to have identified ‘a process of mutual assimilation, gradually building up a European Liberal consciousness pervading its particular manifestations without destroying their differences.’³⁵ He held liberalism to consist, first and foremost, of ‘the recognition of a fact, the fact of liberty’. To that was added a method, ‘a capacity to reconstruct within oneself the spiritual processes of others’, a ‘higher synthesis’ of political life combining ‘resistance and movement, conservation and progress’, and ‘the continual exercise and impartial discipline of governing’. Significantly here, liberalism is endowed with spirituality and an ethical and humanist vision that aspired to transcend the partisanship of politics.

This strand of Italian political theory is also evident in the work of Benedetto Croce, who, as Pombeni argues,³⁶ entertained a transcendental, spiritual idea of liberalism. With strong Hegelian undertones reflecting the ethical purpose of the state and the dialectical progress of humanity away from authoritarianism, Croce’s grandiose interpretation of liberalism is encapsulated in a chapter in his *Politics and Morals* entitled ‘Liberalism as a Concept of Life’.³⁷ By contrast, Isaiah Berlin, the best known of the mid twentieth-century British liberals, espoused a more restricted notion of

liberalism in his famous essay ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’, arguing approvingly that ‘the fathers of liberalism – Mill and Constant ... demand a maximum degree of non-interference compatible with the minimum demands of social life’. Berlin thus beat a retreat from the ideational positions earlier occupied by Hobhouse and Hobson.³⁸ Controversially, in 1949, and with merely perfunctory regard for its nuances and variations, Berlin had portrayed liberalism in terms even more unitary than those of de Ruggiero, as verging on the universal:

The language of the great founders of European liberalism – Condorcet, for example, or Helvétius – does not differ greatly in substance, or indeed in form, from the most characteristic moments in the speeches of Woodrow Wilson or Thomas Masaryk. European liberalism wears the appearance of a single coherent movement, little altered during almost three centuries ... In this movement there is in principle a rational answer to every question.³⁹

From different ends of the ideological spectrum, one may select Harold J. Laski and Friedrich Hayek as symptomatic of two modes of criticizing liberalism. In his 1936 book, Laski reflected the sustained attack on liberalism from the socialist left, as he berated liberalism from a Marxist perspective: ‘Liberalism ... has always refused to see how little meaning there is in freedom of contract when it is divorced from equality of bargaining power.’ Liberalism’s language of ‘the common well-being, the maintenance of order, the preservation of civilized life’ masked the ‘destruction of the liberal spirit’, while in effect pursuing profit-making.⁴⁰ As for Hayek, boxing from the other corner, his 1973 entry for the *Enciclopedia del Novecento* argued that Mill’s mature writings had already abandoned many principles and characteristics of liberalism. He contended that by the end of the nineteenth century, liberalism had thrown in the towel and surrendered to the social reform of the new liberalism – simply socialism in disguise. The entry tellingly begins with the statement: ‘The term [liberalism] is now used with a variety of meanings which have little in common beyond describing an openness to new ideas, including some which are directly opposed to those which are originally designated by it during the nineteenth and the earlier parts of the twentieth centuries’ – those original concepts having been liberty under the rule of law, with its concomitant idea of just procedures. From the late nineteenth century onwards, Hayek claimed that liberalism had entered into decline. Mill’s sympathy for ‘socialist aspirations’ began the transition towards a moderate socialism, and the welfare policies of the British Liberal government prior to the First World War (layer four of Freedén’s schema, see Chapter 11) prompted ‘new experiments in social policy which were only doubtfully compatible with the older liberal principles’.⁴¹ No wonder

that Hayek saw himself as a liberal suspended in time as he conspired to stall liberalism's conceptual history. However, the textual evidence of his writings points to his conservatism. The lesson here for conceptual history is that a concept cannot be evaluated without taking into account its cultural and ideological milieus. By failing to acknowledge the conceptual mutation that occurs beneath the surface of a word, its users will find that they are stranded on the shores of a fast-receding tide.

Towards the Politicization of a Term

To begin with, 'liberal' arose out of a culture of civility, of social norms that could be associated with those equipped either with the religious inclination or the financial means to show generosity to others. We find this semantic usage across most of Western Europe. For example, as Rui Ramos and Nuno Monteiro note in their chapter, an eighteenth-century Portuguese book already referred to 'liberality as a moderate virtue of the human affection of giving and receiving human riches' associated with nobility.⁴² Edmund Burke, too, wrote of a civilization he believed produced 'power gentle, and obedience liberal' and regarded it as the result of two principles: 'the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion'.⁴³ That, rather than the quasi-paternalistic attitude of toleration – which too has religious origins, as can be seen in the writings of John Locke, and is also related to later liberal tenets – seems to be the animating social etiquette that inspired a nonegocentric, nonmonadist view of human relationships from which liberalism could draw. In Germany, however, as Jörn Leonhard observes, 'liberal' indicated not a quasi-aristocratic and gentlemanly culture of manners and good bearing, but the possession of an ethical sensitized and enlightened mind.⁴⁴

It is of course possible to relate the liberality of a civil, polite society to its subsequently unfolding political and ideological connotations. Open-mindedness, the love of liberty, consideration for others and a sense of common interests, both cultural and economic, lay the ground for a distinctive political mindset, and controlled and regulated public conduct that incorporated a protective dimension into legal relationships, promoting some of the components of constitutionalism. These could then attract a disparate range of tenets and practices to give depth and breadth to the mutating and developing conceptualizations that thickened 'liberal' and later 'liberalism' in their journey towards political salience and status. The self-constraint, respect and unassailability required by 'natural rights', the social orderliness fortified by the assurances and predictability of a 'social contract', and the socioeconomic harmony underpinned by an 'invisible hand' were retrospectively assembled as showpieces of the liberal arsenal

that melded philosophical, legal and economic insights. To these should be added the political constraints of constitutionalism, the religious injunctions of tolerance, and the moral imperatives of responsible human and social development. All these were forged in spheres of thought that, notwithstanding a degree of interdependence, possessed their own logic. It follows that a historical–conceptual dynamic necessitates taking into account both the particular semantics of certain concepts as they relate to those specialized spheres, and the changes that took place in their broader social conditions and ‘extra-linguistic’ sociopolitical contexts.

Notably, while the older meaning of ‘liberal’ as generous or accommodating had received general and positive assent, its entry into the vocabulary of politics was accompanied by strong negative appraisals almost from the start, particularly through its rejection by conservatives, alarmed by its radical potential. Scholars disagree over when the terms ‘liberal’ and ‘liberalism’ became specifically political, the issue often being that of identifying liberalism as a party–political label or as demarcating an intellectual and ideological current or movement. That divergence is also evident in the different foci of some of the chapters in this volume, be they weighted more towards institutional political history or the history of political ideas. Spain may claim the earliest use of the noun, as Fernández-Sebastián maintains, while France may have seen the initial distinct politicization of the adjective ‘liberal’. Thus, Rosenblatt identifies the ‘*idées libérales*’ promoted by Napoleon in his attempt to secure the legacy of the French Revolution, while Leonhard tracks the dissemination of the phrase to Germany and Italy (‘*liberale Ideen*’, ‘*le idee liberali*’) following French imperial expansionism, where they took root in different national contexts.⁴⁵

By the late 1820s, the newer connotations of the word – whether derogatory, laudatory or plainly informative – had begun to spread across much of the continent with considerable rapidity over a short period. French liberal language was quickly adapted to German debates, in which French understandings of liberalism predominated, as Leonhard shows. In parallel, Fernández-Sebastián highlights the pronounced ideational activism of Spanish ‘*liberales*’ that saw their ideas traversing their national boundaries and creating early liberal offshoots in European capitals such as London and Paris. The conceptual trajectory of liberalism increasingly fluctuated between broad agreement on its principles and characteristics, a basic consensus on a thin framework (but little else) and strong and divisive contention over which attributes liberalism exhibited. Notably, the numerical preponderance of early assaults on liberalism contributed significantly to the circulation of the term in countries such as Spain and Britain. This again serves to remind us that liberalism is not a default ideational position of the human condition,

as some universalizing ethicists appear to hold, but an ideology crafted in a constant struggle with other creeds and *Weltanschauungen*, often besieged and on the defensive, and frequently reflecting a minority taste.

Word and Concept

A related problem is that many of the attributes of liberalisms long preceded the word that eventually included them. Purists among conceptual historians may have a case in contending that the history of the word ‘liberalism’ rules out the rather clumsily named notion of ‘proto’ liberalisms. But inasmuch as the concept ‘liberalism’ contains many interrelated concepts under its aegis – concepts such as liberty, tolerance and the rule of law – we ought at least to recall that their older history is inextricably intertwined with the story of liberalism itself. Conceptual histories need to stray occasionally from their chosen word in order to reflect the richness it accrues in constant dialogue and interaction with social and political ideas and language. It is therefore incumbent on historians to take note of instances where the absence or disuse of the word ‘liberalism’ is assumed to indicate the lack of the concept. John Stuart Mill employed the word ‘liberalism’ only exceptionally, and Benjamin Constant, as Rosenblatt observes, never did. The tendency to shrink the concept to the word is present both in historical discourses within the political and intellectual classes and constitutes a trend – though to a lesser degree – within the discipline of conceptual history itself. Three issues follow. First, the obverse of the retrospective construction of liberal narratives is the practice of many intellectual historians to trace liberal ideas back to a time when the word was unknown in political discourse. Rights, individualism, constitutionalism and private property often serve in such ‘ersatz’ roles, and they are co-opted, sometimes erroneously, to indicate milestones in a long and durable liberal trajectory. Second, that process is sometimes accompanied by a contemporary misrecognition of the contours and layers of liberal thinking: the strong similarities between French *solidarisme* and British left-liberalism in the late nineteenth century are a case in point, despite the prevailing exclusion of the former from the category of ‘liberal’ by French analysts and commentators. In Britain, ‘radical’ and ‘progressive’ frequently substituted for, or intersected with, ‘liberal’, and variants of social democracy have shared much of their conceptual content with liberalism – an overlap also notable in Sweden – even when it is politically inconvenient to draw attention to such conceptual overlaps. Third, as noted above, the rather crude references to a concept such as liberalism as if it constituted an integrated block or mass undervalue the subtle, intricately bound, mutating and often fragile liberalisms – the conceptions that cohabit or feud under the umbrella term.

Constitution, Individual, Social: Three Liberal Strands

From the outset, some time before liberalism became a more complex and multifaceted concept, it initially displayed two different strands. One commenced from a constitutional order that set boundaries and established proper spheres of sociopolitical conduct for governments and individuals alike. The other focused on the virtues of individuality: of personal freedom and growth as constitutive of both private and public wellbeing, rather than on self-centred individualism, and often with augmented democratic undertones that affirmed the worth of each and every person.

The early association of liberalism with a constitutional order is striking, which may account for its relative collocatory absence in British liberal languages, where constitutionality was considered to be given, unwritten and, indeed, not particular to a liberal order. Thus, in the Netherlands, as Henk te Velde observes, liberalism entailed constitutionalism and that preoccupation with order propelled it into a more conservative orbit, while in Portugal, liberalism demarcated the common terrain of liberals and conservatives under a constitutional monarchy and was linked to the Constitutional Charter of 1826. In Italy, a liberal constitutionalism, as Paolo Pombeni emphasizes, was propped up by the aura of authority and, indeed, power that the state claimed as it assimilated features of community under its wing. In Germany, the ‘Rechtsstaat’ epitomized the legal cognate of liberalism and its initial compatibility with constitutional monarchy: the prominence of the state could not be ignored in that national context, though liberalism became progressively susceptible to challenges from radical democrats.

Constitutionalism also entailed the civil rights enshrined in constitutions, but the broader liberal notion of human rights needs to be elaborated and parsed. In some European societies, Russia included, it referred more modestly to legal protection for individuals or, as in France, a protection that emphasized civil equality. In others – such as the United Kingdom – it expanded to include the development of individuality as a core liberal objective.⁴⁶ Ultimately, liberalism as a theory, or ideology, dedicated to pursuing the individual good in common with others, of opposing harm and preventable suffering, and of the public justification of its principles began to dominate in philosophical and legal circles more than in political ones.⁴⁷ Liberty became the means to fulfilment and self-expression, while torture and the death penalty eventually became red lines that liberals would not cross.⁴⁸

The uneasy and often tortuous relationship between liberalism and democracy is among the better-known aspects of nineteenth-century political thought. A reluctant coming to terms of the two concepts in countries such

as Spain and Britain slowly saw each propelled, at least in part, into the other's orbit, but the distrust of the newly empowered masses took a while to clear across much of Europe. In Britain, liberals had to overcome a fear of majoritarianism and of political mediocrity before they embraced political – and, later, social – reform. Democracy was often associated with Jacobinism in countries that had experienced the political and intellectual impact of the French Revolution. In Dutch liberal discourse, prior preferences for constitutionalism over democracy eventually made way for a hesitant liberal relationship with democratic progressivism. In Germany and France, the semantic antagonism between liberalism and democracy remained resilient for a long time. Though liberalism was initially aligned with democracy against monarchical proclivities, it was increasingly perceived as distant from democracy's radical social perspectives, while republican democracy was out of step with the constitutional and bourgeois identity of many liberals. A similar gap between liberalism and social democracy can be seen in Poland. In Sweden and Denmark, liberals emphasized parliamentary democracy and citizens' responsibility as against the far greater emphasis of the Social Democrats on industrial and economic democracy; yet, in Sweden in particular, effective forms of liberal social democracy were emerging by the twentieth century, as was the case in Britain. It was only well into the twentieth century that self-styled liberals and democrats ceased to circle each other warily, though in recent years new antagonisms have once again surfaced under the contentious banner of 'illiberal democracy'.

As the nineteenth century began to draw to a close, a third liberal strand became gradually more prominent: the incorporation of human sociability into liberalism in such a way that individuality and personal flourishing became partly dependent on state-directed social policies. These strands are notable in Britain, in Sweden (though not in Denmark, as Jussi Kurunmäki and Jeppe Nevers explain in their chapter), in Portugal and Spain,⁴⁹ and to some extent in Poland, where – as Maciej Janowski points out – a new social liberalism relying on state activity was mooted. In Sweden, liberalism accrued a reformist, politically radical and social democratic character before the Social Democrats secured a distinct identity. In Britain, the association of liberalism with the organic interdependence of free individuals was to be enabled by a state that was both benevolent and democratic. The promotion, in certain circumstances, of private alongside collectively held property partly replaced the earlier ethos of free trade and entrepreneurial individualism. It gave rise to the welfare state – a notably liberal achievement that placed British liberalism well towards the left of the political spectrum. In Denmark, however, as Kurunmäki and Nevers observe, liberalism was a once-rural, antiregulatory concept directed against state absolutism and located to the

right of the political spectrum. By contrast, the mid twentieth-century emergence of ‘Ordoliberalism’ in Germany envisaged a market economy presided over by the state.⁵⁰ In general, the positive or negative role ascribed to the state turned out to be one of the sharpest divisions in the European family of liberalisms, a theme central to Olga Malinova’s analysis of recent Russian liberalism.⁵¹ This division was superimposed on disjunctures between property and morality, or between an economic liberalism and a social or humanistic one.

Liberalism as a Doctrine

An intriguing question is the extent to which liberalism was perceived as a distinct political doctrine. One may well ask why Mill frequently referred to ‘socialism’ in his economic works and in his posthumous *Chapters on Socialism*, yet this eminent liberal thinker never produced an equivalent *Chapters on Liberalism* and did not label his own political theory as liberal. In British political discourse and in a culture where ideologies were fluid rather than sharply defined, liberalism was not considered to be a doctrine (except by some of its ideological opponents), but a far looser set of ideas and dispositions, not least because of the association of doctrine with a formally structured, even coded, set of principles, and its frequent emanation from above, be that party, state or church. The *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to ‘doctrine’ as ‘a body of instruction or teaching’, ‘That which is taught or laid down as true concerning a particular subject or department of knowledge, as religion, politics, science, etc.; a belief, theoretical opinion; a dogma, tenet’ and ‘A body or system of principles or tenets; a doctrinal or theoretical system’⁵² – none of which would have resonance with British liberal thinking.

By contrast, the collocation of ‘liberalism’ and ‘doctrine’ is familiar in some other European countries, occasionally for the very reason that would have been discredited in the United Kingdom. The ‘French Doctrinaires’ such as Guizot and Royer-Collard combined royalist respect for a constitutional monarchy with the association of liberty with abstract reason and truth, anchored in law. This prompted Mill to draw a telling juxtaposition: ‘in England few, except the very greatest thinkers, think systematically, or aim at connecting their scattered opinions into a consistent scheme of general principles’. Hence, ‘no person has been able to tell what Whiggery is, or what a Whig believes’. The Whigs – at the time the party of reform – ‘were united ... by a common spirit, and a general disposition to take similar views of most political questions as they arose, but not by any definite creed or profession of faith’. However, in France, ‘the Doctrinaires ... took the phrase “Whig principles” *au pied de la lettre* ... the Doctrinaires are the authors of the only

Whig *code* in existence'.⁵³ In the Netherlands too, Thorbecke was considered a doctrinaire due to his emphasis on the rigorous juridical and constitutional reorganization of the state. This ideology also achieved considerable success in Portugal and Spain. From the 1830s, doctrinaire liberalism was received with hostility by the radical admirers of the Constitution of 1812 (*liberales exaltados*) as a foreign conservative fashion, but it then took root strongly and became one of the most enduring and influential ideologies of modern Spain.⁵⁴

Another sense of doctrine also pervaded liberal economic discourses. In Portugal, although liberalism did not signify a specific doctrinal current, Ramos and Monteiro illustrate some initial attempts to see it as 'as a unified doctrine, based on ethical individualism and free trade economics'.⁵⁵ In Sweden, Kurunmäki and Nevers observe that the older 'laissez-faire' of liberal economics was regarded as a doctrine, and in France, the doctrines of the liberal economists were separately rejected as a 'theology of material interests', as Rosenblatt demonstrates.⁵⁶ Social issues were consigned to the margins of French liberalism and by the mid nineteenth century the label 'liberalism' had become increasingly contaminated, a process exacerbated later in the century as socialist concerns for social justice put French liberal reformism in the shade. Over a century later, in Russia, liberals were perceived as cultivating a doctrinal image by sidelining social needs in favour of economic ones.⁵⁷

Liberal Futures and Horizons

A further compelling theme is the conceptualization of futures enabled through liberal languages and – to invoke Reinhart Koselleck's own interests – the variable horizons of expectations they produce.⁵⁸ This can be investigated on a number of levels. The first level concerns theories of growth, improvement and progress. When liberalism is closely linked to a diverse and free individuality, as in the writings of W. von Humboldt and Mill in Germany and Britain respectively, it becomes a spiritual ideal, a vehicle of intellectual and spiritual maturation along the path to culture, or *Bildung*, and civilization. Among the Spanish intelligentsia and its press, an optimism relating to the universal march of liberalism shone through. Though often presented as 'open-ended' – a horizon that gently recedes as one approaches it – there is nonetheless a sense of entering an advanced stage of personal and, particularly, social development that has permeated the attitudes of liberals towards their own societies as well as towards colonies and non-Western societies, as if each nation were located on a single evolutionary trajectory. Inevitably, one could invoke Mill's famous – or notorious – plea to secure a

movement from barbarism to civilization by employing all expedient means in the ‘spirit of improvement’.⁵⁹ Concurrently, an ingrained reformism was perceived as the key to a steady liberal movement over time, although political upheavals instigated by liberals, whether ‘constitutional’ or ‘revolutionary’, were necessitated in order to unblock hindrances to such gradual progress when these persisted in conservative or reactionary societies.

The second level is the association of liberalism and modernization that also reflects a commitment to a path of development, but in a narrower institutional and technological sense. Especially in Eastern Europe, liberalism was entrusted with a rather different task: providing the ideological arguments and incentives that would enable nations such as Poland and Russia to be propelled as full and equal members into the company of economically and politically confident states. This was not merely a question of prosperity, and even less one of individual development, but of displaying the centralized apparatus of a well-ordered society. In Poland, as Janowski maintains, this aspiration charged the state with the duty to counter the country’s evident ‘backwardness’ by promoting legal reforms and public policy that would underpin economic growth and wealth as well as individual liberty. In Russia, as Malinova contends, liberalism was regarded as a ‘civilizational choice’, but in a more material sense than that imagined by Mill. Here the modernizing alternative was slanted towards ‘Westernism’ and against nationalism or Slavophilism, though it encountered strong national cultural resistance.⁶⁰

A third level concerns Koselleck’s ‘horizon of experience’, referring here in the main to its discursive and ideational dimensions. As liberalism gradually acquired new semantic layers over time, interpretations of the past were reformulated. Alongside changes in the standpoint from which, at any moment in time, liberals cast a historical/retrospective gaze on their own past, their accepted canon of authors was also altered. New names were added and granted greater or lesser significance, according to the liberal variant that a particular interpreter of liberalism felt obliged to defend in set circumstances at a given moment.

By the turn of the twentieth century, various salient liberal groups had been able, in spite of their discrepancies, to construct a canonical account with a considerable degree of consensus. A narrative had been woven by several authors, perfected in the interwar period, in the midst of a dramatic crisis of liberalism, and consolidated with some modifications in the second postwar period. This narrative, which identified the sources of liberalism in early European modernity, and even found its deepest roots in Greco-Roman antiquity, saw liberal democracy as the natural destination of a long historical process. And in that teleological vision, nineteenth-century liberalism appeared as a necessary, if inevitably flawed, imperfect stage towards the fully

fledged Western democracies of the twentieth century. Such interpretations, however, stripped the late eighteenth-century revolutions and the liberalisms of the central decades of the nineteenth century of their genuine historical substance, by understanding those revolutions, movements and ideologies as mere intermediate stations, as if they were but stages in a necessary transition from the Enlightenment to the model of parliamentary democracy triumphant in the West after the Second World War. In order to restore the historicity and substance of these processes, several chapters of this volume pay special attention to the nascent liberalisms in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Liberalism: The Differential Weighting of a Concept

Even when the term ‘liberalism’ became a regular fixture in the ideological and political firmament, it is more appropriate to regard its internal elements as possessing a Wittgensteinian ‘family resemblance’, as a fluctuating cluster of collocations and partner concepts. Notably, in that analogy, Wittgenstein explains that although every member will share some overlapping features with many or most other members, there still may be a few members who have very little in common with some others. Recently, this has markedly been the case with neoliberalism, which may share elements with a range of economic liberalisms, while being unable to correspond to constitutional or social liberalisms, or even to the ethical calling pursued by some nineteenth century free-traders. The European liberalisms that constitute the focus of this volume possess obvious similarities and greater affinity with each other than with neoliberalism, but additional refinement is necessary. There is a clear distinction between: first, the self-description of a polity as a liberal state or society; second, the centrality or marginality of liberalism in a given European society as a set of substantive ideas and practices; and, third, the relative weight of liberalism’s internal conceptual components in each instance. The conceptual history of liberalism is coloured by those factors that affect its variable paths.

On the first topic, Portugal, the Netherlands, Denmark and Britain offer different lessons. In Portugal, as Ramos and Monteiro note, liberalism attained hegemonic status in the mid 1830s, and all political groups claimed the label. In the Netherlands, as te Velde argues, the term ‘liberaliteit’, incorporating freedom and tolerance, had an accepted cultural connotation singling out a Dutch national identity, but liberalism as a political creed suffered from an association with bourgeois economic values, endowing it with a conservative tinge. Hence, when its progressive adherents attempted to enter the territory of social legislation, they were hampered by the label ‘liberal’. Indeed, as te

Velde notes, no one in the Netherlands has called liberal democracy ‘liberal’. In Denmark at the end of the nineteenth century, as Kurunmäki and Nevers maintain, the absence of liberal ideology itself meant that no one seriously claimed the term ‘liberal’. In Britain, according to Freeden, ‘liberal’ as an intellectual identifier of a political ideology and movement became far more acceptable, particularly in the half-century following Mill’s death. Liberal ideas and, to some extent, the liberal language of individual rights and personal liberty percolated beyond party divides both into conservative and social-democratic/Labour camps, but as a party name Liberalism had a more restricted life.

The location of liberalism on a European map of political languages as well as liberal principles is more complex. The radical, even utilitarian, roots of British liberalism coalesced with a historically ingrained narrative of individual human rights that defined the relationship between individual and state. There was little need to import such ideas from other European countries, though German ideas of *Bildung*, as informed personal flourishing, found ready ears in Britain.⁶¹ Austria-Hungary did not endow liberalism with public salience, but nonetheless displayed a brand of tolerance that revealed a liberalism focusing on coexistence in a pluralist social structure – something quite at odds with the unifying organic vision of the British new liberals. In Portugal, however, the terminological dominance of ‘liberalism’ as a common political label was generally acknowledged, and because Spain, as Fernández-Sebastián indicates, uniquely straddled Europe and the Hispanic world, liberalism accrued an unusually broad resonance as a political concept. Indeed, the spread of liberalism in intricate interchanges with other continents through colonial powers, not least in India, should not be forgotten.⁶² In Eastern Europe, recent variants emerged that add important nuances to the historical mutation of the concept of liberalism. The experience of living under totalitarian governments, pursuing an ostensibly socialist and collectivist vision, created a reaction to the statist and welfare functions with which the term ‘liberalism’ had been associated in some West European liberal varieties. The concept now marked a rift between the flight from the oppressive state and the rediscovery of liberty in civil society on the one hand, and the lure of the material benefits liberal markets seemed to hold out on the other.⁶³ In Russia, Malinova demonstrates that, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, ‘liberalism’ indicated not just the defence of private property and free enterprise – as it had periodically been understood throughout its European history – but an ideological project for building a civilized capitalism. In view of Russia’s previous Marxist ideology, this was a precious irony.

The cultural location of liberalism within a setting of religious beliefs and prescriptions is also vital to understanding its conceptual make-up.

Fillafer emphasizes the complexity of the Enlightenment's heritage in this regard, with Catholic liberals playing a part in mitigating a purely economic liberalism and imbuing it with moral import. This declined when rationalism, constitutionalism and popular sovereignty were extracted from the Enlightenment to become liberalism's hallmarks. In Italy, as Pombeni shows, Catholicism was all too often the foil against which liberals would contend, though Catholic thinking on the link between person and community significantly endorsed forms of pluralist democracy that liberals could accommodate. As a concept, liberalism was defined both through its negation by social Catholicism and by its susceptibility to socioreligious meanings on its ideological periphery. In Germany, Leonhard observes that Catholics increasingly associated liberalism with a strong anticlericalism. Indeed, as Rosenblatt remarks, French Catholic liberals resented those 'false liberals' who departed from the principle of nonintervention in religion through their exclusion of powerful Catholic orders.⁶⁴

As for the varying internal conceptual arrangements of liberalism itself, one example may suffice. The liberty element of liberalism was differentially connected to groups rather than only to individuals. We have already mentioned the organic interconnections among people that suffused a welfare-oriented liberalism. But there was also a strong vein of national liberty at the heart of some regional European liberalisms. It should be distinguished from the prenationalist communitarianism that was found either in its religious form – a Catholic community – or its jurisdictional corporate form, typical of the *ancien régime*, such as that occurring in Spain and Portugal in the context of their struggles against Napoleon in the early nineteenth century. Liberal nationalism was at the core of Mazzini's love of liberty and his advocacy of national self-determination that inspired the Risorgimento, as well as influencing Indian and Hispanic American debate.⁶⁵ As our purview moves eastwards, the nationalist connotations of liberalism become more pronounced. Under Habsburg rule, as Fillafer argues, the plurilingual patriotism of Czech and Hungarian national liberals countered Austro-German pressures to engineer a centralizing liberal nationalism, in each case appropriating rival interpretations of the Enlightenment. In Poland, tellingly, as Janowski maintains, personal liberty was not central to liberal discourse; rather, liberty was attached to ideas of ethnic national independence, a nationalism also stimulated by revolutionary Jacobin ideas.

There are also broader questions that, we submit, could serve as the focus of research. Has a perceived polarity between individual and society had a defining impact on what can be conceptualized as liberal? Are there Europe-specific cognates and clusters in whose 'force-fields' either 'liberal' or 'liberalism' can typically, or are more likely to, be found? How have variable colonial

histories influenced and shaped the moulding of European liberalisms? Can one identify, within the melange of European political thinking, loci and eras of liberal inventiveness and influence that possess either greater significance or more manifest marginality, or, indeed, challenge conventional wisdoms on the matter? Conversely, is liberalism the product of a deeply held sense of European (or regional-European) superiority? Many of those questions have been addressed only indirectly in the chapters assembled in this volume, but the plurality of approaches and the diversity of perspectives, periods and case studies attests to a new spirit of inquiry among the conceptual historians of Europe and, indeed, among the wider practitioners of conceptual history itself, as evidenced in the companion lead volume in this series.⁶⁶ We trust that this modest beginning will encourage others to explore these paths and to branch out into others.

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Notes

1. D. Bell, ‘What is Liberalism?’, *Political Theory* 42 (2014), 1–34; M. Freeden, *Liberalism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2015.
2. ‘Liberalismo’, *El Sensato* (Santiago de Compostela), 1 July 1813, 1553–59.

3. M. Freeden, 'The Morphological Analysis of Ideology', in M. Freeden, L.T. Sargent and M. Stears (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, Oxford, 2013, 115–37.
4. To date, the only substantially detailed comparative treatment has been that of J. Leonhard, *Liberalismus: Zur historischen Semantik eines europäischen Deutungsmusters*, Munich, 2001, but our volume extends the geographical space explored.
5. R.R. Palmer, *A History of the Modern World*, 4th edn, New York, 1971, 472.
6. H. Höpfl, 'Isms', *British Journal of Political Science* 13 (1983), 1–17; C. Cuttica, 'Isms and History', in J.D. Wright (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edn, 26 vols, Amsterdam, 2015, vol. 12, 289–93; J. Marjanen, 'Editorial: Ism Concepts in Science and Politics', *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, 13(1) (2018), v–ix; J. Kurunmäki and J. Marjanen, 'A Rhetorical View of Isms: An Introduction', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23(3) (2018), 241–55.
7. Kurunmäki and Marjanen, 'A Rhetorical View', 247.
8. J. Kurunmäki and J. Marjanen, 'Isms, Ideologies and Setting the Agenda for Public Debate', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23(3) (2018), 260.
9. Even if we leave aside the question of liberal Protestantism and Catholic liberalism, a religious imprint is present in liberalism in some cases well into the nineteenth century. Ramos and Monteiro report in Chapter 4 that in 1867, the Portuguese intellectual Alexandre Herculano still mentions 'the two opposing religions of absolutism and liberalism' and enumerates several 'liberal dogmas'.
10. Kurunmäki and Marjanen, 'A Rhetorical View', 243.
11. J. Donoso Cortés, *Obras*, 6 vols, ed. Gavino Tejado, Madrid, 1855, vol. 5, 177–84; G. Tejado, *El catolicismo liberal*, Madrid, 1875, 207f. Let us recall that in his 1864 encyclical *Quanta Cura*, followed by the *Syllabus* of 'the principal errors of our century', Pope Pius IX had unreservedly condemned liberalism and other modern 'isms', including socialism and communism.
12. Höpfl, 'Isms', 12.
13. Cuttica, 'Isms and History', 760f.
14. L. Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, New York, 1955. On the 'Americanization' of liberalism, see H. Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism from Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton, 2018, 245–64.
15. Most of the chapters of this volume contain more or less relevant samples of this type of universalist discourse. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the echoes of liberal universalism were still heard from time to time on both sides of the Atlantic – for example, in President Lincoln's voice in the midst of the American Civil War (Rosenblatt, *The Lost History*, 168–75).
16. Leonhard, *Liberalismus*.
17. 'The adjective expresses our fears, the noun, our hopes.' M. Walzer, 'On Negative Politics', in B. Yack (ed.), *Liberalism without Illusions: An Introduction to Judith Shklar's Political Thought*, Chicago, 1996, 22.
18. 'Sobre las ideas republicanas', *El Censor*, no. 37, Madrid, 14 April 1821, 77–80. In a series of articles on a new 'dictionary' of politics, the following tentative

- definition was included: ‘Liberal: The wise publicists applied this word to the one who promoted in society the principles of civil and political liberty, deduced from the natural rights of man’ (*Abeja Española*, no. 264, Cádiz, 2 June 1813, 18).
19. Thus, according to political essayist Juan de Olavarría, writing in 1820, ‘true liberalism consists in the constant tendency towards the perfection of governments’ according to ‘the progress of human reason’. J. de Olavarría, *Reflexiones a las Cortes y otros escritos políticos*, edited by C. Morange, Bilbao, 2007, 181, 222f. In many other places in Europe, we find similar ideas that tend to identify liberalism with progress and the advance of freedom. See Chapter 2.
 20. G. Matoré, *La méthode en lexicologie*, 2nd edn, Paris, 1973.
 21. As far as we know, based on data provided by some contributors to this volume and some complementary bibliographic research, the first book or pamphlet published in Spanish that meets this condition dates from 1814. The first in French is 1819, in Portuguese in 1822, in English, German and Dutch in 1823, and in Italian in 1832.
 22. See Chapter 7.
 23. J. Fernández-Sebastián, ‘Liberalismos nacientes en el Atlántico iberoamericano: “Liberal” como concepto y como identidad política, 1750–1850’, *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 45 (2008), 149–96, at 172.
 24. N. Foxlee, ‘Pivots and Levers: Political Rhetoric around *Capitalism* in Britain from the 1970s to the Present’, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 13(1) (2018), 78; C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver, Notre Dame, 1971, 411–59.
 25. See Chapter 1.
 26. See Chapter 1.
 27. J. Fernández-Sebastián, ‘Tradiciones electivas: Cambio, continuidad y ruptura en historia intelectual’, *Almanack* 7 (2014), 5–26.
 28. See Chapter 1.
 29. ‘Le système par lequel on a travaillé depuis trois siècles à remplacer le précédent est celui qui se fonde sur la liberté. C’est le *système libéral* proprement dit qui, conçu par la philosophie, appliqué ensuite à la réforme de l’Église et de l’État, a été étendu de nos jours à presque toutes les sphères de l’activité sociale.’ H. Ahrens, *Cours de Droit naturel ou de Philosophie du Droit*, Brussels, 1838, vol. 2, 340f. Translated by Michael Freeden.
 30. Quotation from Louis Blanc in the 1840s. See Rosenblatt, *The Lost History*, Chapter 5.
 31. M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*, Oxford, 1978.
 32. See Chapters 7, 6, 8 and 4 respectively.
 33. L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalismo*, Barcelona, 1927. Throughout the first third of the twentieth century, several essays on this subject appeared in Spain. In these works one can perceive the intense circulation of ideas in those years and the eagerness for the renewal of the European liberal left. Among these works are: A. Posada, ‘La noción de deber social’, *La Lectura* 1 (1901), 1–7; A. Posada, ‘Liberalismo y política social’ (‘Del viejo al nuevo liberalismo’ and ‘Las nuevas

- corrientes políticas'), *La Lectura* 1 (1913), 366–78; M. Almagro Sanmartín, *El nuevo liberalismo*, Madrid, 1910; and T. Elorrieta Artaza, *Liberalismo*, Madrid, 1926. See also M. Suárez Cortina, 'El liberalismo democrático en España: de la Restauración a la República', *Historia y Política* 17 (2007), 121–50.
34. R.G. Collingwood, 'Preface', in G. de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism*, Oxford, 1927, vii.
 35. De Ruggiero, *The History*, 347.
 36. See Chapter 9.
 37. B. Croce, *Politics and Morals*, London, 1946, 78–87.
 38. I. Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford, 1969, 161. See also Freeden, Chapter 11 in this volume.
 39. I. Berlin, *Four Essays*, 8.
 40. H.J. Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism*, London, 1962 [1936], 168, 171.
 41. F. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*, London, 1978, 119, 130, 141.
 42. See Chapter 4.
 43. E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, C.C. O'Brien (ed.), Harmondsworth, 1969, 173.
 44. See Chapter 2.
 45. See Chapters 5 and 2.
 46. See Chapters 10, 5 and 11.
 47. See e.g. G.F. Gaus, *Justificatory Liberalism*, Oxford, 1996.
 48. See e.g. M. Freeden, 'The Elusiveness of European (Anti-)liberalism', in D. Gosewinkel (ed.), *Anti-liberal Europe: A Neglected Story of Europeanization*, New York and Oxford, 2015, 333–44.
 49. M. Suárez Cortina, 'El liberalismo democrático en España: de la Restauración a la República', *Historia y Política* 17 (2007), 121–50.
 50. For a recent assessment, see e.g. T. Beck and H-H. Kotz (eds), *Ordoliberalism. A German Oddity?*, London, 2017.
 51. See Chapter 10.
 52. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, retrieved 17 February 2019.
 53. J.S. Mill, 'French News', *Examiner*, 21 October 1832, in A.P. Robson and J.M. Robson (eds), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 vols, Toronto and London, 1986, vol. 23, 513f.
 54. See Chapters 3 and 4. Republican opponents of the liberal-conservative system in force in Spain during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century (called by historians 'the Restoration'), referred to that regime disparagingly with the label 'doctrinaire monarchy.' L. Díez del Corral, *El liberalismo doctrinario*, Madrid, 1956.
 55. See Chapter 4.
 56. See Chapters 6 and 5.
 57. See Chapter 10.
 58. R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Cambridge, MA, 1985, 267–88.

59. J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, London, 1910, 73.
60. See Chapters 8 and 10.
61. See Chapter 11.
62. See e.g. R. Bajpai, *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India*, New Delhi, 2011.
63. M. Freeden, 'European Liberalisms: An Essay in Comparative Political Thought', *European Journal of Political Theory* 7 (2008), 9–30.
64. See Chapters 1, 9, 2 and 5.
65. C.A. Bayly and E.F. Biagini (eds), *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830–1920*, Oxford, 2008; S. Recchia and N. Urbinati (eds), *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations*, Princeton, 2009.
66. W. Steinmetz, M. Freeden and J. Fernández-Sebastián (eds), *Conceptual History in the European Space*, New York, 2017.

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