

TRANSLATION, THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT, AND THE HISTORY OF CONCEPTS (*BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE*)

Conference at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, September 29- October 1, 2005. Co-sponsored by the GHI, the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the Historical Society, and CUNY's Center for the Humanities. Conveners: Melvin Richter (CUNY), Martin Burke (CUNY) and Dirk Schumann (GHI), in cooperation with the Conference for the History of Political Thought and the History of Political and Social Concepts Group.

Participants: Peter Baehr (Lingnan University, Hong Kong), Warren Breckman (University of Pennsylvania), Peter Burke (Cambridge University), Sandro Chignola (University of Padua), Pim den Boer (University of Amsterdam), João Feres Jr. (IUPERJ), Javier Fernández-Sebastián (Universidad del País Vasco), Joshua Fogel (York University), Julian Franklin (Columbia University), Arthur Goldhammer (Harvard University), James Hankins (Harvard University), Douglas Howland (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee), Jan Ifversen (University of Aarhus), David Johnston (Columbia University), Dirk Kaesler (University of Marburg), Young Koon Kim (CUNY), Margaret King (CUNY), Joachim Kurtz (University of Erlangen and Emory University), David Lazar (GHI), Jörn Leonhard (University of Jena), Steven Lukes (New York University), Raymonde Monnier (Paris), Jeremy Munday (University of Sussex), Eric Nelson (Harvard), Kari Palonen (University of Jyväskylä), Anthony Pym (Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona), Eckart Schütrumpf (University of Colorado), Claire Sherman (Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art), Sharon Snowiss (Pitzer College), Henrik Stenius, (University of Helsinki), Mario Turchetti (University of Friebourg), Wyger Velema (University of Amsterdam).

The purpose of this conference was to examine the history of theories in the disciplines of translation, political thought, and *Begriffsgeschichte*. While few would deny that these scholarly endeavors are connected, their interrelationships have seldom been systematically considered. Thus, the conference brought together theorists, historians, and practitioners of these subjects to discuss their interactions, and to consider how interdisciplinary work might most profitably be conducted. The organizers and sponsors hoped to begin the process of acquainting practitioners in these three fields with the methods and problems common to them all, but often unidentified as systematic approaches applicable to their concerns. In this way, translators of works in the history of political thought

and philosophy, as well as in the human and social sciences, could return to their tasks with an increased awareness of both the difficulties and the alternative responses to problems also confronted in these adjacent but related disciplines.

On Thursday afternoon, the conference's first panel session addressed "The History of Translation in Political Context." Chaired by Wyger Velema, it featured papers by Jeremy Munday and Anthony Pym on "The Politics of Translation." Jeremy Munday surveyed the major theoretical approaches and positions that have emerged within the field of translation studies over the last thirty years; Anthony Pym raised the issue of to what degree these intra-disciplinary developments were of interest, or import, to other scholars. In his comments on these papers, Arthur Goldhammer also noted discrepancies between theories about and practices of translation, and referred to his own experiences as a professional translator by way of example.

The second session focused on "Translation and the Conceptualization of Politics," and was chaired by David Johnston. The participants included Peter Burke, Jörn Leonhard, Melvin Richter, and Kari Palonen. Peter Burke's paper on "Translating the Turk" dealt with the complex linguistic and symbolic processes involved in cultural interchanges between Europeans, in particular the English, and the Ottoman Empire in the early modern era. Jörn Leonhard expanded upon his work of the concepts of "liberalism" and "civil society" in European political discourses and questioned the efficacy of comparative studies of such concepts. Melvin Richter reflected on a number of the practical and methodological issues involved in translating and transmitting central texts and concepts in the history of political thought. Kari Palonen wondered how stable a concept "politics" was in the works of such theorists as Max Weber, Carl Schmidt, Reinhart Koselleck, and Quentin Skinner, and recommended that scholars turn their attention from definitions to political practices.

Friday morning's panel, chaired by Sharon Snowiss, dealt with the phenomenon of "Self-Translation by Political Philosophers." Julian Franklin discussed the Latin and the French versions of Jean Bodin's *Six Books of the Commonwealth* from the perspective of a translator and a Bodin scholar. Eric Nelson compared Thomas Hobbes's Latin and English versions of *De Cive*, and considered this work—or these works—in the light of Hobbes's political and scholarly pursuits. In an extended commentary, Mario Turchetti also focused on Bodin, especially on the problems that arose in the preparation of a comparative edition of the texts. The following session, on "Translating Aristotle's *Politics* in Medieval and Renaissance Europe," was chaired by Margaret King, and included presentations by Claire Sherman and James Hankins. Sherman examined

illustrations from Nicole Oresme's 1375–1378 French translation of *Politica*, and discussed how these images conveyed specific political messages. Hankins analyzed Leonardo Bruni's 1433 Greek-to-Latin text in the context of Bruni's own theories of interpretation. Eckart Schütrumpf delivered a commentary from the perspective of a classicist, and reminded the conference that seemingly stable works such as Aristotle's had been periodically revised since late antiquity.

The final session on Friday moved to more contemporary texts. Warren Breckman chaired this session on "Translating Political and Social Theory: Translation as a Conceptual Act in the New English Versions of Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic* and in English Translations of Emile Durkheim." Dirk Kaesler reviewed two recent translations of Weber: the 2001 edition by Stephen Kalberg, and the 2002 edition by Peter Baehr and Gordon Well. He noted that Weber's works continued to be of great interest and importance to both German-speaking and Anglophone scholars; how those texts were used by sociologists varied considerably. Steven Lukes considered the translation histories of Durkheim's *Division of Labor*, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, and *Rules of Sociological Method*. As did Dirk Kaesler, Lukes emphasized the quite different and often quite problematic ways that these works had been employed in forging a canon of twentieth-century sociological theory. In his comments, Peter Baehr discussed mistranslations, re-translations, and receptions of these and other related "canonical" texts, using as examples Talcott Parsons's and his own translation of *The Protestant Ethic*.

The conference's final day began with a session on "Translating the West in the Age of Imperialism," chaired by Young Kun Kim. Douglas Howland examined nineteenth-century Japanese engagements with Western political theory via the works of such authors as John Stuart Mill. He argued that since many concepts, such as "liberty," neither translated well nor corresponded to Japanese circumstances, new terminologies needed to be invented. Joachim Kurtz focused on the case of Liang Qichao's translations of J. G. Fichte, and how the "body politic" was conceived in early republican China. In his comments, Joshua Fogel suggested that such West-to-East exchanges needed to be appreciated in terms of their specificities, as well as in the larger frameworks of the creation and circulation of new concepts in the modern era.

The conference's closing event was a roundtable discussion on "The Circulation and Reception of Transnational Concepts: The Case of 'Civilization.'" It featured members of the History of Political and Social Concepts Group, and was chaired by Jan Ifversen. In his introductory remarks, Ifversen surveyed the various national projects on conceptual history, in particular by Dutch, Finnish, and Spanish researchers, that have been carried out in the wake of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. He

also noted the interest of scholars in moving beyond the political and linguistic boundaries that have informed these studies to more systematic comparisons. Pim den Boer expanded on the possibilities of analyzing “transnational” concepts, in this case “civilization,” and assessing to what degree they may have been adopted, assimilated, or rejected in particular chronological and cultural settings. The other panelists, Sandro Chignola, João Feres, Raymonde Monnier, Javier Fernández-Sebastián, and Henrik Stenius, then delivered short presentations on how, when, and to what extent “civilization” was used in Italy, Brazil, France, Spain, and Finland from the early modern period to the present. In the subsequent discussion among the panelists and the audience, the utility of the category “transnational” was the subject of some disagreement.

Martin J. Burke