

Introduction

# Conceptual History

## Challenges, Conundrums, Complexities

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The purpose of this book is twofold. To begin with, it serves as the lead volume to an ambitious series of volumes on conceptual histories in Europe. But it also is an opportunity to reflect on the state of the art of conceptual history in a post-Koselleckian era. Does current conceptual history respect its founders and their intentions? What are its most prominent trends? On what is it still missing out? And how does it have to change when practised on a European scale?

The practice of conceptual history, like its subject matter, is simultaneously discontinuous and intra-referential, scattered and centripetal. In fact, over the past twenty years its study has been experiencing a rebirth. Its practitioners are multiplying; its investigations have spread across many languages and cultures – within Europe and beyond; its assumptions and contentions are becoming more nuanced; and it has entered into a fertile mutual give-and-take with neighbouring disciplines. Moreover, it has embraced the digital age: leafing through yellowing dictionaries has been (partly) replaced by recourse to searchable databases.<sup>1</sup> From being a somewhat esoteric venture within the domain of history it is fast becoming one of the most important avenues to studying not just intellectual history and political thought but a broad spectrum of discourses ranging from comparative religion, emotional lexicons and welfare state policies to the natural sciences and science and technology studies.<sup>2</sup> Before delving deeper into the opportunities offered and challenges posed by conceptual history, two basic questions need to be addressed: Why concepts? And why Europe?

Concepts can be seen as focal points of interpretation and understanding; as identifying regularities and differences in human discourse; as windows through which we can appreciate how comprehensions of the world

are organized and brought to bear on action; as milestones in the changing course of the evolution of knowledge; as constraints on the messiness of human thought and enablers of its transformation; and as rational and emotional containers of social logic and imagination. Their history is the history of all this and more, both on the micro-level of human interaction and on the macro-stage of national and international upheavals, revolutions, transactions and order.

The main body of work to which conceptual historians all over the world continue to refer is the volumes of Reinhart Koselleck's monumental *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.<sup>3</sup> These volumes cover in alphabetic order the social and political concepts in the German language in modern times. For Koselleck, basic concepts express what a discourse is talking about, and some concepts attain the status of 'inescapable, irreplaceable part[s] of the political and social vocabulary'.<sup>4</sup> One of Koselleck's main findings is that in the late modern era these concepts became more abstract and general, and also more future-oriented. Conceptual history traces the modifications occurring in the meanings of such concepts, always within a particular social and cultural context, and always in a state of potential contest with one another. It is, in his words, a 'record of how th[e] uses [of past conceptualizations] were subsequently maintained, altered or transformed'.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the method identifies the many layered meanings contained in the actual usages of a concept. Koselleck argued that concepts consist of aggregative meanings that are reflected in later usage, and this was expressed in the famous phrase the 'simultaneity of the non-simultaneous'. While Koselleck was more interested in long-term, diachronic change, the method is equally applicable to shorter time frames and to synchronic comparisons within one community of language users, or between languages.

There is already much debate and research on how to apply conceptual history and what it is that we are conceptualizing, but less on what the practice of conceptualizing concepts itself entails. We need to know what concepts can and cannot deliver, and how they convey information, as part of the discipline of conceptual history. The emphasis on conceptual change should not rule out a parallel emphasis on the performativity of concepts. That means, among others, looking at their intricate structure, at their illocutionary force, and at the emotional clothing in which they are articulated. It even means deducing concepts indirectly from non-textual evidence such as that provided by art, architecture, dance, photography, political emblems or body language.<sup>6</sup> And conceptual absences too demand their own investigation. These are only some of the complexities that make conceptual history so fascinating a topic, and they will be discussed in the present and the following volumes of our European book series.

But why Europe? This question immediately entails another, preliminary one: What is 'Europe' from a conceptual history point of view? Where do we consider the European conceptual space to end, given the fact that, since the onset of modernity, major European languages like Spanish, Portuguese, French, Russian and above all English have been spoken, and are still being used, as second or indeed first languages in many parts of the world? And how do we contend with the fact that European languages have been and continue to be in constant interchange with non-European ones? What is at stake here is the spatial scope of our project. Should we extend our view to the totality of linguistic contacts between speakers of European and non-European languages or, rather, restrict our inquiries to uses of concepts in the political communities which, together, make up the geographical province conventionally called Europe?

Without pretending that the two approaches may be as neatly separable from each other as this alternative suggests we have chosen the second option. Our main reason is a pragmatic one. Jumping immediately to the global level in a discipline that is just about to move beyond single-nation or single-language studies would be rash and could, possibly, overstrain the resources and network-building capacities of the editors and contributors to the book series. The decision to concentrate on conceptual histories in Europe, however, does not preclude looking at how those histories were affected by events happening outside Europe, by people migrating into Europe or by translations and conceptual transfers originating in non-European world regions. Non-European linguistic and extra-linguistic developments will thus have a legitimate place in our volumes in so far as they have had repercussions on European ones. Even with these restrictions in mind the task in front of us is ambitious enough.

Our venture of writing conceptual histories on a European scale fits well with similar projects underway for other world regions. The most advanced, and also the nearest from a cultural point of view, is the *Iberconceptos* project, which explores parallel and diverging uses of concepts in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking worlds on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>7</sup> Also far advanced are two competing South Korean projects on conceptual histories and transfers within the East Asian region and particularly between China, Korea and Japan.<sup>8</sup> More recently, similar attempts have been made to explore the histories of certain clusters of concepts or semantic fields in parts of Asia, the Middle East and Africa.<sup>9</sup> The introduction of Western concepts in the respective Asian and African languages during the colonial and postcolonial periods is an important, though never exclusive, research topic in those projects. Given the present state of research, choosing a world-regional rather than a global approach seems to be the appropriate step.

When we turn to Europe as one among several world regions we do not thereby wish to claim the existence of a European special path, let alone a European model. The assumption from which we start is that the mechanisms and patterns of conceptual change to be discovered in Europe will be as multiple and diverse as in any other world region. One might perhaps argue that since the Middle Ages the European conceptual universe, despite its diversity, has been more homogenous because of the common traditions of Greek, Latin and Judeo-Christian texts,<sup>10</sup> yet a similar point could easily be made with regard to, for instance, common traditions forming the base of the modern Chinese, Korean and Japanese conceptual worlds. Another argument in favour of European exceptionalism might be that a large number of basic concepts that nowadays serve to order our modern worldview – concepts like ‘politics’, ‘religion’, ‘science’, ‘law’ and ‘economy’ – happen to be of European origin. This, however, is the result of the contingent fact that, since the 1920s, English has acquired the status of a global *lingua franca*,<sup>11</sup> but it cannot be attributed to any supposed specific quality of European concepts themselves. In short, rather than searching for European exceptionalisms, we will treat Europe as just one interesting case among others from which one might learn more about how to approach transnational and, eventually, global conceptual history. We regard Europe as one of several provinces suitable for studying mechanisms and patterns of conceptual change – no more and no less.

The following paragraphs of this introduction, as well as the entire volume, address the main issues currently preoccupying conceptual historians working on European languages. As the lead volume to a new book series, it has no pretensions to offer an exhaustive panorama of European political and social concepts. Particular concepts such as liberalism, democracy and regionalism are merely mentioned here as brief case studies to illustrate certain controversies. More comprehensive studies on specific concepts and conceptual clusters will be the object of future volumes in the series.<sup>12</sup>

## The Times and Speeds of Conceptual Change

Understanding the historicity of temporal concepts like history and time, progress and decline, revolution and acceleration, synchronicity and repetition, contingency and crisis, experience and expectation, modernity and utopia was at the heart of Reinhart Koselleck’s interests when, together with Werner Conze and Otto Brunner, he launched the project of writing the history of German key concepts (*Grundbegriffe*).<sup>13</sup> While his co-editors, Conze and Brunner, were more concerned with past and present contests over the vocabularies of social classification, political institutions and constitutional theory, Koselleck saw conceptual history above all as laying the ground for a

theory of historical times. He devoted special articles to most of the temporal concepts mentioned, either in the lexicon *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* itself or in separate publications.<sup>14</sup> The title of Koselleck's first collection of essays, 'Futures Past' (*Vergangene Zukunft*), was a programmatic statement in this respect. Koselleck was convinced that notions of time, history and future had changed fundamentally in the course of human development, and especially so in the age of enlightenment, revolution and industrialization between the 1760s and the 1840s. In his view, those decades formed an epochal threshold which he designated as *Sattelzeit* (literally: saddle period), a strange metaphor which has ever since been used as a concept in historiography. The *Sattelzeit*, according to Koselleck, was the period in which our own conceptual universe emerged, in which European modernity came, so to speak, into its own by becoming self-reflexive in terms of being a new way of conceptualizing historical time (*Neuzeit*).

One of the processes that Koselleck saw at work during this transformation period, arguably the most important one, was what he called temporalization (*Verzeitlichung*). Concepts in discourse, he argued, now increasingly appeared as 'entimed' concepts – that is, as concepts that were associated either with a bygone past, a transient present or an ideal future. A common way in which temporalization occurred was to reimagine phenomena formerly thought of as static in the form of dynamic processes. The result was a great number of 'movement concepts' (*Bewegungsbegriffe*). In French and, by extension, in many other European languages movement concepts could be created simply by adding the suffix '-ization' to a known term. 'Democracy' thus became 'democratization'; it was no longer assumed to be a fixed constitutional form, but a supposedly ongoing process or even a task ahead. Another way in which movement concepts could emerge, very prominent in the German context, was the creative use of metaphors. Many key concepts that expressed the new, linear vision of history originally had strong metaphorical resonances. Some of them, notably *Fortschritt* (progress), *Aufklärung* (enlightenment) and *Entwicklung* (development or evolution; literally: unfolding), already implied a movement directed towards an open, potentially better future; others, like *Revolution* (revolution), *Krise* (crisis) and *Geschichte* (history; literally: superimposed layers) had originally referred to circular or recurrent natural phenomena, but their conceptual meaning was reoriented towards a linear vision of time.

Debates have been going on among historians, literary scholars and political theorists about whether Koselleck's findings on the *Sattelzeit* can be generalized with regard to other parts of Europe or whether they should be considered a German peculiarity. How we answer this question is important for our European conceptual history project as it touches upon the issue of periodization, which is discussed more extensively by Willibald Steinmetz in Chapter

2.<sup>15</sup> Without going into details here, we may find a variety of answers. There are some scholars who doubt the validity of the *Sattelzeit* hypothesis even for Germany itself. They have discovered that certain conceptual innovations happened much earlier, or query the limited social significance of Koselleck's source materials, or point to the fact that many political, economic and scientific concepts only became contested much later, in the decades around 1900 rather than around 1800.<sup>16</sup> Other critics argue on a European scale and reject the idea of a pan-European *Sattelzeit* to be dated precisely at that period. These comparativists argue that accelerated conceptual changes along the lines described by Koselleck can be observed earlier in some parts of Europe, and later in others.<sup>17</sup> With a view to Europe, then, these critics tend to dissolve Koselleck's hypothesis of the *Sattelzeit* and replace it with a vision of a Europe at different times and speeds – a formula that is often used in debates on European integration but may profitably be applied, as Helge Jordheim demonstrates in Chapter 1, to understand the complex synchronicities and asynchronicities of conceptual change in Europe.<sup>18</sup>

While the latter vision still relies on the background assumption that conceptual innovation in Europe, although discontinuous and stretching over centuries, by and large followed a similar direction, a third line of criticism, only tentatively raised so far, would be to argue that circumstances in European countries differed so widely that it would be misleading to presuppose a common developmental path. For us this is an open question. What we may safely assume is that temporalization, politicization, ideologization and democratization of concepts are certainly not the only modalities of conceptual change worth exploring in a European context. Alternative modalities might be rupture, replacement and distortion. Another mode of conceptual change, prevalent especially in Europe's peripheral regions and in countries ruled by foreigners, may be termed the 'nationalizing' or 'ethnicizing' of sociopolitical language. In such instances local elites might follow an agenda of cultural rejuvenation or nation-state building, consciously rejecting the foreign (Western), and inventing instead an array of indigenous social or political concepts. The Slavophiles in Russia would be a case in point. Such attempts at 'nationalizing' (or 'ethnicizing') sociopolitical language should be looked at more closely in a European conceptual history project. The increasing degree of scientization of sociopolitical language in the later twentieth century would be another. In the event, the conceptual histories discussed in our book series will be no simple replicas of already existing Western or German models, but will present a much greater variety of paths and speeds of conceptual innovation.

An additional reason why we anticipate a wide variety of paths, compared to existing conceptual history projects, is the extension of our temporal focus:

towards the early modern period and the Middle Ages on the one hand, and towards the twentieth and twenty-first centuries on the other. For instance, it is a widely underexplored question how sociopolitical concepts derived from Latin (or Greek) linguistic roots were introduced, redefined and stabilized (or rejected) in the European vernaculars.<sup>19</sup> Is it possible to identify one or just a handful of typical patterns in this process of ‘vernacularization’? Or are there as many different paths in Europe as there are languages or even individual concepts? Similar questions may be raised, and have hardly been touched upon in research so far, with regard to the ongoing twentieth- and twenty-first-century processes of scientization, anglicization and globalization of ever-larger parts of diverse professional languages. Can we observe a limited number of patterns here? And what are the repercussions of these changes in professional languages for the use of vocabularies in ordinary public and private communication?

The anglicization and globalization of our contemporary conceptual space is driven not only by professional discourses but even more through the languages of popular culture, of the entertainment industries and of new communicative practices such as blogging and Facebook. These languages percolate into everyday usage and eventually produce new concepts. The ‘selfie’ as a new vision and technology of the self may be a case in point. Yet how precisely, and why, some of these concepts, mostly created according to English morphological and phonetic rules, become widely used while others remain ephemeral and limited in use to certain groups or communities, is largely unexplored. And so is the question whether the newly created English words are actually understood in the same way when used in the context of non-English languages.

We can be certain, therefore, that even the most recent developments of conceptual innovation, although apparently expressed in terms of one language (English), are not happening in a synchronized way. As in earlier periods of European history, every concept will continue to have its own temporal structure, within each language and between the European languages. Superficial simultaneity of use may conceal a multiplicity of allusions to past experiences and future expectations. Any vision of a one-size-fits-all periodization to contend with Europe’s historic and present asynchronicities and different speeds of conceptual change is doomed to failure.

### **The Spatial Dimension: Nations and Regions, Centres and Peripheries**

Closely connected to the issue of different times and speeds of conceptual change is the question of how we divide Europe into spaces – analytically and

historically. The present volume examines this problem from various angles. In Chapter 5, on the pitfalls of methodological nationalism, Jani Marjanen discusses the reasons why nation states have long ceased to be the only relevant spatial framework for the writing of conceptual histories. While stressing the need to look at translations and conceptual transfers, he does not go as far as claiming that nation states have become irrelevant.<sup>20</sup> Assuming, as we do in our book series, a long-term historical perspective from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century, we are well advised to conceive of Europe as a permanently mutable assemblage of differently shaped political, cultural and linguistic units. Each of these may serve as a focal point for conceptual history studies. Nation states are but one possible form within this assemblage – an important one, but historically speaking an exceptional one. For even during the short period of extreme nationalism between the late nineteenth and the mid twentieth centuries the ideal of the nationalists – namely, the perfect territorial overlap between political ‘decision space’, ethno-cultural ‘identity space’ and linguistic space – was nowhere fully realized.<sup>21</sup> Sub-national and supra-national regions of various size and shape, from small historic landscapes up to the European Union, will therefore figure as prominently in our book series as nation states.

As we have learned to de-essentialize nations, so we should also denaturalize regions. Both – nations and regions – are social products, and the same holds true for their names. In Chapter 8, Diana Mishkova and Balász Trencsényi remind us that applying the toolkit of conceptual history to explore the historical practice of giving names to nations and regions is perhaps the best antidote we have against falling into the trap of essentializing the spatial units of our research.<sup>22</sup> How the meanings of names such as ‘the Balkans’ or the ‘Nordic countries’ changed over time, by whom, when and why they were politicized, how they became associated with political ideologies (‘the Nordic model’), and generally how they were disputed among various groups of agents – academics, politicians, intellectuals, journalists, authors of school-books, international organizations – are questions that need to be addressed more thoroughly if conceptual history turns European. There is a promising new field of research opening up here which includes not only the names of specific spatial units (*Mitteleuropa*, the Mediterranean, Scandinavia, the West,<sup>23</sup> the Eastern bloc and so on), but also the abstract terminology used to organize or classify geographical/political spaces: terms such as ‘region’, ‘country’, ‘territory’, ‘land’, ‘city’, ‘empire’, ‘colony’, ‘province’, ‘centre’, ‘periphery’, ‘zone’, ‘border’, ‘frontier’, ‘international community’, and of course also ‘nation’ and ‘nation state’.<sup>24</sup>

The field is all the more interesting as it offers excellent opportunities to integrate the study of visual images and symbolic representations in the

practice of conceptual history. We need only think of (gendered) figures like Britannia, Germania, Marianne, or the Russian bear, and the ‘family romances’ (Lynn Hunt) told around them, to realize the field’s potential.<sup>25</sup> Names of regions and nations, and the figures symbolizing them, were disputed in language as well as in images, even in music and sounds; they were put on stage, visualized in monuments and the layout of cities, drawn in maps and schoolbooks, displayed in museums, and represented in the architecture of royal palaces and parliamentary buildings. These names and symbols were not just harmless décor, but functioned as emotionally charged political concepts in situations of conflict. This applies to names of nation states as well as to denominations of supra-national or sub-national regions like ‘South Eastern Europe’, ‘the Celtic fringe’, ‘Catalonia’ and ‘Transylvania’. Even today such names take hold of peoples’ minds because they serve to draw boundaries, create identities, or exclude unwanted strangers. For this reason they rarely appear alone, but more often in quasi-personalized form: as pairs or groups opposing each other, forming alliances, moving in the same direction or drifting apart.

As well as being identified by names or symbolic figures, spatial units may be conceptualized metaphorically with regard to their *modus operandi*: as melting pots, transit zones, frontiers, federations, empires or national ‘containers’. European history provides examples for all of these, and many more, forms of conceptualizing communication within and between political spaces. Again, the concepts (and metaphors) mentioned had very tangible consequences. On the one hand they informed the ways in which rulers, administrators and statisticians organized territories, constructed institutions, and categorized people; on the other hand the governmental and administrative practices often provoked popular or elitist reactions relying on opposite notions.<sup>26</sup> Studying competing notions of ordering spaces and grouping people is a rewarding task for conceptual historians. In Chapter 9, on Central and Eastern Europe, Victor Neumann provides telling examples showing how, and why, the contests were particularly sharp in regions where stable nation states only asserted themselves by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>27</sup> In these regions, Neumann explains, new visions of ethno-linguistic homogeneity, derived mostly from German intellectuals (Herder), destroyed the benevolent respect for plurilingualism, multiculturalism and multiconfessionalism, which until the mid-nineteenth century had characterized political interactions in the Habsburg monarchy, and to a lesser extent even in the Ottoman and Russian empires.<sup>28</sup> Languages themselves became a dividing issue in the process of hardening ethno-nationalist attitudes; German for instance changed its role from being a meta-language of intra-imperial communication to just one particularist language among

others. The language dispute was carried to an extreme in the imperial parliament for the Austrian (Cisleithanian) part of the monarchy: by the 1900s, decision making there was almost brought to a standstill by nationalist parties insisting on using only their own languages in the absence of a translation service. By that time the assumption of the Austrian Germans that their language should be the universal language in the empire had lost all credibility.<sup>29</sup>

The disruption of political communication in the Austrian parliament may serve as a drastic illustration for a problem discussed in more general terms by Henrik Stenius. In his chapter on concepts in a Nordic periphery he posits it as a rule, valid at least for the formative period of modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that speakers of 'central' European languages (French, English, German) tended to use their own concepts as if they were universally valid. Whether these speakers did so consciously (out of arrogance) or unconsciously (out of ignorance) mattered little to the speakers of 'peripheral' languages who in any case, Stenius argues, found themselves in the awkward position of being forced to react. Their reaction would usually take one of two courses: faced with the allegedly universal concepts transmitted from the centres, speakers of peripheral languages could either accept the claims to universality and redefine their own concepts accordingly (for instance by appropriating foreign terms), or they could denounce these claims as nothing but a concealed particularism and, in turn, defend their own parochial concepts against them. As Henrik Stenius explains in Chapter 10, actors in the peripheries were thus constantly 'forced to navigate between universalisms and particularities'.<sup>30</sup> In theory, there existed a third option which would have been to create a meta-language enabling both groups of speakers to find a balance between local contextualizations of key concepts and claims to universality in their respective languages. In practice, however, this was hard to realize, and it may therefore be difficult to find examples for it in modern European history.

Henrik Stenius's core-periphery hypothesis raises several follow-up problems that need to be investigated empirically. First of all it seems reasonable to assume that no country or region, however remote geographically, is *essentially* peripheral, and nor is any language. 'Core' and 'periphery' are terms that describe a non-reciprocal relationship, and it is evident that such relationships are always shifting. What we, as conceptual historians, define as 'core' and 'periphery' depends on the subject areas discussed, on the historical period of course, and on the perspectives taken by the researchers and the historical agents themselves. From the standpoint of a member of the Republic of Letters in late eighteenth-century Paris, the Russian Empire of Catherine II might well have been viewed as peripheral, yet when it came

to measuring political power and military strength it was anything else but peripheral, even from a Parisian perspective.

With respect to languages, though, one might argue that native speakers of small languages like Finnish, Latvian or Basque encounter a greater probability of finding themselves in the ‘peripheral’ position described by Stenius than native speakers of widely used languages like French or German in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and English in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Widely used languages may be described as occupying the ‘centre’ in the sense that their speakers often feel no need to learn small languages (or sometimes any foreign languages at all) and hence need not care about alternative conceptual universes that the smaller languages may contain. Speakers of small languages, on the other hand, are forced to translate more often. They frequently compare their own autochthonous concepts with the foreign ones, and especially so if they aspire to make their own language capable of expressing their political and cultural identity, as was the case with most intellectuals and politicians during the nation-building processes going on in eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe.

The mere size of a speaker community, however, is no guarantee that a language occupies a ‘central’ position in the sense described. The Russian language in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a pertinent example. Its spread beyond the imperial borders was limited; Russian concepts rarely posed a challenge for speakers of Western languages to revise their own conceptual apparatus. The Russian elites themselves spoke French when they addressed other Europeans. Much more important than size was, and is, the cultural prestige of a language. It is above all that prestige that stimulates foreigners to learn a language and contend with its conceptual universe. On what factors the cultural prestige is founded, when and why languages acquire or lose it, how far the political, economic or military power of the peoples (or rulers) speaking the language enhance or diminish it: these are all questions only to be answered empirically on a case-by-case basis. For our European conceptual history project they are worth studying.

No less important are questions related to the conceptual innovations happening in the ‘peripheral’ languages. Again, we need to investigate the specific historical conditions for each particular case to ascertain why certain foreign concepts were eagerly accepted as new and meaningful terms, why others were engrafted on existing autochthonous terms and, finally, why some foreign concepts were rejected or simply ignored. The Nordic examples discussed by Stenius point to such specific conditions as explanatory factors, for example when he shows that the sense of strong conformity brought about by the coincidence of political space and (Lutheran) church left little room in the Nordic countries for using concepts like ‘opposition’ or ‘party’ as positive

self-descriptions. By contrast, it would be interesting to know whether the same concepts met a different fate when introduced in the multiconfessional and multiethnic environments prevailing in large parts of the Habsburg Empire. It is through genuine comparisons like these that we may ultimately be able to write European conceptual histories that are more significant than conventional 'national' histories of key terms put side by side in the form of a lexicon.

## **Multilinguality and Translation**

Anyone who starts practising conceptual history beyond the boundaries of one single language, usually his or her own, will soon realize that the model of homogenous, self-sufficient national languages is more of a myth (rationalist or romantic) than an adequate description of past and present reality. This is most obvious for the so-called peripheral countries, especially in the period before the growth of modern nation states. The coexistence of overlapping linguistic communities was a normal fact of life for those living in the more remote borderlands of Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, but also in the fringe zones of Western and Northern Europe like the Basque country, the Gaelic-speaking parts of the British Isles, and Lapland. Even today, speakers in these areas often grow up with more than one 'native' language and are able to switch between them depending on where they are and what situations they are in: whether, for example, at home, or in school, a market place, a church, or even a police station.

Note how Elias Canetti, Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1981, describes his early childhood in Ruschuk, a small Bulgarian town on the River Danube's border with Romania, still officially belonging to the Ottoman Empire when Canetti was born in 1905. On any day, he writes, 'you could hear seven or eight languages'. He was a descendant of a family of Sephardic Jews, so the first children's songs he heard were in Spanish, but interspersed with a few Turkish words; his wet nurse was Romanian, the servants of the family Bulgarian, Circassian or Armenian, but there were also Ashkenazy Jews, Greeks, Russians, Albanians and Gypsies in the town.<sup>31</sup> With each other Elias's parents spoke German, a language he was not allowed to understand, but tried to learn secretly on his own, 'like a magic formula'.<sup>32</sup> With the children and relatives they spoke Ladino, 'the true vernacular, albeit an ancient Spanish. ... The peasant girls at home knew only Bulgarian'; so he learnt it with them, forgetting it later only to remember the early events of his childhood in German: 'I don't know at what point in time, on what occasion, this or that translated itself. ... It is not like the literary translation of a book from one language to another, it is a translation that happened of its own accord in

my unconscious'.<sup>33</sup> For 'peripheral' Europeans like the young Elias Canetti, switching between languages and the necessity to translate were daily experiences. They were common to all social groups and strata, not just ethnic minorities and the learned elites: 'Each person counted up the languages he knew; it was important to master several, [as] knowing them could save one's own life or the lives of other people'.<sup>34</sup>

The necessity of switching between languages was never limited to the European peripheries. It was no less imperative in the 'core' regions of Europe, notably in the most densely populated cities and along major traffic routes. Cultural historian Peter Burke has vividly described how, from the Middle Ages on, the inhabitants of sea ports like Naples, Cadiz, Bordeaux and Antwerp – ordinary people like merchants, dock workers, cart drivers and keepers of boarding houses – had to be conversant in more than one language.<sup>35</sup> No less polyglot were the seamen on the ships, travelling journeymen, officers and soldiers, or young cavaliers on their *tour d'Europe*. Similarly, students and professors in university towns like Heidelberg, Padua, Leiden, Oxford and Krakow had to write and dispute in Latin while at the same time being able to negotiate with local landladies and shopkeepers in one or several vernaculars. The same was true for lawyers, state counsellors, diplomats, clergymen and the juridically trained clerks in the more important cities. The superimposition of languages went furthest, of course, in the late medieval and early modern European metropolises: Paris, London, Amsterdam and, later on, Vienna and St Petersburg. In all those places multilinguality and translation were ubiquitous.

When doing conceptual history on a European scale we should therefore assume that functional and situational multilinguality was the rule, not an exception, in most European regions for most of the time. This is a fact that has rarely been considered systematically in existing 'national' conceptual history projects. Moreover, we should keep in mind that, far into the early modern period and sometimes beyond, people often mixed fragments of several languages in ordinary communication. This resulted in hybrid languages not easily classifiable by later standards. In general, European vernacular languages were less homogenous, their boundaries more porous, and hence the meanings of terms generally more fluid, even in the most elaborated texts of political theory. Only in later times were national standards imposed and linguistic usages 'purified', either by the state and its academies, as in Richelieu's France, or by independent poets, philologists and intellectuals, as in most other European countries.<sup>36</sup> Latin itself was only restored to a supposed 'classical' norm through the efforts of the Renaissance humanists, thus at a time when Latin had already begun to lose its position as the *lingua franca* of the European elites, except in the universities and the Catholic Church.

Our modern national languages, but also the ‘classical’ ancient languages, only emerged out of the various standardizing and purifying movements driven in turn by sixteenth century humanists, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century state-builders, lexicographers and poets, and nineteenth-century romantic nationalists. It is only by means of their language-political activities that the meanings of terms and the semantic relations between them became more stable and ‘national’ languages on the whole more homogenous and more clearly separated from each other. In many European countries this process stretched over several centuries, in others it was condensed in shorter periods, but in general it started somewhere in the sixteenth century and came to a close towards the late nineteenth century. Conceptual historians working on one language have so far preferred to concentrate on the periods that followed the linguistic homogenization processes, and we may assume that this is no accident since conceptual histories in the form of lexicons like the German *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* or the Spanish *Diccionario*<sup>37</sup> require a certain degree of (at least temporarily) stable, and hence recognizable, relations between terms and concepts.

We should not forget, however, that even during and after the stabilization of national languages, and even in the most consolidated nation states like France, the correct use of linguistic standards was often limited to written and verbal exchanges in public institutions such as schools, theatres, town halls, courts of law, and parliaments. Below that official level, dialects, patois, and hybrid languages continued to be spoken. Furthermore, functional multilinguality and the need to translate on a day-to-day basis gained a renewed importance through the growing numbers of migrating workers crossing borders within Europe during industrialization, or immigrating into Europe from the overseas colonies (or ex-colonies) in later times.

If there was a period in which, despite ongoing migration, linguistic homogeneity within European national borders was greatest, it may have been during the short era of extreme nationalism between the two world wars. Since the postwar years, however, with prosperity returning and transnational connections increasing on all levels – economic, political and cultural – we are witnessing almost a kind of rapprochement to the late medieval and early modern situation. Overlapping linguistic communities and continuous hybridization of languages are now as omnipresent as then, with the important difference that a dozen or more varieties of English, instead of Latin or French, are now functioning as a default language not only in Europe, but all over the world.<sup>38</sup>

There are plenty of opportunities in our everyday lives that allow us to get an insight into how far the mixing of languages can go today. Take the example of a young German student of Turkish descent speaking on her mobile

phone in a bus on its way to the local university. Listening to her can be a fascinating experience. In her talk, bits of Turkish alternate with passages in German, both interspersed by occasional Anglicisms, and all that happens even within single sentences. Obviously, the young woman feels no need to translate. The words pour out of her in an almost natural flow, and one can only guess that she mixes her languages habitually, depending on the subject matter being addressed: job- or university-related issues are discussed in German, family problems in Turkish, leisure activities or love affairs in a curious mixture of both.<sup>39</sup> It remains to be seen whether, and how, such a linguistic formation of everyday experience, which is by no means exceptional, will shape the use-value and semantic stability of the more abstract sociopolitical, moral or scientific terms in which conceptual historians are often interested. We have good reasons to assume that some of these terms – those referring to work, feelings or family, for example – will be affected considerably, possibly by way of a multiplication of terms or an enrichment of meanings, while others – the vocabularies referring to high politics or legal, economic and scientific matters – are more likely to remain unaffected, at least by this kind of everyday communication.

There exists another level of communication, however, at which precisely the expert vocabularies of sociopolitical, legal, economic and scientific affairs will be noticeably affected: the level of European and international institutions. Organizations like UNESCO and the OECD, the European bureaucracies in Brussels, the European Research Council, the European courts of law, the European Central Bank and especially the European Parliament provide an interesting, only recently discovered experimental ground for the study of the practical functioning, or mal-functioning, of multilinguality.<sup>40</sup> Here, the need to translate, in this case abstract legal, economic, scientific and sociopolitical terms, constitutes a permanent challenge. It is felt more acutely by non-native English speakers, but it is by no means unknown to native English speakers. There is a danger of being misled here by the apparent display of linguistic uniformity that is produced through the common use of English terms in international organizations. In fact, the superficial uniformity of *terms* may often hide a plurality of different national *concepts* that will resurface as soon as it comes to interpreting what the participants actually meant while negotiating or consenting to a document in English. Our linguistically eclectic German-Turkish student, and the European institutions as arenas of multilingual negotiation and translation, are only two – contemporary – examples of new research fields that are opened up when conceptual history takes a transnational – in our case, European – turn. Many more examples from contemporary as well as earlier periods in history could be imagined.

Empirical studies on multilingual situations and translation activities are not just fascinating topics in their own right. For conceptual historians they offer a chance to find additional, or better, explanations for the ways in which conceptual innovation functions. László Kontler, in Chapter 7, discusses plenty of examples and critically reviews academic literature on how acts of translation have brought about shifts in meaning.<sup>41</sup> Most studies so far have focused on the receiving end of the translation process, the target culture. Considering the translators' agency, however, should, Kontler insists, go further than this. Translations operate in two directions: they not only introduce innovations into the conceptual universe of a target culture, but their omissions and redescriptions may also highlight peculiarities of the culture of the 'original' text.

Apart from professional translations, contacts between languages generally are an extremely powerful trigger for semantic change. How, exactly, this happens may be described schematically. The process usually starts with foreign words, or strange-looking signs, coming up more or less contingently in written or oral communication. The mere presence of such 'alien' words and signs functions as an irritant in one's own language. Readers and listeners will try to make sense of the alien expressions by finding equivalent words (and signs) in their own language; if purposely extended to entire texts, this becomes translation in the professional sense. But speakers or writers will also use the opportunity, consciously or unconsciously, to 'play' with the foreign terms while their meaning is still unclear. In that case, the foreign words may serve as a stimulus to rearrange, and enrich, semantic fields in one's own language. Douglas Howland calls this process a 'translingual act of transcoding cultural material'.<sup>42</sup> This rearrangement can take different forms. For instance, introducing a foreign word may lead to a 'split' of an original native concept into two: one a negatively connoted concept, now denoted by the foreign term, and the other a positively connoted concept, denoted by the original native term. Such processes of semantic rearrangement by means of irritants derived from another language may be regarded as a translation process in a wider sense, but – as Kontler makes clear – it is recommendable to distinguish the two modes of linguistic contact and their effects; it may be more apposite to call the latter process 'conceptual transfer'. Translation in the professional sense aims at rendering the meaning of foreign terms as faithfully as possible, whereas conceptual transfer in the sense just described is an appropriation of foreign words that may change semantic relations (for example value hierarchies) among concepts in one's own language.

Both kinds of translation studies are highly useful for conceptual historians. The first, more conventional kind of studies looks at historical acts of translation that are explicitly marked as such. Starting points for such

inquiries are usually entries in bilingual dictionaries and translations of literary texts or classical works of political theory.<sup>43</sup> These translations may then be interpreted as indicators of semantic congruence or incongruence, and in diachronic perspective as indicators of convergence or divergence, between certain semantic fields in two or more languages at a given time.<sup>44</sup> The second kind of studies looks at transfers of terms between languages. These transfers should then be interpreted as *factors* of conceptual innovation in both the receiving language and the 'original' language.<sup>45</sup> The focus is on the acts of appropriating or redescribing terms, and conceptual historians should read these acts as 'moves' in argumentative games as understood by Quentin Skinner and Kari Palonen.<sup>46</sup> Any kind of text containing lexical items of foreign origin can serve as source material for this kind of inquiry. In practice, historical translation studies often combine both perspectives, and both should have their place in future European conceptual histories. Moreover, as Reinhart Koselleck remarked, even the writing of conceptual histories within one language alone can be seen as a specific form of translation, in this case an attempt to recall into memory and make comprehensible meanings that have been lost over time.<sup>47</sup> Very often, this will require demonstrating in present-day language that no concept remotely equivalent to the modern one with which we are familiar existed, and that the semantic field referring to comparable phenomena or problems was structured in a completely different way.

Finally, a word of caution should be added: reframing, (mis)translation, contestation, and diverse forms of reception have become the nodes around which the study of conceptual history has been increasingly revolving. But it would be wrong to take this too far and to underplay the similarities and conjunctions displayed in human thought. The very act of translation entails an assumption of similarity and of the value of cross-fertilizing cultures with a particular take on knowledge. A concept still remains a marker for a shared specificity and a claim, even when exaggerated, for uniqueness. To be mired in a culture of diversity and fragmentation tells only one story; the other is that of identifying commonalities of the human condition. Both can lead to scholarly extremes; fortunately, that is not evident in the current trajectory of conceptual history studies.

### **Comparisons: An Outdated Approach?**

The unquestionable relevance of cultural transfers, translations and entanglements in modern European (and global) history has induced some scholars, mostly historians, to argue that comparisons between nations, language communities or indeed any other supposed collective entities are not only fraught

with difficulties, but should be deemed an improper approach altogether.<sup>48</sup> The allegation of the critics is that practitioners of comparisons all too readily take the unity of the units they compare as granted and tend to essentialize them. The comparers ignore, it is said, how malleable the supposed units of comparison actually are because of the incessant contacts between them.<sup>49</sup> For brevity's sake one may label this kind of unsound comparison 'methodological nationalism', although nation states are only one of many possible entities that may be falsely essentialized. Another reproach is that comparative scholars all too often use the norms, values and concepts of their own culture as a universal yardstick against which they measure the comparative progressiveness or backwardness of other cultures. Historically, this kind of misguided comparison has mainly appeared in the form of 'Eurocentrism' or Western progressivism, although in principle it can also occur elsewhere. Conceptual historians may also be tempted to apply progressivist comparisons to earlier stages in their *own* nation's development. This is what Denis Diderot had in mind when he wrote in the entry 'Encyclopédie' in his and d'Alemberts great work of the same name that '*sur la seule comparaison du vocabulaire d'une nation en différens temps, on se formeroit une idée de ses progrès*'.<sup>50</sup> From Diderot's statement it is only a short step to the idea that comparisons between the vocabularies of different nations might enable us to range them along a temporal scale according to their respective degree of progressiveness.

The criticisms put forward against essentializing and Eurocentric (or progressive) comparisons are no doubt justified. One should be careful however not to forego the opportunities of additional insights that comparisons, if well designed, still have to offer. With regard to conceptual history, the challenge is to devise ways of comparing that bring multilingualism and conceptual transfers, and hence the notorious instability of the compared languages, back into the picture. Similarly, comparisons in conceptual history should explicitly avoid all progressivist undertones when comparing the trajectories of concepts in different linguistic communities or cultures. Thus a statement that a certain community disposes of a certain concept while in another community an exact conceptual equivalent for it does not exist should not be worded in terms of 'already' or 'not yet' or any other formulation that suggests the idea of an alleged 'normal' or ideal development. What seems to be acceptable, though, if carefully worded, are statements of convergences or divergences in the meanings of individual terms or in the configurations of semantic fields.<sup>51</sup>

Even for these kinds of statement, however, considerable methodological pitfalls will have to be surmounted. For, in order to come up with such statements, we need to know in the first place that the terms or vocabularies to be compared are actually the nearest equivalents in the two languages compared. But how can one be sure about this? Bilingual dictionaries may give some

clues. Yet the truth is that we would need an intuitive, quasi-divine linguistic knowledge to be confident about where the apex of semantic proximity lies at a given historical moment. Nineteenth-century bilingual dictionaries will tell us, for instance, that the nearest equivalent to the English word 'education' is the German term *Bildung*, although the latter may also be retranslated into English as 'culture' which, in turn, would be retranslated into German as *Kultur*, for which, again, the English term 'civilization' seems to be the most appropriate translation. This chain of translations is an unspectacular example, yet it makes clear why comparisons that start from individual words (semasiological comparisons) will often end up in labyrinths of translations and retranslations and, ultimately, descriptions of untranslatability.<sup>52</sup> The method of 'hopping' through bilingual dictionary entries and contemporary translations of canonical texts combined with intuition may, at best, help to establish charts of vocabularies referring to approximately similar phenomena in the respective linguistic communities at various points in time. Although more than nothing, this is merely a first step.

European conceptual historians working on comparisons may derive additional comfort from the fact that the problem of identifying the lexical equivalents whose meanings are then made the objects of comparisons is much easier to solve in a European context than in a global one. The family resemblances between most European languages are sufficiently large, and hence the probability of coming across truly incommensurable concepts should be quite rare. More important than the morphological resemblances, so fascinating for nineteenth-century comparative philologists, are in this respect the shared vocabularies resulting from uninterrupted chains of translations and conceptual transfers from Antiquity to the present age. Bo Stråth has indeed a good point when he writes that, within Europe, the common foundations of the ancient Greek, the Roman and the medieval Latin languages, as well as the Judeo-Christian intellectual tradition, provided a conceptual reference frame that, in most cases, guaranteed a mutual understanding of the semantic differences that still remained.<sup>53</sup> Stråth's argument holds good especially for the more abstract sociopolitical and philosophical terms that conceptual historians have, so far, usually been interested in: names of institutions ('parliament') and ideologies ('liberalism'), forms of government ('democracy'), historical processes ('revolution'), and fundamental categories of ordering the world like 'religion', 'politics', 'society', 'science' and 'the economy'. Etymologically, large sections of these abstract vocabularies derive from Greek or Latin roots. These terms are common to most European languages, and hence most Europeans, Stråth argues, will have at least roughly similar ideas about what they mean. But are we therefore entitled to say that Reinhart Koselleck's scepticism regarding the feasibility of comparative conceptual

histories has been unfounded?<sup>54</sup> Is it true that in the Greek, Latin and Judeo-Christian traditions on the one hand, and English as today's lingua franca on the other hand, we actually dispose of tools that, at least in a European context, come close to the famous 'meta-language' which, according to Koselleck, is necessary to compare different conceptual worlds?<sup>55</sup>

A few caveats against such an over-optimistic view may be in place here. The first and most obvious one concerns the long time lags between the historical moments at which abstract terms derived from Greek or Latin roots became integral parts of the vocabularies of different European languages. While in the Romance languages adaptations of Latin words went on continuously, and while English was enriched by thousands of Latin and Romance loanwords from the Norman Conquest on, similar appropriations happened much later and only in a more sporadic fashion in the Germanic, Slavic and other European languages. Latin (or Greek) terms not only entered these languages much later, but often remained clearly recognizable as 'foreign' for quite some time. The hesitant integration of a word like 'politics' into public discourse in Tsarist Russia from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries is a good example.<sup>56</sup> The process bears more resemblance to analogous attempts of making sense of 'politics' in modern China or India than to conceptualizations of 'politics' in late medieval Italy or early modern France.<sup>57</sup> Our brief discussion on time lags leads to another, more important point: for the periods *before* the abstract terms of Latin (or Greek) origin gained a foothold in the vernaculars, the search for the nearest lexical equivalents will be almost as hard for European as for non-European languages.<sup>58</sup> Neither Latin nor English can serve as substitutes for the much-needed 'meta-language' for these earlier periods.

This last observation leads to a second caveat. There is a danger of falling back into progressivist comparisons of the pattern described above, if research in European comparative conceptual histories focuses too much, or even exclusively, on the vocabularies belonging to the supposed 'common' tradition of Latin, Greek or Judeo-Christian origin. For many regions and periods in European history such an approach would only produce the same kind of deficit- or 'waiting-room' histories that postcolonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty justly rejected as inappropriate.<sup>59</sup> With regard to our European conceptual history project, we therefore expressly invite contributions dealing with non-Western, non-Greek- or Latin-based terms, terms that do not belong to a supposed common European tradition, even terms that at first sight seem to be unique for one linguistic community only.<sup>60</sup> Finding lexical equivalents for comparisons will thereby not become easier, but this is the only way of truly Europeanizing the practice of conceptual history.

A third caveat against the view that, owing to common lexical traditions, comparative conceptual histories should be easier to realize in a European context than elsewhere in the world is necessary. It is a point elaborated by Jörn Leonhard in Chapter 6 of this volume as well as in his extensive historical studies on the semantics of 'Liberalism' in several Western European political cultures, mainly the Spanish, French, English, Italian and German ones.<sup>61</sup> One of Leonhard's major findings is that the apparent similarity of the *words* 'liberal' and 'liberalism' in these languages concealed many of the differences in the *concepts* conjured up in people's minds in their respective political cultures. At the same time, one might argue that the various conceptions of European liberalisms do not occupy entirely distinct semantic fields. It is indisputable, though, that the historical moments at which the terms became politicized and the ways in which they could be used to name parties across the spectrum between left and right depended not just on national contexts, but also on situational factors. If, then, even a term such as 'liberalism', which is clearly rooted in the Latin-European tradition and seems on the surface easy to translate, has seen different conceptualizations and paths of politicization, we should be all the more sceptical about the allegation that the pitfalls surrounding comparative conceptual histories on a European scale have already been surmounted.

Assuming for the moment that the problem of defining equivalent lexical items as units of comparison may nevertheless be resolved reasonably well, we still need to discuss what the objectives of comparative conceptual histories should be. Why comparisons? As long as we proceed semasiologically (i.e. take words as starting points), the answer seems evident. On a synchronic level the aims are to study similarities and differences in the use-patterns ('meanings') of terms and then, on that basis, to describe the congruities or incongruities of individual concepts; eventually this could lead to comparative descriptions of entire conceptual grids. If we add a diachronic perspective, our search extends to the question of convergence or divergence in the uses of terms and will result in histories of converging or diverging conceptual worlds.

However, it is one thing to elucidate factual changes, and another to *explain* them. One way of approaching explanations has been to embed the conceptual histories in meta-narratives of Europe-wide or world-wide processes such as democratization, secularization, European integration, globalization, and so on. Given the enduring attractiveness of such meta-narratives, which suggest linear and similar developments all over the globe, it is no wonder that comparative conceptual histories have tended to stress convergence more often than divergence. However, there is nothing in the comparative approach as such that obliges scholars to prefer narratives of converging

concepts. Comparisons within our European book series will be open for both search directions: those that are about to show convergence as well as those that rather focus on divergence.

Up till now, most comparisons in conceptual history have proceeded semasiologically. Some critics even pretend that conceptual history in principle cannot but use a semasiological approach. But this is unfounded, and confuses the specific method used by Koselleck and others in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* with the overall research programme of conceptual history. Koselleck has even sketched the inverse method of proceeding onomasiologically in the introduction to the *Grundbegriffe*, although he rarely used the onomasiological method himself.<sup>62</sup> His famous essay on asymmetrical counter-concepts, however, is a fine example of how an onomasiological conceptual history, and a comparative one at that, might be conceived.<sup>63</sup> Basically, the idea is not to begin with words, but to start from phenomena, preferably historical problems – or ‘challenges’, to use Toynbee’s phrase – and then to look for the relevant terms used by historical agents to contend with these problems – the ‘responses’ to use Toynbee’s metaphorical expression again, a metaphor that fits well in our context. In the case of Koselleck’s essay on counter-concepts the ‘challenge’ he explored was the problem of how people in different historical constellations dealt with inclusion and exclusion. And the ‘responses’ he found were different ways in which groups of human beings were opposed against each other in discourse (and corresponding practice): Hellenes and Barbarians, Christians and heathens, (Arian) humans and (non-Arian) ‘sub-humans’. The result of Koselleck’s comparative sketch was not only that the concepts used for the ‘ins’ and the ‘outs’ varied across time and space, but that the very forms of articulating inclusion and exclusion also changed along with the concepts. Exclusion could be expressed in a way that recognized the human quality of the ‘others’ although they were considered as inferiors (Barbarians); it could also be articulated so that the ‘others’ were still recognized as humans in the present, but condemned to hell in the future (heathens); or it could be conceived in a way that denied them even the quality of humans (non-Arian ‘sub-humans’).<sup>64</sup>

Generally speaking, onomasiological comparisons will never be concerned with just one or a handful of individual concepts; their principal aim is rather to show how concepts within larger semantic networks are interrelated. Onomasiological comparisons are an elegant way around the puzzling difficulties, so typical for semasiological comparisons, of knowing in advance what the relevant and possibly equivalent terms in different languages, communities or circumstances are. Onomasiological comparisons are indeed a way of *finding* the relevant and equivalent terms (and the concepts they refer to) through empirical research on the ‘responses’ to analogous historical

phenomena. These phenomena may be recurrent problems, situations or challenges as, for example, the ways in which societies deal with inclusion and exclusion, organize and conceptualize hierarchies, or position themselves in historical time between past, present and future. What the relevant terms are is then not decided more or less arbitrarily by the researcher, but emerges as a verifiable result of the analysis. And the same applies for the definitions of equivalent terms. They are not preliminarily fixed by intuitive guesses, but can only be identified in the course of the investigation: terms are equivalent when they can be shown to have a similar use-value or position in arguments used to contend with the problem or situation investigated. An additional advantage is that because the relevant terms are not fixed in advance, there can be no Eurocentric or Western progressivist bias in their choice, as happens so easily when proceeding semasiologically. Not least for that reason onomasiological comparisons will have greater potential for surprising findings, a benefit that seems particularly welcome for a multinational and multilingual project like our book series.<sup>65</sup>

For all their advantages, onomasiological comparisons also have their drawbacks. The most serious one is, of course, the identification of suitable phenomena (analogous and recurrent problems, challenges, situations in history) that may be compared. One must not go as far as Koselleck in claiming that human social and political history as a whole is characterized by certain 'repetitive structures' (*Wiederholungsstrukturen*) made possible by 'anthropological' constants. In his view those anthropological constants are, above all, the constant requirements of defining the 'ins' and the 'outs', those being 'above' or 'below', and those who come 'earlier' or 'later'.<sup>66</sup> As Jörn Leonhard points out in his chapter, looking for elementary oppositions like these in discourse may indeed be one point of departure for comparative studies in historical semantics, and we may safely do so without accepting Koselleck's argument that these oppositions have an 'anthropological' quality.

In more limited historical contexts – late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, for example – other more complex historical problems may be made objects of comparative onomasiological inquiries, for instance debates on electoral reforms, a topic of contestation all over Europe at that time. The difficulty then consists in defining a set of sufficiently abstract test questions that will allow us to *find* the relevant and equivalent vocabularies in the debates compared. In the case of debates on electoral reforms, test questions like the following come to mind: What were the self-descriptions used by those who claimed the right to political participation? How were those who claimed it called by their opponents? What were the legitimating formulas used by those who demanded participation? What were the legitimating formulas used to reject their demands? And so on. The result of such

an inquiry would be a set of vocabularies in different national languages that served similar argumentative purposes and could, therefore, be considered as relevant and equivalent with respect to the problem, situation or debate in question.

Onomasiological and semasiological comparisons are by no means mutually exclusive research strategies. They can be used separately or consecutively, the one compensating the shortcomings of the other. Within our European conceptual histories series, both will have their place.

### Conceptualizing Concepts

The interrelations and imbrications of concepts may be observed on more than one level. It is not only that concepts are clustered in fluid macro-arrangements such as those that characterize ideologies or professional political theory. Concepts are also located in segmented micro-arrangements that perform a variety of cultural roles, underpinning and mapping understandings that may be peculiar to one society but not to another. The setting of certain concepts in close – and conventionally durable – proximity to one another is one such instance. Thus, the well-worn phrase ‘law and order’ associates specific meanings of each of the paired concepts, so that the possible link between, say, law and reform is underplayed. Law is there to ensure order rather than, say, to enable innovation or redistribute wealth. The British conservative newspaper the *Daily Telegraph* has an online page on ‘law and order’ that preponderantly – and ironically – enumerates forms of social disorder, and which, on a particular day, included news on murder, financial fraud, internet trolling, compensation for a medical mishap, drink-driving, and road-rage.<sup>67</sup> But the implicit moralistic and punitive connotations of the pairing are evident.

Another, more recent, pairing, ‘truth and reconciliation’, narrows down the first concept to a category located in a conceptual terrain that is also populated by ‘victimhood’, ‘historical grievances’, ‘accountability’, ‘apology’ and ‘conflict-resolution’, and in which that unusual pairing begins to make sense. But it would only make sense in cultural milieus with strong legal frameworks that entertain the idea of restorative justice, with the invocation of ideologies that recognize ethnic and cultural pluralism, and with an incipient optimism about envisaged futures and the possibility of terminating deep-rooted ill feeling. There are at least ten countries that have set up ‘truth and reconciliation’ commissions, and many more that employ one term or the other in different pairings. The absence of such commissions in Europe, where in principle they might have been established in some instances, is itself a notable instance of a vacant conceptual space. Note also the ideational distance

between that pairing and that of 'law and order', as well as the different future horizons, or levels of expectation, that each of them summons up.

At the level of metaphor, specific phrases have enormous impact on the conceptualization of the ideas and practices with which they are made to relate in professional and vernacular languages. A 'level playing field' – a phrase emanating from rugby or football in British public (i.e. private) schools – is closely connected to notions of fairness, yet is incomprehensible at first glance in many other languages. Indeed, one might ponder the almost complete absence of the word 'fairness' outside anglophone usage, except as a borrowed term (though, significantly, not the absence of the concept). At any rate, the metaphor implies that fairness is about the distribution of equal conditions to different social units, but certainly not about equal results, as the level field supports a competitive game in which there can be clear winners and losers. It underpins a limited, free-market, notion of equality of opportunity.

Likewise, 'holding the ring', in its original sense of keeping order with respect to a boxing or fighting event held within an enclosed space, suggests a norm of social conduct involving non-intervention in the substantive practice in which the combatants are engaged. Simultaneously and necessarily, however, it summons up the impartial monitoring of a practice that is incapable of being entirely self-regulating, and hence one that potentially invites a different kind of intervention, namely, one enabling the practice to run smoothly and correctly (if those are the appropriate phrases for the circumstances!). From there it is but a few steps on towards notions of ostensible state neutrality that update and proscribe state action in certain versions of liberalism.<sup>68</sup> These are instances of the conceptual peculiarities of specific societies with enormous spillover consequences for imagining and managing further sets of social relationships.

Phenomena such as the above alert one to the internal tensions built into conceptual structure. The potential totality they embrace – that is to say, the full interpretative range a concept can call up in its various temporal and spatial manifestations – is effectively inexpressible in concrete 'real-world' understandings and pronouncements, except as a long list of components that may be mutually incompatible. Whereas conceptual historians focus on this issue primarily as a question of continuities and discontinuities, it is simultaneously a question of cultural choice. Employing concepts is always an exercise in selectivity, whether deliberate or unintended, not an exercise in generating the totality of meanings. Disagreement, however gentle, over their connotations is invariably built into the very existence of social and political concepts, because conceptual indeterminacy is their norm, not the exception.<sup>69</sup> Hence the need for semantic parsimony in operationalizing a concept competes with acknowledging the full range of semantic abundance it has

carried, is carrying, and can carry. That dualism sharply pinpoints the contest over meaning inherent in language.

There also are issues pertaining to the broader question of conceptual interdependence. In political studies it is now recognized that ideologies constitute clusters of political concepts in varying combinations of flexibility and durability.<sup>70</sup> We have become increasingly aware of the interconnections among concepts and of the limits of studying any concept in isolation from others. But their interrelationships are not best seen as entanglements. When conceptual historians speak of entanglement, that metaphor is more pertinent to cultures than to concepts. Were we to speak of conceptual entanglement, that would imply that intact and autonomous concepts get knotted up with others, as in the sense of having one's clothes caught when walking through a hedge. That kind of trapped enmeshment does not happen in the realm of concepts. Rather, the default position of concepts is that their micro-structure ensures overlap, the sharing of ideational elements, with other concepts. It is more a question of intertwinement. Here word and concept pull in different directions: the word attempts to define, to establish boundaries, even on occasion to finalize – a frequent attribute of political language – but concepts are notably boundary-lacking, or at least boundary-porous.

The potential inter-conceptuality of social and political concepts already exists *ab initio* in a given concept. Different concepts frequently share some components: think of 'power' and 'authority' sharing certain notions of inequality and hierarchy. Yet concurrently, it is a ubiquitous and arguably universal thought-practice that human minds engage in the invention and construction of boundaries – physical and symbolic – and interpret the world through them. Thinking in terms of boundaries is itself a real property of the human imagination, and central to the spatial and temporal mapping exercises people perform in trying to make sense of the world.<sup>71</sup> That is what makes conceptual history so interesting. When we attempt to tell the story of a political or social word, such as 'socialism', a purely lexical approach focusing on the word may run counter to the evidence that breaks socialism down not only into different socialisms, but charts its gravitation towards, or estrangement from, the multiple conceptual environments in which it is located temporally and spatially. Those ideational fields will crucially inform socialism's distinguishing properties and contribute to their constant mutation.

In the series launched by this volume we are keenly aware of the artificial, culturally constructed, nature of concepts. Boundaries and categories function as simplifiers. Naming a constellation of concepts and practices – say, 'liberalism' – is not tantamount to clearing a precise space for that term, but should be seen as a proposal to unpack a linguistic and ideational convention that, on closer inspection, may turn out to be quite slippery – and quite

normally so. Both internal semantic pluralism and external cultural contexts and translations contribute to that conceptual malleability.

The requirements of scholarship therefore leave us with a conundrum: how much conceptual detail and diversification do we wish to establish and track down, and how much can we cope with? As a concept begins to accrue multiple meanings and is enriched – or impoverished – by interactions with intersecting concepts, we need a cut-off point, however flexible, so as not to mire ourselves in semantic overload. There is, after all, a limit to the usefulness of minute detail. That is where the notion of a pattern becomes useful. Just because there may be dozens of nuances in the way the concept of liberty is interpreted does not mean that we cannot classify some of them into intelligible categories. Consequently, the distinction to be made is not between the specific and the universal, or the multiple and the singular, but between the unique and the patterned. And there is a danger of over-exaggerating the unique, precisely because conceptual diversity under the umbrella of a given word does not necessarily signal that the particular meanings encompassed in that word have no conceptual affinities. We are always dealing with degrees of similarity, not with identity, unless there is a deliberate attempt to deceive and confuse – the starkest literary version of which is exemplified in George Orwell's *1984*.

In sum, an awareness of conceptual morphology points to new directions conceptual historians can take. In particular, we may distinguish between mass, line and field when analysing concepts. The focus on the concept as if it were a single macro-body of knowledge and understanding downplays the shifting intricacy of its internal semantic composition as a given, and not as imposed by external circumstances. A concept is not a single undifferentiated *mass* which, in the course of its contestation, may change into another single undifferentiated mass. And a concept does not only inhabit a narrative *line* that requires nothing else than the recounting of its own story as it mutates, but is located in complex semantic *fields* in which concepts inform and shape each other. Those features are attributes of language, not merely a result of contestation over time and across space. Identifying the subcomponents of any given concept, and the fluctuating patterns of adjacent conceptual interdependence, may make the task of the conceptual historian more onerous but, as that branch of history gains momentum, the increasing accuracy it can provide to the interpretative task cannot be ignored.

Finally, a word on silences and their impact on meaning. Conceptual historians share with political philosophers an emphasis on articulation, on word, text and utterance. Yet social and political discourses contain significant silences, absences and lacks. The concern here is not the deliberate silencing of individuals and groups – a pervasive occurrence throughout human

history. It is, rather, a more intriguing and complex matter, as the unspeakable, the unthinkable, and the unconceptualizable play crucial parts in shaping political communication and debate.<sup>72</sup> Thus, when the concept of consent is understood by Locke also to emanate from verbal tacitness and indicated through performing activities, such as using the highway or taking lodgings, rather than through speech, is that another way of expressing concepts or is it a way of managing silences by superimposing an invented voice on them? In other instances, those superimposed voices may be the voices of future generations or of the war dead, for example. Does the absence, or disappearance, of verbal articulation and of vocabulary open a significant window into the conceptual universe of a society, to which conceptual historians should listen? The absence of conceptual articulation when it might be knowable and would be expected by interlocutors and scholars alike constitutes an interpretative challenge. Can concepts be expressed visually and performatively as well as verbally? Is the insertion of silences and hiatuses that interrupt verbalization a matter of interest to conceptual historians? And how do we approach political silence itself as a social concept? As for the unconceptualizable, here cultural comparisons may be helpful: the presence of a concept in one space- or time-zone and its absence in another can evoke awareness of conceptual lacks that may be crucially important in decoding the semantic potential of a conceptual cluster or chain. That is where comparison comes into its own, and that is where the location of concepts vis-à-vis each other, and the gaps exposed between them, gain enormously in significance.

### **The Disciplinary Environments of Conceptual History**

Conceptual history may, tautologically speaking, have developed within the discipline of history, and to a large extent from the history of ideas, but it is anchored to and linked with intra-disciplinary and extra-disciplinary practices. In the field of history, conceptual historians often count Quentin Skinner as one of their own, his protestations to the contrary. But Skinner's work, spearheading what used to be referred to as the Cambridge school of intellectual history, focuses on a different intellectual enterprise, despite some similarities and overlaps. His emphasis is on intentionality and purpose, on speech-acts, rhetoric and performativity, and on explaining them in the context of the norms and available discourses that justify or challenge beliefs at a point in time and space.<sup>73</sup> It is principally an exercise not in the history of concepts or in detecting continuities or ruptures in their history but in the excavation of meaning, in particular the Austinian illocutionary rendering of an account of what people are doing in engaging in a discourse. That differs from what has primarily preoccupied conceptual historians, not least in its

reliance on comparison as a tool of interpretation. What Skinner shares with conceptual historians is sensitivity to context, a curiosity about the particular, and an emphasis on interpretation, rather than the search for truth, a preoccupation with the right and/or the good, or the bestowal of abstract universalism on ideas, as is evidenced by many political philosophers.

That said, in Chapter 3 of this volume Kari Palonen has enlisted Skinner in support of giving discourse and rhetoric their due as instruments of performativity, addressing the question of explaining political action. As is becoming increasingly common among a new generation of conceptual historians, Palonen extends the purview of conceptual history from the concept to the debate – specifically, from the concept of politics to the manner in which it is put into practice in formal parliamentary debates – and utilizes it as a means to investigate conceptual change.<sup>74</sup>

Discourses are of course the focus of discourse analysis, once again placing the single concept within a broader field of terms, expressions and phrases. Directing its concern to language, discourse analysis eschews the concept in favour of linguistic structure – grammar and syntax – identifying deliberate and often concealed meaning contained in word order, frequency, emphasis and metaphor. One of its variants, critical discourse analysis (CDA), exhibits strong normative overtones usually avoided by conceptual historians, and aims at uncovering and combating those discourses that reinforce practices of social domination and discrimination. For some CDA advocates, language is a repository of oppressive power – a perspective that is not in itself misguided, but narrower than the one motivating conceptual historians.<sup>75</sup>

The study of ideologies is perhaps the closest of the disciplines external to conceptual history and, as Michael Freeden contends in Chapter 4 in this volume, intersects with it and can extend it. The analysis of ideologies as a morphological arrangement shares with conceptual history the insistence on the centrality of concepts, not of ideas or discourses. But it elaborates significantly on the casual references to concepts among conceptual historians. It does so through revealing the micro-structure of concepts, composed as they are of conceptions that are not necessarily mutually compatible and, even more so, not necessarily simultaneous. The ‘simultaneity of the non-simultaneous’ is not the perspective through which we actually access concepts as vernacular, everyday, users. In any given instance some of the past and present meanings of a concept are removed or suppressed in individual speech and text act. The conceptual historian is sensitized to the many layers of a concept, but the vast majority of its users are not. Instead, they engage in the inevitable practice of conceptual decontestation, when one conception of a concept is preferred and given preponderant weight, whether those users be politicians, journalists, bureaucrats or, yes, even scholars. In addition, as

noted above, the study of ideologies does not consider concepts in isolation of one another but as always located in conceptual clusters or fields. One of the defining features of ideologies becomes the manner in which these diverse, conceptually decontested clusters compete over the control of public political language, for semantic domination smoothens the path to political control. Significantly, the selected meanings employed in speech and its textual and visual representation may be unintended as well as deliberate.<sup>76</sup>

Here decontestation links into the contingency question. Semantic polysemy is not just the function of temporal or spatial contexts but is built into the essential contestability of concepts, yet societies and individuals cannot endure a state of permanent contestability. Decontestation is a necessary condition of political decision making, an instrument that counters the inevitable contingency of conceptual structure with the alluring illusion of certainty. It achieves that through selecting one of the multiple conceptions contained in social and political concepts, assigning it cultural rather than logical priority, and attempting to associate it with the entire meaning the concept is expected to convey. The study of ideologies examines the application of concepts not only through comparative diachrony, and not only through a focus on how concepts change. It may significantly elaborate the practice of conceptual history by showing what is specifically political about certain concepts and how their subtle flexibility and detailed interface with contexts and events is brought to bear on overcoming the often-assumed gap between idea and practice. And it preaches the normality of conceptual fragmentation and reassembly, while demonstrating the balance of durability as well as change displayed by ideologies.

Finally, a few words on the relationship between political philosophy and conceptual history. Although the two disciplines centre on political and social thought, the mismatch between them seems striking. First, political philosophers and ethicists, and the more conventional practitioners of *Ideologiekritik*, pursue and justify normative value-preferences and tend to examine political ideas and arguments from the perspective of their truth value. In contrast, conceptual historians, historians of ideas of a Skinnerite disposition, and contemporary theories of ideology concentrate on interpretation and meaning, irrespective of the moral attractiveness or political efficacy of their subject matter. Second, the abstract, idealized, universalizing and, until recently, dominant versions of political philosophy – particularly though not exclusively in the anglophone world – have carried little rapport with conceptual historians due to their ahistoricity, their frequent allusion to teleological versions of progress that take change as given, rather than interrogating it, let alone the essentializing predilections of some moral philosophers. Third, the training of many political philosophers is in analytical precision – crucially, not only in

their own research but as an expectation directed at the contents of their subject matter. Conceptual historians and students of ideology, to the contrary, acknowledge and even welcome the indeterminacy, slackness and messiness of the languages they explore. Fourth, political philosophers – in particular when they write their own history of ideas – tend to be highly elitist in their choice of voice and argument, though that feature may also be discerned among some conceptual historians. Thus the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* has been criticized as being less socially inclusive and representative of the vocabularies circulating in a society than Koselleckian methodology would seem to indicate. There are still many cross-disciplinary conversations that are not taking place, to the detriment of all potential participants.

### Concluding Remarks

Conceptual history is not an orthodoxy, but continuously reinvents itself. As it crosses national and disciplinary boundaries, as it enters different countries and linguistic spaces, as it is applied to new objects of study, the history of concepts is changing and will further develop in practice and theoretical outlook. Moreover, conceptual history necessarily reflects the changing nature of language itself and consequently the ways in which we approach and analyse language. Within this constant flux, there are nonetheless a number of durable assumptions that define conceptual history. Three of them should be emphasized here.

First, there is the idea that ‘language matters’; or to put it in more elaborate terms, the idea that the sign systems we use to communicate among each other are neither arbitrary nor merely instruments completely disposable at our will. Rather, taken together, they make up a given structure that imposes certain limits on what is ‘sayable’ and ‘doable’ at any point in time.

Second, any conceptualization of the so-called ‘reality outside’ using language or other sign systems is an inseparable component of that very reality. It is therefore our conviction that the study of past and present politics, society, economics or culture cannot be conducted in any meaningful way without taking into account the conceptualizations of the past or present agents themselves.

Third, when studying language use in time, it is appropriate to distinguish between the linguistic *terms* (or words) of a language and the *concepts* referred to by these terms. As conceptual historians we are convinced that it is possible to make the history of these concepts a worthwhile object of inquiry of its own.

Finally, conceptual historians may also consider the social and political consequences of their enterprise, as Javier Fernández Sebastián suggests in

his concluding chapter. In outlining the future perspectives of this book series, he particularly alerts us to the importance of conceptual history studies in the European contests of the present time.<sup>77</sup> One of the most valuable contributions conceptual history could offer in this context is to instil an awareness of the communicative patterns and conceptual challenges involved in the current processes of integration – or disintegration – of Europe.

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## Notes

1. The use of digitized corpora for purposes that go beyond counting the frequency of words is still at an early stage. There are as yet no internationally agreed standards for extracting and interpreting semantic data from digitized sources. Publications are usually short and scattered across different websites, blogs, working paper series or specialized e-journals often difficult to trace for outsiders. Examples are: Ryan Heuser and Long L-Khac, *A Quantitative Literary History of 2,958 Nineteenth-Century British Novels: The Semantic Cohort*

- Method*, Pamphlets of the Stanford Literary Lab 4, May 2012; Alix Rule, Jean-Philippe Cointet and Peter S. Bearman, 'Lexical Shifts, Substantive Changes, and Continuity in State of the Union Discourse, 1790–2014', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, 1 September 2015, vol. 112, no. 35, 10837–10844; Mike Kestemont, Folgert Karsdorp and Marten Düring, 'Mining the Twentieth Century's History from the Time Magazine Corpus', in Proceedings of the 8th Workshop on Language Technology for Cultural Heritage, Social Sciences, and Humanities, 14th Conference of the European Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics (EACL), Gothenburg, 26 April 2014, 67–70 (<https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/W/W14/W14-06.pdf>); we thank Sinai Rusinek (Jerusalem) for information on these examples. For insights on a project based on digitized medieval Latin texts see: Roberta Cimino, Tim Gelhaar and Silke Schwandt, 'Digital Approaches to Historical Semantics: New Research Directions at Frankfurt University', *Storicamente* 11(7) (2015) ([http://storicamente.org/sites/default/images/articles/media/1901/historical\\_semantics.pdf](http://storicamente.org/sites/default/images/articles/media/1901/historical_semantics.pdf)); see also: Tim Geelhaar, 'Talking About *christianitas* at the Time of Innocent III (1198–1216). What Does Word Use Contribute to the History of Concepts?', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 10(2) (2015), 7–28; Silke Schwandt, 'Virtus as a Political Concept in the Middle Ages', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 10(2) (2015), 71–90.
2. Marion Eggert and Lucian Hölscher (eds), *Religion and Secularity: Transformations and Transfers of Religious Discourses in Europe and Asia* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013); Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ute Frevert et al., *Emotional Lexicons: Continuity and Change in the Vocabulary of Feeling 1700–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Daniel Béland and Klaus Petersen (eds), *Analysing Social Policy Concepts and Language: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives* (Bristol and Chicago: Policy Press, 2014). On the natural sciences, see the publications of the Centre for Literary and Cultural Research (ZFL) in Berlin at: <http://www.zfl-berlin.org/interdisciplinary-conceptual-history.html>. On science and technology studies, see Désirée Schauz, 'What is Basic Research? Insights from Historical Semantics', *Minerva* 52 (2014), 273–328.
  3. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 9 vols (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972–1997) (hereafter referred to as GG).
  4. Reinhart Koselleck, 'A Response to Comments on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*', in Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter (eds), *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts* (German Historical Institute, Washington DC, 1996), 64.
  5. *Ibid.*, 62–63.
  6. For a stimulating discussion of this issue, see Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani, 'Emotional Translations: Conceptual History beyond Language', *History and Theory* 55 (2016), 46–65.

7. The extensive publications and activities of the *Iberconceptos* network can be traced at <http://www.iberconceptos.net/>.
8. See Myoung-Kyu Park, 'Conceptual History in Korea: Its Development and Prospects', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7(1) (2012), 36–50. Park mainly refers to research done at Seoul National University; another project is underway at Hallym University.
9. For example on 'civilization', 'civility' in Asian and European contexts: Margrit Pernau et al., *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth-Century Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); see also Hagen Schulz-Forberg (ed.), *A Global Conceptual History of Asia, 1860–1940* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014); for new ventures in African conceptual history see the website of the project 'Concept Africa' at Helsinki University: <http://www.helsinki.fi/conceptafrica/>; cf. also: Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds), *Global Conceptual History: A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
10. This is an argument put forward by Bo Stråth in 'Towards a Global Conceptual History'. Paper presented at the seminar 'National and Transnational Notions of the Social', Helsinki, 21 August 2008 ([http://www.helsinki.fi/conceptafrica/theory\\_method\\_literature/towards\\_a\\_global\\_conceptual\\_history.html](http://www.helsinki.fi/conceptafrica/theory_method_literature/towards_a_global_conceptual_history.html)).
11. David Northrup, *How English Became the Global Language* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); on twentieth-century projects to construct 'Basic English' as an easy-to-use global language, see Valeska Huber, 'Eine Sprache für alle: Basic English und die Grenzen der Globalgeschichte', in Boris Barth, Stefanie Gänger and Niels P. Petersson (eds), *Globalgeschichten: Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2014), 175–204.
12. Already published: Pasi Ihalainen, Cornelia Ilie and Kari Palonen (eds), *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016); volumes in preparation: Liberalism, Regions and Regionalism, Democracy, Asymmetric Counterconcepts.
13. The most comprehensive account of the *Grundbegriffe* project, its implications and follow-up projects remains Melvin Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); on Koselleck's work in general, see Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012).
14. He contributed articles on *Fortschritt* (progress), *Geschichte* (history), *Krise* (crisis) and *Revolution* (revolution) to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*; the article on *Krise* has been translated into English: Reinhart Koselleck, 'Crisis' [transl. by Michaela W. Richter], *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006), 357–400. His studies on many other temporal concepts are accessible in English: Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* [transl. by Keith Tribe] (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1985); Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* [transl. by Todd Samuel Presner et al.] (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

15. Steinmetz, below 63–95.
16. See Stefanie Stockhorst, ‘Novus ordo temporum: Reinhart Kosellecks These von der Verzeitlichung des Geschichtsbewußtseins durch die Aufklärungshistoriographie in methodenkritischer Perspektive’, in Hans Joas and Peter Vogt (eds), *Begriffene Geschichte: Beiträge zum Werk Reinhart Kosellecks* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 359–86; Jan Marco Sawilla, ‘Geschichte und Geschichten zwischen Providenz und Machbarkeit. Überlegungen zu Reinhart Kosellecks Semantik historischer Zeiten’, in *ibid.*, 387–422; Stefan Jordan, ‘Die Sattelzeit – Transformation des Denkens oder revolutionärer Paradigmenwechsel?’, in Achim Landwehr (ed.), *Frühe Neue Zeiten: Zeitkonzepte zwischen Reformation und Revolution* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), 373–88; Christian Geulen, ‘Plädoyer für eine Geschichte der Grundbegriffe des 20. Jahrhunderts’, *Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History* 7 (2010), 79–97.
17. Jörn Leonhard, ‘Erfahrungsgeschichten der Moderne: Von der komparativen Semantik zur Temporalisierung europäischer Sattelzeiten’, in Joas and Vogt, *Begriffene Geschichte*, 423–48; from a Dutch perspective: Pim den Boer, ‘The Historiography of German *Begriffsgeschichte* and the Dutch Project of Conceptual History’, in Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans and Frank van Vree (eds), *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 21–22.
18. Jordheim, below 47–62.
19. But see some case studies for early modern Sweden, the Netherlands and late medieval Italy and France: Bo Lindberg, *Den antika skevheten: Politiska ord och begrepp i det tidig-moderna Sverige* (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitetsakad, 2006); Pim den Boer, ‘La vie politique selon Stevin et Juste Lipse’, in Pim den Boer and Catherine Secretan (eds), *Simon Stevin. De la vie civile, 1590* (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2005), 191–99; Ulrich Meier, Martin Papenheim and Willibald Steinmetz, *Semantiken des Politischen: Vom Mittelalter bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 18–38.
20. Marjanen, below 139–74.
21. We adopt the notions of ‘decision space’ and ‘identity space’ from: Charles S. Maier, ‘Transformations of Territoriality 1600–2000’, in Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad and Oliver Janz (eds), *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 35; linguistic spaces may or may not coincide with identity spaces, and therefore it seems appropriate to add that category.
22. Mishkova and Trencsényi, below 212–35.
23. On German conceptualizations of ‘the West’, see Martina Steber and Riccardo Bavaj (eds), *Germany and ‘The West’: The History of a Modern Concept* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).
24. For a similar approach, cf. Mathias Albert et al. (eds), *Transnational Political Spaces: Agents – Structures – Encounters* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2009).

25. For exemplary studies see: Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712–1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Bettina Brandt, *Germania und ihre Söhne: Repräsentationen von Nation, Geschlecht und Politik in der Moderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); the trilogy by Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), *Marianne au pouvoir: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), *Les métamorphoses de Marianne: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1914 à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001); and Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
26. See the classic study by James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1998). Cf. also: Ulrike von Hirschhausen, 'People that Count: The Imperial Census in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Europe and India', in Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen (eds), *Comparing Empires: Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 145–70; Mehmet Hacisalihoglu, 'Borders, Maps and Censuses: The Politicization of Geography and Statistics in the Multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire', in *ibid.*, 171–210.
27. Neumann, below 236–62.
28. Cf. also Martin Schulze Wessel, 'Religion, Politics and the Limits of Imperial Integration: Comparing the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Empire', in Leonhard and Hirschhausen, *Comparing Empires*, 337–58; Azmi Özcan, 'Imperial Legitimacy and Unity: The Tradition of the Caliphate in the Ottoman Empire', in *ibid.*, 373–84.
29. On the practice of translation in the Habsburg monarchy, see Michaela Wolf, *Die vielsprachige Seele Kakaniens: Übersetzen und Dolmetschen in der Habsburgermonarchie 1848 bis 1918* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2012).
30. Stenius, below 263–80.
31. Elias Canetti, *The Tongue Set Free: Remembrance of a European Childhood* [transl. from the German by Joachim Neugroschel] (London: Deutsch, 1988), 4–5.
32. *Ibid.*, 24.
33. *Ibid.*, 10.
34. *Ibid.*, 27.
35. Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); for similar stories on the Ottoman/Greek city of Salonica, see Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430–1950* (London: Harper Collins, 2004).
36. On the standardization of French: Francine Mazière, 'La langue et l'État: l'Académie française', in Sylvain Auroux et al. (eds), *History of the Language Sciences / Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaften / Histoire des sciences du langage*, vol. 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2000), 852–62; the volume also con-

- tains chapters on the standardization and purification efforts in many other European countries.
37. Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes (eds), *Diccionario político y social del siglo XIX español* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2002); Javier Fernández Sebastián et al. (eds), *Diccionario político y social del siglo XX español* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2008).
  38. For interesting reflections on this – with examples from non-European contexts: Anna Wierzbicka, *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of English as a Default Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
  39. For a study on the linguistic structure of ‘*Türkendeutsch*’, see: Yazgül Şimşek, ‘Formen und strukturelle Merkmale des Sprachgebrauchs türkisch-deutscher Jugendlicher aus Berlin’, in Barbara Jańczak, Konstanze Jungbluth and Harald Weydt (eds), *Mehrsprachigkeit aus deutscher Perspektive* (Tübingen: Narr, 2012), 155–79.
  40. See the following publications: Peter A. Kraus, *A Union of Diversity: Language, Identity and Polity-Building in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Anne Lise Kjaer and Silvia Adamo (eds), *Linguistic Diversity and European Democracy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Johann Wolfgang Unger, Michał Krzyżanowski and Ruth Wodak (eds), *Multilingual Encounters in Europe’s Institutional Spaces* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
  41. Kontler, below 197–211.
  42. Douglas Howland, ‘The Predicament of Ideas in Culture: Translations and Historiography’, *History and Theory* 42 (2003), 45.
  43. The challenges of translating political theory are discussed in: Martin J. Burke and Melvin Richter (eds), *Why Concepts Matter: Translating Social and Political Thought* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).
  44. An exemplary study is: Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); see also: Willibald Steinmetz, ‘Gemeineuropäische Tradition und nationale Besonderheiten im Begriff der “Mittelklasse”. Ein Vergleich zwischen Deutschland, Frankreich und England’, in Reinhart Koselleck and Klaus Schreiner (eds), *Bürgerschaft: Rezeption und Innovation der Begrifflichkeit vom Hohen Mittelalter bis ins 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 161–236 (comparing several translations of Aristotle’s *Politics* into English, German and French around 1800).
  45. See, for example, Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).
  46. For Skinner’s reassessment of his own rhetorical approach in the light of conceptual history: Quentin Skinner, ‘Retrospect: Studying Rhetoric and Conceptual Change’, in Skinner, *Visions of Politics, vol. 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 175–87; for Palonen’s take on ‘moves’ in argument, see Kari Palonen, *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 35–37; see also Kari Palonen’s chapter in this volume (Chapter 3).

47. Cf. Melvin Richter, 'Introduction: Translation, the History of Concepts and the History of Political Thought', in Burke and Richter, *Why Concepts Matter*, 11–13.
48. Cf. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 30–50.
49. For an elaboration of these arguments, see Hagen Schulz-Forberg, 'Introduction. Global Conceptual History: Promises and Pitfalls of a New Research Agenda', in Schulz-Forberg, *Global Conceptual History of Asia*, 1–24.
50. Denis Diderot, 'Encyclopédie', in Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (eds), *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Art et des Métiers*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1755), 637 [By comparing a nation's vocabulary at different times one can form an idea of its progress].
51. Hagen Schulz-Forberg rejects even this kind of inquiry as 'not a useful question' (Schulz-Forberg, 'Introduction', 8), but we beg to differ. To observe that certain semantic fields in different languages have become more similar (converge) or dissimilar (diverge) over time, for whatever reasons, is not tantamount to maintaining that speakers of one linguistic community have been in any way superior to (or more 'modern' than, or a model for) the speakers of the other language. Whether such statements on convergence and divergence are useful or not depends entirely on what it is we want to know.
52. Good examples, restricted to philosophical vocabulary, can be inspected in: Barbara Cassin (ed.), *Vocabulaire Européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Le Robert/Seuil, 2004).
53. Bo Stråth, 'Comparative Conceptual History and Global Translations: An Outline of a Research Agenda', in Rudolf de Cillia et al. (eds), *Discourse, Politics, Identity: Festschrift für Ruth Wodak* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2010), 216.
54. Koselleck's final thoughts on this issue can be found in an interview he gave in April 2005: Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes, 'Conceptual History, Memory, and Identity: An Interview with Reinhart Koselleck', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 2 (2006), 110–12.
55. *Ibid.*, 111; see also: Reinhart Koselleck, Ulrike Spree and Willibald Steinmetz, 'Drei bürgerliche Welten: Zur vergleichenden Semantik der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft in Deutschland, England und Frankreich', in Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006), 413.
56. Cf. Ingrid Schierle, 'Semantiken des Politischen im Russland des 18. Jahrhunderts', in Willibald Steinmetz (ed.), *"Politik": Situationen eines Wortgebrauchs im Europa der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2007), 226–47; Walter Sperling, 'Vom Randbegriff zum Kampfbegriff: Semantiken des Politischen im ausgehenden Zarenreich (1850–1917)', in *ibid.*, 248–88.
57. On conceptualizations of 'politics' in India and China, see: Sudipta Kaviraj, 'On the Historicity of "the Political": *Rajanity* and Politics in Modern Indian Thought', in Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent (eds), *Comparative Political*

- Thought: Theorizing Practices* (London: Routledge, 2013), 24–39; Rana Mitter, ‘Communism, Confucianism, and Charisma: The Political in Modern China’, in *ibid.*, 60–69; for Italy and France, see Meier, Papenheim and Steinmetz, *Semantiken des Politischen*.
58. For early modern Russian conceptualizations of ‘politics’ before the term ‘politics’ was introduced, see Mikhail Krom, “‘Die Sache des Herrschers und des Landes’: Das Aufkommen der öffentlichen Politik in Russland im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert’, in Steinmetz, “*Politik*”, 206–25.
  59. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.
  60. For interesting examples from non-European contexts, see Carol Gluck and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (eds), *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2009).
  61. See Jörn Leonhard, *Liberalismus: zur historischen Semantik eines europäischen Deutungsmusters* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001).
  62. Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Einleitung’, in GG, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972), xxii; Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*’ [transl. by Michaela Richter], *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6 (2011), 19.
  63. Reinhart Koselleck, ‘The Historical-Political Semantics of Asymmetric Counterconcepts’, in Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 159–97.
  64. Kirill Postoutenko is preparing a volume in this book series on ‘Hellenes and Barbarians’; cf. also Kay Junge and Kirill Postoutenko (eds), *Asymmetrical Concepts after Koselleck: Historical Semantics and Beyond* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014).
  65. The procedure described here is an extension of what is usually meant by ‘onomasiology’.
  66. Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Structures de répétition dans la langue et dans l’histoire’, *Revue de Synthèse* 5(1) (2006), 159–67.
  67. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/> (accessed 6 March 2015).
  68. For some of the arguments, see R.E. Goodin and A. Reeve (eds), *Liberal Neutrality* (London: Routledge, 1989).
  69. For a literary understanding of conceptual indeterminacy, see G. Schwab, ‘Introduction’, in *Imaginary Ethnographies: Literature, Culture, and Subjectivity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 1–23. For a discussion of indeterminacy and ambiguity in a political context, see M. Freeden, *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: The Anatomy of a Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 69–79.
  70. See M. Freeden, L.T. Sargent and M. Stears (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
  71. A helpful discussion is to be found in D. Newman, ‘Borders and Bordering: Towards an Interdisciplinary Dialogue’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 9 (2006), 171–86.

72. See M. Freeden, 'Silence in Political Theory: A Conceptual Predicament', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20 (2015), 1–9.
73. A succinct rendering of Quentin Skinner's position can be found in his 'Truth, Belief and Interpretation' lecture given at the University of Poznań, 23 October 2014. A similar version is on YouTube, published on 1 December 2014.
74. See also K. Palonen, *Politics and Conceptual Histories: Rhetorical and Temporal Perspectives* (Baden-Baden: Nomos/Bloomsbury, 2014).
75. For differing approaches, see T.A. van Dijk, *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, 2nd edn (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011); N. Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Longman, 2001); R. Wodak, *The Discourse of Politics in Action* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
76. For a concise exposition, see Michael Freeden, 'The Morphological Analysis of Ideology', in Freeden, Sargent and Stears, *Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 115–37.
77. Javier Fernández Sebastián, below 281–297.

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