

German Historical Institute
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**THE MEANING OF
HISTORICAL TERMS
AND CONCEPTS**
NEW STUDIES ON *BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE*

Edited by
Hartmut Lehmann
and
Melvin Richter

With contributions by
Donald R. Kelley
Reinhart Koselleck
James Van Horn Melton
Gabriel Motzkin
J. G. A. Pocock
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Edited by Detlef Junker, Manfred F Boemeke,
and Janine S. Micunek
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PREFACE

The most important objective of the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C., is to foster the exchange of ideas between German and American historians. The publication of this Occasional Paper is therefore of special significance since *Begriffsgeschichte* and the central work in this field, the eight-volume *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, edited by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, belong to the most original and truly pathbreaking achievements of German historiography in the past decades.

The great achievement of *Begriffsgeschichte* and the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* lies in the fact that the latter surpasses the claim to be merely a lexicon of the changing meanings of central terms and concepts of human history. *Begriffsgeschichte* is based on a particular theory, even an ontology, of history. It was especially Reinhart Koselleck who developed this theory, which became the structural principle of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. A superior philosopher of historical theory and someone who has at his intellectual disposal the entire Western tradition, Koselleck attempted to apply the discussion on “historicity”—as defined to a large extent by Heidegger and Gadamer—to a theory of empirical historical scholarship. According to Koselleck, the study of history must not become lost in a sea of equally valid questions and in the postmodern interchangeability of all things. Out of contemporaries' changing experiences of time in history, it is necessary and possible to reconstruct differential “temporal structures” of the past, and, at the same time, to convert these into the basic principles and methods of historical inquiry. To put it more concretely, the foundation of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* rests on the hypothesis of the so-called *Sattelzeit* or *Schwelienzeit* between 1750 and 1850. The “denaturalization” of older experiences of time was completed during this century. Older concepts such as “democracy,” “freedom,” and “the state” now denoted a new future-oriented perspective, that is, they became concepts in motion. Only after the articulation of this hypothesis was it possible to create a lexicon of historical terms and concepts and not merely a positivistic catalog of events and ideas.

Although it might be difficult to relate *Begriffsgeschichte* to recent scholarship on the history of ideas in the United States, and even more difficult to incorporate it into the discussion within the American historical profession, I am very grateful to Professor Hartmut Lehmann, former director of the GHI, for hosting in December 1992 a symposium to commemorate the completion of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Professor Melvin Richter was instrumental in organizing the symposium and the driving force behind the publication of its proceedings. We were most honored that Professor Koselleck was able to come to Washington for this occasion. His response to the papers given at the symposium is published here. I am equally grateful to Professors Donald R. Kelly, James Van Horn Melton, Gabriel Motzkin, and John G. A. Pocock for their contributions and their enormous support.

The participants of the symposium, the contributors, the translators, and the editors of this Occasional Paper all share one fundamental experience: the extraordinary difficulty of translating the meaning of terms and concepts from one language into another, from one cultural tradition into another, and from one intellectual climate into another. Therefore, we hope that the essays in this Occasional Paper lead to a deepening transatlantic dialog on *Begriffsgeschichte*. We also hope that it is not clarity that is lost in the translation.

Washington, D.C.
March 1996

Detlef Junker

Appreciating a Contemporary Classic: The *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and Future Scholarship¹

Melvin Richter

A CONTEMPORARY CLASSIC

We meet to commemorate one of the greatest achievements of German historians during what is already being called “the old Federal Republic.” After more than a quarter of a century, there soon will be available all eight volumes of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (hereafter GG).² The seventh and last substantive volume is in press, as is the eighth or index volume, which will greatly facilitate the use of those that preceded it. In coming together on this day, we honor Professor Reinhart Koselleck, not only as the preeminent theorist of *Begriffsgeschichte* (the history of concepts), but also as the sole surviving editor of the GG. It is he who has successfully brought to completion the monumental collective work begun by Werner Conze, Otto Brunner, and himself. The book's program is stated most dearly in his introduction to the first volume of the GG, published in 1972. It may be safely predicted that, a century from now, scholars will still be relying on this rare example of a reference work focused in terms of a historiographical theory.

In 1989 the president of the Federal Republic awarded Koselleck the prestigious prize of the Historisches Kolleg in Munich. This citation for his notable contributions to the historical profession

¹Research for this paper in the Federal Republic of Germany was made possible by support from the PSC-CUNY Research Award Program of the City University of New York (Grant 667420) and the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst). I also wish to acknowledge with thanks the indispensable aid of the National Endowment for the Humanities; the History of Ideas Unit, the Australian National University; and the National Humanities Center.

²Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Basic Concepts in History: A Dictionary on Historical Principles of Political and Social Language in Germany). 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972-1993).

occupied fifteen pages of the elegant *laudatio* presented by Professor Rudolf Vierhaus, who, by a felicitous coincidence, will be succeeded as the head of the Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen by the host of this symposium, Professor Hartmut Lehmann. Among Koselleck's most considerable achievements, Vierhaus ranked his contributions as theorist, editor, and contributor to one of the "most notable and ambitious historical enterprises of the past two decades."³

A definitive work on its subject, the GG is unlikely to be superseded for a very long time to come. Although any or all of its articles may be corrected within the predictable future, it will continue to be indispensable. Thus, the GG will join Paulys *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* as among those indispensable classic works first consulted by anyone beginning serious research on the subjects it covers. This comes as close to immortality as scholars may reasonably aspire. We congratulate Professor Koselleck and express our gratitude to him, the GG's contributors, and his fellow editors, Werner Conze and Otto Brunner, who did not live to see the results of their labors. Although Brunner contributed much to the GG's agenda, as Professor Melton has demonstrated, the many editorial and administrative burdens of completing the GG in a quarter of the time needed for the *Paulys* fell upon Professors Conze and Koselleck. Moreover, it was they who had to write or rewrite articles when contributors failed to do so satisfactorily.

But what exactly is the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*? Some of those who praise it tacitly diminish their praise by classifying it as a reference work, a dull genre executed by contributors, rather than by an individual with shining abilities. Thus, to describe the GG as a multi-authored lexicon, while not completely inaccurate, is seriously to underestimate the originality of its program and the high quality of its execution. Nor does such well-merited praise suggest that the purposes of the GG are advanced by prematurely canonizing it. After all, as a work of scholarship, its value in part derives from those of its statements that can then be revised in the light of subsequent

³ Rudolf Vierhaus, "Laudatio," on awarding the prize of the Historisches Kolleg to Reinhart Koselleck, Munich, Nov. 23, 1989. In Stiftung Historisches Kolleg im Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft, Dritte Verleihung des Preises des Historischen Kollegs. Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, Dokumentationen (Munich) 7 (1991):32.

research. More generally, the distinctive advantages of *Begriffsgeschichte* can be realized only after both its method and findings have been subjected to vigorous criticism and reworking by those who care enough to separate what is worth preserving from what ought to be discarded because of faults in the method, inadequacies in its application, or ideological biases in one or another article.

It is in this spirit that I propose two main purposes for the rest of this paper. First, I should like to continue the dialogue among English- and German-speaking specialists in the history of political thought and intellectual history.⁴ Our commentators today rank among the most respected and influential scholars writing in English on these subjects. Perhaps the single most relevant issue involves the relationship of individual concepts to the political language or languages in which they are used. For English-speaking historians such as John Pocock, Quentin Skinner and Keith Michael Baker have developed distinctive modes of treating political and social thought and language historically. These have been assessed by Donald Kelley in his own work and in his capacity as editor of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Professor Pocock's work has been described by Keith Thomas, a leading English historian, as an "exemplary model of how historical study is the indispensable condition of interpreting the political texts of the past."⁵ We are fortunate to have them with us, as well as Dr. Motzkin, an authority on Professor Koselleck's thought and intellectual provenience. Their work, while differing in some regards, raises important questions about the linguistic and

⁴ My own attempts to inaugurate and continue this dialogue are: "Conceptual History (*Begriffsgeschichte*) and Political Theory," *Political Theory* 14 (1986):604-637; "Begriffsgeschichte and the History of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987):247-263; Finnish translation, with preface by Kari Palonen, *Politiikka XXXI* (1989):76-87. "Pocock, Skinner, and the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*," *History and Theory* XIX (1990):38-70; German version, "Zur Rekonstruktion der Geschichte der Politischen Sprachen: Pocock, Skinner, und die *Geschichtlichen Grundbegriffe*," in *Alt-europa—Ancien Regime—Frühe Neuzeit: Probleme and Methoden der Forschung*, eds. Hans Erich Bödeker and Ernst Hinrichs (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1991), 134-174; "Begriffsgeschichte in Theory and Practice: Reconstructing the History of Political Concepts and Language," in *Main Trends in Cultural History*, eds. Willem Melching and Wyger Velema (Amsterdam/Atlanta, 1994). *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction* (New York, 1995).

⁵ Keith Thomas, *New York Review of Books*, Feb. 27, 1986, 36.

extra-linguistic dimensions of historical analysis. Second, now that the lexicon is finished, what sorts of research or application of *Begriffsgeschichte* in the style of the GG ought to be undertaken?

Before turning to these two questions, let me summarize briefly what I take to be the main points of the research project. The GG encompasses some 120 concepts covered in more than seven thousand pages. Articles average over fifty pages; the most important contributions are monographs exceeding a hundred pages. Yet it is not the project's scale but its program that makes it notable. What are its stated purposes? They are: to provide, for the first time, reliable information about past uses in German of political and social concepts by assembling systematically extensive citations from original sources; to characterize the ways in which language both shaped and registered the processes of change that transformed every area of German political and social life, from approximately the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth; to sharpen one's awareness at the present time of just how one uses political and social language.

By understanding the history of the concepts available to us, we may better perceive how they push us to think along certain lines, thus enabling us to conceive of how to act on alternative and less constraining definitions of our situation. Thus, this work aims at much more than providing histories of concepts. It opens the way to understanding how those experiencing the historical formation of the modern world in German-speaking Europe conceptualized those great changes, incorporated them within their respective political and social theories, and acted upon these contested understandings. Comprehensive and highly structured, the GG could not have been planned and executed without Professor Koselleck's pointed historiographical queries and hypotheses.

The GG seeks to correlate political and social concepts with the continuity or discontinuity of political, social, and economic structures. But the history thus provided goes beyond social and economic history. Because those who lived through the unprecedented rapid changes of modern history did not all experience, understand, and conceptualize structural transformations in the same way, their prognoses differed sharply, as did their consequent actions as members of different social formations and political groups. The range of alternatives depended upon the concepts available. What these concepts were, how they were contested, and the extent to

which they remained constant, were altered, or created *de novo* are the integrating themes of the GG's project. In order to treat them, the GG has utilized both the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) and structural social history.⁶ Its program is anti-reductionist, positing the mutual interdependence of both types of history, which it sees as in a condition of fruitful, irreducible tension. Thus, as formulated by Professor Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichte* simultaneously refuses to regard concept-formation and language as epiphenomenal, that is, as determined by the external forces of "real history"; while, at the same time, he rejects the theory that political and social languages are autonomous and discrete "discourses" unaffected by anything extra-linguistic. This position has endeared the GG's method to neither social nor intellectual historians, both of whom prefer their respective professional oversimplifications. These simply ignore concepts or structures, respectively.

As a lexicon of political and social concepts, the GG charts the concepts constituting specialized vocabularies, that is, the semantic fields or linguistic domains, of political and social language used in German-speaking Europe. In addition, the GG proposes a set of hypotheses about how, particularly during the period that Koselleck calls the *Sattelzeit* (approximately 1750-1850), German political and social vocabularies were transformed at an accelerated speed and in certain specified directions. These changes in language both conceptualized rapid transformations in the structures of government, society, and the economy and helped produce determinate reactions to them.

The GG combines the study of the languages used to discuss state, society, and economy with identifications of the groups, strata, orders, and classes that used or contested such concepts. This program requires contributors (occasionally individuals, more often teams) to look back as far as classical antiquity and forward to the conceptual usages of our own time. The GG's objective is to identify

⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte," in his collection of essays, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt a.M., 1979), 107-129. This has been translated as "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History," in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 73-91. A more recent paper by Koselleck is "Sozialgeschichte and Begriffsgeschichte," in *Sozialgeschichte in Deutschland*, eds. Wolfgang Schieder and Volker Sellin. 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1987), I: 89-109.

three types of political and social concepts, each defined in terms of German usage at the present day: concepts long in use, such as “democracy,” the meaning of which may still be retrieved and understood by a speaker of the language today; concepts such as “civil society” and “state,” whose earlier meanings have been so effaced that they can now be understood only after scholarly reconstruction of their prior meanings; neologisms such as “Caesarism,” “fascism,” or “Marxism,” coined in the course of revolutionary transformations that they helped shape or interpret.

What is specifically modern in such concepts? High on the agenda of the GG are a number of hypotheses about conceptual developments during the *Sattelzeit*: 1) *Verzeitlichung* (temporalization), the disposition to insert modern political and social concepts into one or another philosophy or horizon of history set out teleologically in terms of periods, phases, or stages of development. Dr. Morzkin's paper admirably states this hypothesis in detail; 2) *Demokratisierung* (democratization) of political and social vocabularies, which, prior to this period, had been specialized and relatively restricted to elite strata. During the eighteenth century, profound changes occurred in the manner of reading, what was read, the political messages delivered, and the size of the audiences to which they were directed; 3) *Ideologisierung* (the growing extent to which concepts could be incorporated into ideologies). Under the systems of estates and orders characteristic of pre-revolutionary Europe, political and social concepts tended to be specific and particularistic, referring in the plural to well-defined social gradations and privileges, such as the liberties of the *Bürger* (citizens) of a city, or to stories connecting chains of events. But beginning in the eighteenth century, those older terms remaining in use started to become more general in their social reference, more abstract in meaning, and hence took the linguistic form of -isms, or singular nouns, like “liberty,” which replaced such prior usages in the plural as “liberties,” or “history,” which replaced previously discrete narratives. These abstract concepts easily fit into open-ended formulae, which could be defined according to the interests of movements and groups competing for the ever-growing number of potential adherents; 4) *Politisierung* (politicization) of concepts. As old regime social groupings, regional units, and constitutional identifications were broken down by revolution, war, and economic change, political and social con-

cepts became more susceptible to use as weapons among antagonistic classes, strata, and movements.

Now that the GG is completed, what is it that we know about political and social language that we did not know before? And what difference does it make to possess such knowledge? Perhaps the single most important answer to the original editors consisted in contrasting the political and social concepts created by the advent of modernity and those that preceded it. Since we live in this modern or, as some say, post-modern world, we have much to learn about every one of its aspects that is illuminated by the GG. Some queries about this aspect of the lexicon's findings will be considered below. But a work of this scope is directed to more than one audience and hence has more than one justification. Let me list some of its more obvious contributions.

For those concerned with politics and the history of political thought, the GG provides situated, that is, contextual accounts of how key concepts came into existence, were modified, or became transformed, always understanding that these concepts were contested. The founding editors were convinced that *Geistesgeschichte* (intellectual history) and *Ideengeschichte* (the history of ideas), both older German styles of writing such histories, were seriously inadequate because they did not treat thought within its context, because they did not address the question of what historical actors thought was at stake when they disputed the meanings and uses of abstract terms in use, or else they proposed new language. The GG was meant to help us understand when and why ideologies first emerged so as to combat ideological thinking in our own times and places. And, by specifying alternatives excluded by ideologies, the GG may suggest categories of thought and patterns of action previously unidentified and unavailable. Recently we have seen how retrieving the concept of civil society has turned out to be valuable to those who have emerged from the repressive setting of the former Soviet bloc.

For scholars concerned with political and social thought in the past, *Begriffsgeschichte* enables them to avoid anachronism and to penetrate to the original meanings of the texts they read, as well as to the practical goals of their authors. Definitions of key terms need no longer be phrased unhistorically nor remain at a level of abstraction that makes understanding difficult or impossible. As in much recent work in English, the authors of the GG sought to avoid erroneous interpretations derived from the false assumptions that the

questions of political and social theory always remain the same and that their histories should be written in terms of the debate among canonical great thinkers about these perennial issues.

For political theorists today who discuss the meaning and application of such subjects as justice or equality, the *Begriffsgeschichte* of the GG is more closely fitted to their needs than any other type of historical treatment. Conceptual history enables political philosophers to perceive the relationship between past and present uses. The dangers of applying one or another conceptual usage may emerge from learning what have been its past implications and consequences. Again, because of present-day associations, a political philosopher may assume intuitively that there is some connection or opposition among concepts that is logically rather than contingently given. Detailed knowledge of past usages may reveal that such assumed connections are fortuitous rather than logically given.

Finally, the GG is of inestimable value to translators of German political and social thought. Far more precisely than any other work previously available, it indicates the range of usage among German theorists. Thus, indispensable information is provided about theorists' language, their intended audiences, and actual reception.

SOME UNRESOLVED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GG

Now that the program that Koselleck stated in the first volume of the GG has been briefly summarized, I should like to consider some problems about the GG as a historical work on political and social language. Its English subtitle, after all, is *A Dictionary on Historical Principles of Political and Social Language in Germany*.

It is clear that what is most needed after the GG's completion is a further analysis of its findings. Before comprehensive judgments can be made about the adequacy of its program and its method, a considerable amount of analysis will be required. Although the GG's introduction sets out a number of hypotheses about changes in political and social concepts, the work contains no analysis of its findings. More than twenty-five years of research and seven thousand pages of findings are or soon will be available to those seeking to answer the questions posed when this project was undertaken. Certainly the first order of priority is to make a systematic assessment of the extent to which the studies now available in the GG

confirm, confirm in part, or disconfirm the GG's hypotheses about the nature of conceptual change during the *Sattelzeit*. To note this absence of evaluation is neither a reflection on the editors nor a call for Koselleck personally to undertake this task. But if historians continue to use *Begriffsgeschichte*, the original hypotheses of the GG ought to be reconsidered in the light of this unprecedented evidence now available for their evaluation.

Another difficulty derives from the GG's lexicon format. This was adopted reluctantly, but there turned out to be no practical alternatives to it as a scholarly and publishing enterprise.⁷ Foremost among the unresolved problems is the question of how to proceed from an alphabetical inventory of individual concepts to the reconstruction of integrated political and social vocabularies at crucial points of development in German political and social languages. At any given time, concepts were grouped together thus forming a semantic field, or a special language. Thus, if such concepts are to be treated synchronically as constituting the specialized vocabularies of particular semantic fields or political and social languages, a question must be answered: At which periods or intervals ought related concepts be brought together? A further question involves the periodization that should serve as the basis for a diachronic comparison of concepts. For another part of the GG's program proposes investigation of changes in the sense of concepts.

A further set of issues grows out of questions posed by scholars writing in English. They have inquired into the effects of different political languages upon perceptions and consequent action of those using one or another of the conceptualizations available. Which

⁷ Koselleck's original proposal was for a single-volume dictionary from classical antiquity to the present. This was to be organized in terms of connected subjects rather than alphabetical articles. But as the project expanded from one to eight volumes, it became clear that, in order to make progress on the project as a whole, the concepts would have to be published in individual volumes ordered alphabetically. However, once the lexicon is completed, there is a possibility that there will be a publication in paperback of articles grouped by subject rather than alphabetically. Given the prohibitively high price of the hardcover format, such a step would make the GG much more accessible to scholars. See Keith Tribe, "The *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* Project: From History of Ideas to Conceptual History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989): 180-184; and "Introduction," in Koselleck, *Futures Past*, x-xiii.

concepts were restricted to particular groups? Which were held more generally? What was the range of political languages? To what extent was communication facilitated or impeded by conflict over the concepts and conventions of political and social discourse? And, in terms of the consequences for action—individual, group, governmental—what difference did it make how structural changes were conceptualized? Serious efforts to answer these questions could utilize the unparalleled materials gathered in the GG and fit them into new patterns, including some adapted from programs developed by Pocock, Skinner, and Baker. It remains to be seen to what extent their work is compatible with that done in *Begriffsgeschichte*. What would be the consequences of trying to combine the resources of these two bodies of work in German and English on the language of political thought?

To pose this question is to ask, how has this problem of synchronic synthesis been treated by English-speaking historians of political thought? That is, how do they go about determining what, at a given time, were the concepts available to those using one or another of the identifiable political vocabularies? Pocock, Skinner, Baker, et al. have been studying the complex interactions among political language, thought, and action, as well as seeking to develop an adequate historiography of these subjects. Their project is in part to discover and analyze the competing political languages, “discourses” (in Pocock's preferred terminology), or “ideologies” (in Skinner's) available from early modern to eighteenth-century Europe.⁸ Their method differs from the German works that emphasize concepts. John Pocock has presented historical accounts of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political discourses in the English-speaking world. No small part of his achievement has been to identify and to trace, to present narrative and analytical accounts of alternative and competing discourses, each of which combined concepts into a distinctive pattern of meanings. Such integrated modes of analysis and belief as the tradition of the “ancient constitution,” classical republicanism or civic humanism, or the various forms taken by Whiggism all defined the meanings of

⁸ See Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*. Ideas in Context Series, ed. Quentin Skinner in collab. with Richard Rorry, J. B. Schneewind, and Wolf Lepenies (Cambridge, 1987).

thought and actions, which, framed otherwise, would not have been meaningful to their adherents or comprehensible to us.

Quentin Skinner has emphasized two levels of historical analysis: treating political theories within historical contexts and linguistic conventions that both facilitate and circumscribe legitimations of political arrangements; and describing and making intelligible such theories, or ideologies, as he calls them, as intentional speech acts. At the same time, Skinner, in his influential writing on method, has consistently ruled out the possibility of writing any meaningful history of concepts. Thus, the “strictly historical” accounts of political language demanded by Pocock and Skinner have in their actual practices produced distinctive methodological emphases and types of histories. While differing somewhat from one another, Pocock and Skinner nevertheless have not as yet embraced any research program approximating the German project of reconstructing political and social language by charting the histories of the concepts that make up its vocabulary.

In some recent papers, I argue that to add the conceptual histories found in the GG to the projects of Pocock and Skinner would provide a more nearly satisfactory historical account of political and social thought and language.⁹ But it is also the case that an adequate linguistic synthesis of the concepts treated separately in the GG might necessitate both Pocock's strategy of seeking the overall patterns of the political languages used in given times and places and Skinner's emphases upon the types of legitimation made possible or restricted by the linguistic conventions and political intentions of writers regarded as active agents or actors. These German and Anglophone styles converge to an extent that justifies dialogue among their practitioners. Out of this might come a meaningful comparative analysis of how different political and social languages in Dutch-, German-, French-, and English-speaking societies have converged and diverged.

⁹ *History and Theory* XIX (1990):38-70; German version, “Zur Rekonstruktion,” 134-174.

BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE AND COMPARATIVE INQUIRY

In a paper assessing historiography in the twentieth century, a leading Dutch cultural historian, Professor Pim Den Boer, has characterized German *Begriffsgeschichte* as among the most important developments in the writing of history in the last third of the century, and he placed the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* high among the greatest achievements during that period by historians anywhere. Nor is this praise purely formal.¹⁰ Dutch historians are launching a major new undertaking, a history of political, social, and cultural concepts in the Netherlands. The first of its kind outside Germany, this project acknowledges the need for comparative, transnational studies of the languages and conceptual schemes created by Europeans, with such enormous consequences for the rest of the world as well. The prospective addition of these specialized Dutch vocabularies to those of German- and French-speaking Europe underlines the further need to fill what will be the greatest remaining lacuna in our knowledge of language and culture. This absence is the in-depth study of the distinctive forms, cultural and linguistic, as well as political and social, of the principal conceptual categories developed in English-speaking societies.

The Dutch initiative, then, is particularly important because it is being undertaken at just the time when, in order to prepare its future, a newly united Europe will need to take stock of the ways in which each of its constituent parts has understood its past. Are such attempts to chart the component parts of a culture in complex detail impossibly ambitious? In order to reply, we must realize that the Dutch project complements the GG's charting of the political and social vocabularies of German-speaking Europe, as well as another significantly different work on French political and social language that has been appearing since 1985. This major study, although published in German, centers on the history of political and social concepts in France from 1680 to 1820. It is called the *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680-1820* (A Handbook of Political and Social Concepts in France, 1680-1820). Its

¹⁰ Melching and Velema (eds.), *Main Trends in Cultural History*. This paper opened the International Summer School on "Main Trends in Cultural History" sponsored by the Dutch Graduate School for Cultural History in Amsterdam, June 18-27, 1991.

editor from the beginning has been Rolf Reichardt, once an assistant to, and still an occasional collaborator of, Koselleck.¹¹ There is also some prospect of a Hungarian work. Each of these projects contributes in different ways to a more detailed understanding of how Europeans have conceptualized their experiences of change since the end of the Middle Ages, as well as the transformations of the world since the early modern period. To bring these findings together from a comparative perspective would produce a new field of study.

Still another project offers the prospect of a transcultural comparison of European and Chinese concepts of revolution.¹² This is a projected study by specialists of the keywords of the Chinese Revolution from 1911 to the present, the goal of which is to present an account of how the language of politics has been shaped and reshaped by the Chinese Revolution. Thus it may be that, in the future, the GG will be seen as having made possible an altogether new subject of inquiry, the comparative history of political and social concepts, within and beyond Europe. Without the precedent of the GG, any such comparison would be inconceivable, as would be the separate national studies occasioned by it. Here is still another reason for thanking Professor Koselleck for all that he has contributed to the great work.

¹¹ Rolf Reichardt and Eberhard Schmitt (eds.), *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680-1820* (A Handbook of Political and Social Concepts in France, 1680-1820). 10 vols. to date (Munich, 1985-). Hans Jürgen Lüsebrink has become its co-editor. The proceedings of a notable conference at Bielefeld have been edited, along with their own contributions and comments, by both Koselleck and Reichardt: *Die Französische Revolution als Bruch des gesellschaftlichen Bewußtseins* (Munich, 1987).

¹² The keywords project is led by a team of five scholars: Timothy Cheek, Joshua Fogel, Elizabeth Perry, Michael Schoenhals, and the project director, Jeffrey Wasserstrom. An initial conference organized by Wasserstrom and William B. Cohen, Department of History, Indiana University, took place at Bloomington, Indiana, in September 1992. An example of the type of work likely to be generated by the project is Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992). A number of papers on language and politics in modern China are being published by the East Asian Studies Center, Indiana University.

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Otto Brunner and the Ideological Origins of *Begriffsgeschichte*

James Van Horn Melton

The books and essays of Otto Brunner are among the most original and provocative works of twentieth-century German-language scholarship. Brunner's *Land and Lordship*¹ first appeared in German in 1939, is now in its fifth edition, and has been translated into Italian and English. Peter Blickle, the distinguished historian of the German Peasants' War, called *Land and Lordship* "one of the most important works of German historiography in our century"; more recently, the Harvard medievalist Thomas Bisson praised *Land and Lordship* as "a powerful if tendentious critique of prevailing modes of political history"² Brunner's second major³ work, *Noble Rural Life and European Culture* (1949), also acquired the status of a classic for scholars in the field.⁴ The emigre historian Hans Rosenberg called it "a brilliant and subtle work by an imaginative scholar who has much to give."⁵ Brunner's third major work, *New Paths of Social History*, appeared in 1956. Now in its third German edition, it is widely recognized for its contribution to the emergence of German social history after 1945.⁶

Brunner was also a key figure in the development of *Begriffsgeschichte* (the history of concepts), which brings us to the subject of

¹ The first edition: *Land und Herrschaft. Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Südostdeutschlands im Mittelalter* (Baden bei Wien, 1939). The second and third editions, published respectively in 1941 and 1943, have the same title. The fourth edition is *Land und Herrschaft. Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Österreichs im Mittelalter* (Vienna/Wiesbaden, 1959). The English translation: *Land and Lordship: Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria*, trans. with an introduction by Howard Kaminsky and James Van Horn Melton (Philadelphia, 1992).

² Peter Blickle, "Otto Brunner," *Historische Zeitschrift* 236 (1983):779; Thomas Bisson, "Nobility and Family in Medieval France: A Review Essay," *French Historical Studies* 16 (1990):597.

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⁴ *Adeliges Landleben and europäisches Geist* (Salzburg, 1949).

⁵ Hans Rosenberg, review in *The Journal of Economic History* 11 (1951):289.

⁶ *Neue Wege der Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte*, 3d ed. (Göttingen, 1980).

this conference.⁷ Along with Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck, Brunner served as co-editor of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* from 1972, when the first volume appeared, up to his death in 1982. Owing to his advancing age, Brunner's involvement in the project was neither as long nor as sustained as that of Conze and Koselleck: Brunner was already seventy-four years old when volume I was published in 1972. But to understand Brunner's contribution to the development of *Begriffsgeschichte*, we must go back to ideas that Brunner developed in the late 1930s—more than three decades before the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* began publication.

In the years between 1937 and 1939, Brunner was to articulate one of the central assumptions underlying the development of *Begriffsgeschichte* after 1945. This was the conviction that the nineteenth century had constituted a radical break with the past, a break that was not just social, economic, or political, but also cognitive. For Brunner, the history of concepts was a means of bridging the gulf that separated the cognitive categories of the modern world from those of the premodern past.

All of this is rather well known to those familiar with *Begriffsgeschichte*. What I want to explore in this essay is the ideological dimension of Brunner's position. As originally elaborated by Brunner, *Begriffsgeschichte* was far more than a philological tool. It was a critique of liberalism founded on Brunner's conviction that the liberal-bourgeois order of the nineteenth century was historically contingent, destined to be superseded by the New Order of National Socialism. In arguing that *Begriffsgeschichte* originated as a radical conservative critique of what Brunner called the bourgeois-liberal *Rechtsstaat* (constitutional state), it is not my purpose to tarnish the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* with a brown brush. That is to say, I am emphatically not claiming that *Begriffsgeschichte*, in its postwar incarnation, has anything in common with National Socialist ideology. While I do believe that the genealogy of *Begriffsgeschichte*, at least in Brunner's case, was inextricably linked to his politics, I

⁷ On *Begriffsgeschichte* see Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte," in *Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte. Aspekte und Probleme*, ed. Peter Ludz (Opladen, 1972); Melvin Richter, "Begriffsgeschichte and the History of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987); Keith Tribe, "The *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* Project: From History of Ideas to Conceptual History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989).

would also make the obvious point that the genealogy of an idea or a movement is something distinct from the idea or movement itself, to argue otherwise is to fall victim to the genetic fallacy.

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With that caveat, let me turn now to Brunner's historical thought.⁸ The central theme in Brunner's early work is how the social and political order of the nineteenth century had distorted the way historians treated the past. This liberal, bourgeois, and national structure came out of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the negation of Old Europe, a historical formation whose basic outlines, according to Brunner, first crystallized in the eleventh century. The individualistic premises of natural rights theory, and the delineation of an autonomous sphere of commodity exchange in the emerging science of political economy, had, by the late eighteenth century, produced a concept of civil society that distinguished between a public realm monopolized by the state and a private sphere within which individuals were free to pursue their interests. The emancipation of commodity exchange and labor from political or seigniorial directives stripped social relations of their public character and relegated them to a private sphere free of state interference. At the same time, the rise of the territorial state since the late Middle Ages had served to demarcate a sphere of public authority within which political functions were ultimately to be consolidated and exercised exclusively by the sovereign state. The result was the separation of the public from the private sphere, the precondition for the bourgeois *Rechtsstaat*.

The effect of this liberal-bourgeois structure, argued Brunner, has been to produce disjunctive categories of thought (*Trennungsgedanken*) that themselves reflect the disjunction of state and society, i.e., the public and private spheres. Disjunctive thinking informs how we view all spheres of life—the economic, the social, the political—since

⁸ The following summary of Brunner's thought is taken from Kaminsky and Melton, introduction to *Land and Lordship*, and James Van Horn Melton, "From Folk History to Structural History: Otto Brunner (1898-1982) and the Radical-Conservative Roots of German Social History," in *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s through the 1950s*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and James Van Horn Melton (New York, 1994), 263-292.

the bourgeois order of the nineteenth century allowed them to develop independently of each other and the whole. The modern liberal state has a monopoly of legal power, and everything apart from this state is “free” to develop privately.

Brunner argued that historians seeking to establish the historicist dimension of modern reality had unconsciously carried these disjunctive categories of cognition into their representations of the past. These categories split the past into dualities, such as state and society, might and right, idea and reality, public and private. Brunner's *Land and Lordship* (1939) was, at heart, a polemic against the prevailing tendency to view medieval political formations through a liberal and national prism. In the Middle Ages, argued Brunner, there was no state of the modern sort. Those activities we associate with the modern state monopoly of sovereignty—taxation, the waging of war, jurisdiction, coercion—were, in medieval times, shared at all levels. These functions were not derived from royal or comical powers, as the medievalist Georg von Below had argued, nor were they “private” in origin, as Otto von Gierke had maintained. Instead, they were rooted in conceptions of justice, originating in Germanic times, that posited a sacral and transcendent sphere of Right to which everyone was subject. The guarantor of Right was not only the king but every house lord, who was responsible for defending his household against injustice and attacks from the outside.

Here Brunner views the feud, which medieval historians had traditionally viewed as “private war” waged by selfish robber barons and feudal brigands, as central to medieval social and constitutional life. Brunner devotes some of the most brilliant pages of *Land and Lordship* to a careful analysis of the feud. To modern eyes, the spectacle of noble lords taking up arms against their territorial ruler, making alliances with foreign powers, and concluding peace treaties with each other or with foreign princes can only appear as a collapse of political order. Brunner, however, penetrates beneath this apparent anarchy to describe a world in which the feuds functioned as formal legal actions through which conflicts were resolved and claims of right expressed and enforced. In effect, what Brunner did was to *decode* the feud; that is, to describe how feuds were waged in accordance with well-defined moral and legal codes of conduct.

Brunner likewise insisted that the modern disjunction of state and society had distorted our understanding of pre-modern economic life. Here, according to Brunner, the primary culprit was the

modern science of political economy, organized as it was around the categories of market, commerce, and exchange. These reflected, again, the disjunction of the social from the political, the public from the private. Brunner argued that the triumph of political economy in the late eighteenth century had all but obliterated an older tradition of economic thought, one that dated back to Aristotle and Xenophon and persisted up to the collapse of Old Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Within this tradition, economics (*oeconomia*) had been a science not of the market but of the household. Since for Brunner the noble household was the basic political unit of Old Europe, *oeconomia* was as much a political science as it was an economic one. Its object was the Aristotelian *oikos*, the *Haus*, or what was in Latin called the *familia*. Prior to the eighteenth century, these terms referred not simply to a kinship unit but to all individuals living under the authority of the house lord or house-father. In seigniorial households these could include subject peasants, in peasant households the hired hands, and in guild households journeymen and apprentices. To be sure, the science of *oeconomia* was concerned with agriculture, manufacturing and trade insofar as they promoted the autarky of the household. But *oeconomia* also treated subjects that lie entirely outside the sphere of economics as we know it, subjects that today would be classified under disciplines like sociology, political science, pedagogy, ethics, and even medicine. Hence, the older tradition of *oeconomia* was concerned with activities that were not only private and economic in character, but it also involved governmental functions and a whole set of assumptions about justice, Right, and social hierarchy. Above all, *oeconomia* was concerned with the proper relationship between the head of the household on the one hand, and his wife, children, and dependents on the other.

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The basic point behind Brunner's critique of modern historical scholarship was that one understands the past by seeing it whole, and one sees it whole by comprehending it in its own terms. Because, beginning with the nineteenth century, historians had fragmented the past into segments that were nothing more than reifications of their own disjoined consciousness, the actual structures of the past remained concealed from their view. "The danger here,"

he wrote in reference to modern medieval scholarship, “is that phenomena basic to the structure of the medieval world may be overlooked because the position allotted to them in the system of modern disciplines may conceal their significance for earlier periods.”⁹ Far from rejecting specialization, Brunner believed that historians could acquire a total view of the past only if they mastered the methods of related disciplines. His own work blended legal, constitutional, social, economic, and intellectual history with a skill that few medievalists have since rivaled. But Brunner insisted that, in drawing on the work of the social sciences, historians had to keep in mind the historical contingency of their concepts.

Which brings me back to *Begriffsgeschichte*. Brunner considered the history of concepts to be indispensable for rescuing historical scholarship from the liberal and national anachronisms that had distorted it. Necessary for the study of any past era, he argued, was the reconstruction of its conceptual universe, an enterprise that would enable historians to derive their cognitive categories from the sources themselves. Accordingly, much of Brunner's *Land and Lordship* was devoted to investigating the contemporaneous meanings of key terms (e.g., lordship, territory, feud). Hence, *Begriffsgeschichte* was, for Brunner, not simply one of a number of technical methods that historians were free to adopt or discard at will but an epistemological imperative. In Brunner's view, studying the history of key concepts provided a critical antidote to a liberal historiography that had accepted its categories as normative and imposed them on the past. Brunner was not a conceptual Luddite, and he did not believe that historians could dispense with modern concepts. Only by using modern concepts, after all, could historians render the past intelligible to the present. But, although historians had no choice but to employ modern concepts, these had to be understood as themselves historically conditioned.

At this point, few would quarrel with Brunner's insistence on the historicity of concepts. But Brunner went much further than this, as we see in two of his essays from the late 1930s; one was an address to the Congress of German Historians in Erfurt in 1937; the other was an article published in 1939 entitled “The Modern Concept of the Constitution and Medieval Constitutional History.” Brunner de-

⁹ Brunner, *Land and Lordship*, 101.

Brunner applied for membership in the Nazi party, and thereafter became firmly ensconced in the academic circles of the New Order. In the heady atmosphere of the *Anschluss*, it did not occur to Brunner that his own present—that of the Third Reich—would one day prove as contingent and anachronistic as the bourgeois *Rechtsstaat* he attacked. This was a lesson he was to learn in 1945, when the commission charged with denazifying the University of Vienna after Germany's defeat found Brunner's record of National Socialist activity strong enough to justify his suspension from his professorship; in 1948, after a vain appeal, Brunner was formally retired.¹³ In this case, Brunner's membership in the Nazi party counted against him; nor did it help that, in 1941, the Nazi historian Walter Frank had named Brunner to the board of the Reichsinstitut for the History of the New Germany, which was intended to mobilize the historical profession in a programmatically Nazi reconstruction of German history (a few months later, Frank awarded Brunner the Verdun Prize for his *Land and Lordship*, which, in Frank's words, served “to help the ideas of a creative New Order triumph even in the field of medieval scholarship”).¹⁴

In all fairness it must be said that, for all of Brunner's overt hostility to liberalism, there is no evidence that he ever became a fanatical adherent of National Socialism. Brunner did not apply for Nazi membership until after the *Anschluss*; this was held against him by Nazi party authorities in Austria, who tended to look upon post-*Anschluss* applicants as opportunistic “March Nazis” (March being the month of the *Anschluss*). This may in fact explain why Brunner's application for party membership was initially rejected in September 1943, although he was finally admitted into the party two months later. In assessing Brunner's politics during this period, it should also be noted that the anti-Semitic component of Nazi ideology is utterly absent from his work. He maintained warm relations with Jewish colleagues who were forced to flee after 1938 and, on numerous

¹³ On Brunner's relationship with the Nazi regime see Kaminsky and Melton, introduction to *Land and Lordship*, and Melton, “From Folk History to Structural History,” 265-272.

¹⁴ Quoted in Helmut Heiber, *Walter Frank und sein Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands* (Stuttgart, 1966), 609.

occasions, used his influence to shield Jewish acquaintances from persecution.¹⁵

Collaboration, like resistance, is a notoriously slippery and ambiguous category. It is certainly to Brunner's credit that he refused to denounce former colleagues who had been forced to flee the regime, and that he even rendered aid to those whose careers or lives were in danger. Nevertheless, the fact of his complicity with the regime is incontestable. Brunner's writings and activities both before and after the *Anschluß* went well beyond the bounds of simple conformity or careerism, and his writings prior to 1945 were simply too riddled with Nazi catch phrases to be dismissed as token gestures of support and obeisance.

In any case, Brunner's forced retirement after 1945 proved relatively short. Here his situation was quite typical: in what was to become the Federal Republic of Germany, most historians who had held academic chairs under the Nazis retained their positions after 1945. Others, like Brunner, who were suspended after the war, were often able to resume their careers in the 1950s.¹⁶ Brunner himself returned to academic life in 1952, when he spent a year as a visiting professor at the University of Cologne; two years later his appointment to Hermann Aubin's vacant chair at the University of Hamburg completed Brunner's rehabilitation, and he remained at Hamburg for the remainder of his career.

¹⁵ These included the young medievalist Erich Zöllner, whose mother was Jewish and who worked under Brunner as an *Assistent* at the university. In accordance with the Nuremberg decrees on race, Zöllner was formally declared a "mongrel of the first degree" (Mischling I. Grades) and would have lost his position at the institute had not Brunner intervened on his behalf (sworn deposition of Erich Zöllner, July 2, 1945). Brunner also came to the aid of Johanna Baltinester, a schoolteacher who had previously taught his wife Stephanie. After the Baltinesters were declared "full Jews" (Vollfuden) in 1942, the S.S. arrested Johanna's parents and sister; they were later deported to a concentration camp and did not survive the war. Johanna, who was hiking with friends when her family was arrested, sought refuge with the Brunners. They found her a safe hiding place in the apartment of Stephanie Brunner's aunt and, for the remainder of the war, provided fifty marks a month for her support (sworn deposition of Johanna Baltinester, June 20, 1945). Copies of the documents cited above were kindly provided to me by Brunner's daughter, Dr. Hedwig Brunner.

¹⁶ See James Van Horn Melton, "Introduction: Continuities in German Historical Scholarship, 1933-1960," in Lehmann and Melton, *Paths of Continuity*, 1-18.

How did Brunner's concepts change after 1945? How, in other words, do we write a *Begriffsgeschichte* of Brunner's own intellectual development? Brunner himself left a record of his conceptual shifts in the four editions of *Land and Lordship* published between 1939 and 1959. Not surprisingly, in the first postwar edition of 1959, Brunner toned down the stridently anti-liberal language found in the first three editions. He deleted every overtly pro-Nazi passage and tried to eliminate what my co-translator Howard Kaminsky liked to call the "F-words": terms like folk, folk-community, folk-order, or *Führung*. Brunner performed these retrospective amputations in a manner more suggestive of a meat cleaver than a scalpel. Entire passages were eliminated *in toto*, with little effort to preserve the integrity of the text or the coherence of the argument. As one can imagine, this made translating Brunner a difficult and often frustrating task. In struggling with the blatant discontinuities that mar the 1959 edition, Kaminsky and I sometimes wished we had chosen to translate one of the earlier, unexpurgated editions. In the end we opted for a compromise: where we found the flow of the book broken by Brunner's excisions, we added in brackets the original passage from the 1943 edition in order to establish logical continuity.

But beyond these excisions, which appear to have been made rather hastily and for obvious political reasons, the 1959 edition of *Land and Lordship* does reveal a substantive change in Brunner's historical thought. His belief in historical discontinuity remained, and he continued to view *Begriffsgeschichte* as a means of bridging the cognitive gulf that separated the present from the past. However, where he had earlier located two breaks between the world of the present and that of Old Europe, he now found only one. This was the break brought about by the French and Industrial Revolutions, giving rise to what Brunner (following the sociologist Hans Freyer) now called simply "industrial society." Brunner jettisoned his earlier conviction that the liberal order of the nineteenth century had been superseded, and thereby affirmed a fundamental continuity between the nineteenth century and the present. What Brunner did, in effect, was what many other German intellectuals of his generation did: he made his peace with the liberal principles he had once condemned as the aborted offspring of the nineteenth century.

One could, of course, dismiss this change of heart as patently opportunistic or, more generously, see it as an act of contrition on

the part of a defeated people now eager to embrace the liberal values they had once repudiated. Neither possibility excludes the other. Where it led, in any case, was to a shift in perspective that one finds not just in Brunner but in West German historical scholarship as a whole. This was the shift from the narrow, Germanocentric perspective that had characterized the German historical discipline up to 1945 to a broader, pan-European one. The Germanocentrism of the profession had been rooted in notions of German exceptionalism, which invoked the idea of Germany's "special path" or *Sonderweg* as evidence of the nation's moral and political superiority vis-à-vis the West. Bernd Faulenbach has traced this idea, which rested on a number of invidious comparisons—for example, between the organic "wholeness" of the German idealist tradition and the arid materialism of the Western European Enlightenment, or between the selfless devotion to the state found in Germany's authoritarian version of constitutional monarchy and the shallow self-interest that enervated Western parliamentary government.¹⁷

After 1945, however, the model of German exceptionalism gave way in West German scholarship to a new identification with Europe. Already in 1946 one finds Gerhard Ritter voicing hopes for what he called "a new epoch of Europeanism," while Friedrich Meinecke's *German Catastrophe* (published the same year) called for a United States of Europe.¹⁸ In the case of Brunner, this postwar, pan-European perspective is evident in the title of his first major postwar work, *Noble Rural Life and European Culture* (1949). We also find this perspective in Brunner's *New Paths of Social History*, whose essays center around the theme of European civilization as unique and as the origin of a global culture. Similarly, although the first three editions of his *Land and Lordship* emphasized the tribal-Germanic origins of medieval concepts of Right and obligation, this Germanistic rhetoric disappeared from the postwar edition of 1959.

For Brunner and other historians in the immediate postwar period, this new identification with Europe in part reflected the hope

¹⁷ 16 Bernd Faulenbach, *Ideologie des deutschen Weges. Die deutsche Geschichte in der Historiographie zwischen Kaiserreich und Nationalsozialismus* (Munich, 1980).

¹⁸ Gerhard Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage* (Munich, 1948), 7; Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*, trans. Sidney Fay (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), 1.

that Germany could quickly shed its pariah status and gain acceptance into the postwar Western European political community. Their pan-European perspective was also the ideological precondition and consequence of West Germany's integration into the Atlantic alliance. With the unfolding of the Cold War, the allegiance to Europe proved congenial to conservative historians who saw West Germany as the last Western outpost against Soviet communism.¹⁹

However one interprets the change in perspective that marked Brunner's work after 1945, its effect was to salvage his methodological insights by detaching them from their National Socialist moorings. Or to put it differently: Brunner's *Begriffsgeschichte* was "denazified," its function now hermeneutical rather than overtly political. This ensured its survival into the postwar era, most notably in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Brunner's theoretical contribution to the GG is evident in its central thesis, namely that social and political language underwent a fundamental transformation during the period from 1750 to 1850.²⁰ An explicit aim of the lexicon is to describe how, in the course of this transitional era (what Reinhart Koselleck called the "saddle period"), the structures of Old Europe dissolved and the modern era emerged. As we have seen, this approach is fully consonant with Brunner's earlier model in all but one respect: the *terminus ad quem* of history was not the folk-community but simply "the modern world," or what Brunner and Conze now called industrial society. The break between the liberal order of the nineteenth century and the present thereby disappeared, just as it had disappeared in Brunner's thought after 1945.

This points to the central irony of Brunner and *Begriffsgeschichte*. Originating as a radical-conservative critique of liberalism, Brunner's *Begriffsgeschichte* ended up affirming it. This affirmation, rooted in the presumption of continuity between the nineteenth century and the present, paralleled broader developments in the West German historical discipline after 1945. As we have seen, it facilitated the shift from a pan-German to a pan-European historical perspective. At the same time, it signified an abandonment of the anti-

¹⁹ Melton, "Introduction."

²⁰ See Reinhart Koselleck, "Einleitung," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck. 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972-1993), I:xv.

modernism so pervasive in German historical thought during the first half of this century.

The consequences are evident not only in the GG but in other fields of historical scholarship. In German social history, for example, the concept of industrial society embraced by Brunner and others after 1945 proved highly fruitful as a heuristic tool. First, the very comprehensiveness of the concept encouraged historians to conceive of historical change in the broadest possible sense. It made room for more generalizing and typological approaches, thereby facilitating the important if belated reception of Max Weber in postwar German historical scholarship. Second, the concept of industrial society implied an acceptance, however resigned, of the social and political transformations of the nineteenth century. As a result, historical phenomena that had earlier been viewed as symptoms of cultural decline, such as the rise of the working class or the emergence of mass politics, were now more amenable to analysis in their own terms.

The consequences are less apparent in Brunner's scholarship, which centered chiefly around the medieval and early modern periods, but they are plainly evident in the work of scholars like Werner Conze and Theodor Schieder. In addition to co-editing the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Conze also served as editor of *Industrielle Welt*; this series, which began publication in 1962 and currently runs to almost fifty volumes, basically founded the study of labor history in the Federal Republic. And, while Schieder's interests remained more oriented toward political history, his structural approach to the history of political parties, nation-state formation, and the problem of revolution in the modern era pointed the way to the "social history of politics" that was later associated with the work of Hans-Ulrich Wehler and the so-called Bielefeld school.

In short, the *Begriffsgeschichte* of *Begriffsgeschichte* is revealing for what it says not only about the genesis of the GG, but also about the fundamental changes that have marked the development of German historical scholarship during the previous half-century.

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On the Margins of *Begriffsgeschichte*

Donald R. Kelley

I want to make a brief comment on and leave you with a small question about *Begriffsgeschichte* (the history of concepts). I speak from the standpoint of an intellectual historian who has ties with the American counterpart of this field, that is, the history of ideas, especially as it was formulated by Arthur O. Lovejoy, the founder of the periodical that I presently edit, the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.¹ A half-century ago, when the journal was just starting out, a better comparison would have been made with *Geistesgeschichte* or *Ideengeschichte*; but there have been some changes since the somewhat unreflective idealism of all of those enterprises; and I like to think that intellectual history, in its Anglophone as well as its German forms, has grown and learned something since those pre-postmodern days.

First, a bit of historical background. What was common to both the American and German approaches at that earlier time was a reliance on, and perhaps even an intimidation by philosophical tradition. That was a period when philosophy was still aspiring to conceptual supremacy, still claiming to be a “rigorous science” (*strenge Wissenschaft*), in the phrase used by Husserl (and, incidentally, Leo Strauss), repeating the claim made by Kantians two centuries earlier.² Lovejoy himself was in the forefront of professional philosophy in the first half of this century (and I find it amusing and perhaps significant that, in 1912, he was chairman of the Committee on Definitions of the American Philosophical Association).³ In any case, his celebration and employment of what he called “unit-ideas”

¹ See the group of articles on “Lovejoy, *The Great Chain*, and the History of Ideas,” especially that of Melvin Richter, “*Begriffsgeschichte* and the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987), and my own “Horizons of Intellectual History,” *ibid.*, 143-69, esp. 163 (on *Begriffsgeschichte*), and *ibid.*, 51 (1990), “What is Happening to the History of Ideas?” repr. in *History of Ideas: Canon and Variations*, ed. Donald R. Kelley (Rochester, N.Y., 1991), with a much more relevant bibliography.

² “Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft,” *Logos* 1 (1911):289-341.

³ Daniel J. Wilson, *Arthur O. Lovejoy and the Quest for Intelligibility* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980), 87.

was a way of preserving the intellectual hegemony of philosophy, his first discipline of choice, and of subordinating to it the upstart, interdisciplinary field already known as the history of ideas.⁴

Here is the beginning of a problem that I think still affects both historians of ideas and *Begriffshistoriker* (historians of concepts). Many years ago, George Boas, Lovejoy's colleague, posed the question: "Just what is it we are writing the history of?"⁵ But Boas was a philosopher, too, and I am not sure he appreciated what a mixed blessing the notion of "ideas" has been to historians. On the positive side, ideas have permitted scholars to rise above the level of biography or literary chronicle. Ideas become characters, whether good or evil, heroic or tragic, in the stories that historians tell about the past of civilization. They become ways of tracing collective intellectual effort, dialogue, and exchange across many centuries and cultures—a shorthand for doing general intellectual history. On the other side of the ledger, this idealist shorthand has led scholars to beg many questions about the interpretation of texts, the construction of cultural contexts, and historical semantics in general.

Here I must interject a marginal comment. I find it curious that the epistemological consequences of transporting ideas from philosophical psychology into cultural history—demonstrating the shift from individual conception to collective expression and historical transference—has provoked very little discussion among either historians or philosophers. Philosophers speak of ideas as the stable currency of intellectual exchange to be invidiously contrasted to mere opinion, while historians, making no such distinction, take ideas as vehicles of intellectual and cultural transmission over many centuries and across many cultures. *Begriffsgeschichte*, much more than Anglophone intellectual history, has faced these semantic problems.⁶

⁴ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), ch. 1.

⁵ George Boas, *The History of Ideas* (New York, 1969).

⁶ I am currently writing a book on the historical background of the history of ideas, a field that emerged nominally in the eighteenth century as an offshoot of the history of philosophy; in particular, I am trying to follow the transformation of the concept of "idea" in this context from a principle of psychology or epistemology into a category of historical interpretation, a vehicle of intercultural communication, and a subject of historical criticism.

In general, it seems to me, ideas have been the spiritual creatures of the philosophers, having found their modern definition and legitimacy in the tradition of critical and neocritical philosophy initiated by Kant. Not that ideas in this mode have gone unexamined; for the skeptical impulse that awakened Kant from his dogmatic slumber was not spent with the formation of the so-called “critical philosophy.” As Hume remarked (and as most Kantians chose to ignore), “Skepticism is a malady which can never be radically cured, but must return upon us at every moment, however we may chase it away.”⁷ The trouble was, however, that the new assault of skepticism in Kant's day was not taken seriously, because it came not from a philosophical authority quarter but rather from scholars whose concerns were historical and, above all, linguistic. The particular form that this skepticism took in the later eighteenth century was the so-called *Metakritik* of Herder, which took Kant to task for his evasion of the diverse, unstable, and historically constructed medium of language on which the expression of ideas depends.⁸ In our own time, a similar raising of the critical stakes has been brought about by scholars who, like Herder, take literary history and criticism as their point of departure.

Herder's metacriticism was an early example of the so-called “linguistic turn”—a turn that philosophy failed to take, however, in that euphoric age of philosophical idealism. In our own century, a similar criticism has been brought to the history of ideas; and to illustrate, I refer to the famous debate between Lovejoy and Leo Spitzer in the fifth volume of the *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1944), which was carried on with particular reference to Nazism.⁹ In this exchange, Spitzer objected to Lovejoy's implication that ideas

⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I, iv, 1.

⁸ Johann G. Herder, “Metakritik,” in *Sämtliche Werke*, XXXVII (Stuttgart, 1853), 17; and cf. William Alexander, “Johann Georg Hamann, Metacritic of Kant,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966):137-144.

⁹ Geistesgeschichte vs. the History of Ideas as Applied to Hitlerism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 5 (1944), repr., with Lovejoy's response, in Kelley, *History of Ideas*. See also Harry Levin, “Two Romanisten in America: Spitzer and Auerbach,” in *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 463-484, and Thomas Bredsdorff “Lovejoy's Idea of 'Idea,’” *New Literary History* 8 (1977):195-211.

were detachable from human emotion, experience, and “spiritual climate” and that, if not actually preserved in the mind of God, as medieval theologians believed, they were at least spiritually reproducible in the mind of the intellectual historian. Spitzer, of course, came to his critique through philology and his own sort of linguistic and semantic historicism. Although he believed in a spiritual dimension of linguistic traces, he never tried (in Gadamer's famous phrase) to “get behind the back of language.”¹⁰ For Spitzer, the underlying *Geist* of meaning was accessible only through what he called a “philological circle,” a linguistic analogy of the hermeneutical circle employed to determine—by approximation and, as it were, triangulation—the locus of meaning of terms according to particular and changing usage.¹¹ Lovejoy, in his view, inclined to a rational method that subjected discourse to a mechanical kind of philosophical analysis that was both unhistorical and, as people say nowadays, decontextualized. It was the Kantian *Kritik* and the Herderian *Metakritik* all over again—and again from the field of literary history and criticism, but this time on the level of the history of thought.

Neither historians of ideas nor *Begriffshistoriker* have, it seems to me, given much credit to the work of scholars like Spitzer, Vossler, Auerbach, or even Curtius, in part, no doubt, because of their associations with the “old historicism.” In any case, American intellectual historians worship at different altars, some of them at a “new historicism” (which, however, seems as innocent of linguistic self-criticism as Lovejoy or Boas).¹² More recently, American scholars have taken their inspiration from textualist and deconstructionist methods, imported mainly from France, oft in garbled and historically uncritical form, and, of late, from *Begriffsgeschichte*, which adds the authority of the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer and methodological offspring, such as *Rezeptionsgeschichte*.

Yet for some critics, the linguistic turn of this generation has not been completed. Skepticism continues to threaten our inquiries and, in its newest form—which might be called the “textualist turn”—

¹⁰ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, tr. D. Linge (Berkeley, Calif., 1976), 35

¹¹ Leo Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History* (Princeton, NJ., 1948), 28.

¹² One recent critique is Brook Thomas, *The New Historicism and Other Old-Fashioned Topics* (Princeton, NJ., 1992); and see Kelley, “Horizons of Intellectual History,” 163.

provokes one to another level of criticism. According to this new phase of metaphysically destructive *Kritik* (exemplified, but not exhausted, by Heidegger), not only is there no “thing in itself” and no “past in itself,” but there is no idea in itself and perhaps not even a word in itself: there is no *Ding an sich*, no *Vergangenheit an sich*, no *Begriff an sich*, and no *Wort an sich*. The question that continues to preoccupy me is whether we have entirely absorbed the lessons of this sort of criticism. Have we altogether extricated ourselves from the residues of insufficiently critical idealism and the false security of spiritual, *geistlich* foundations—the concepts and ideas that continue to be our common stock-in-trade and the spiritualist premises on which they have flourished? Are we still working “behind the back of language?”

This question is further complicated by the problem of context, which corresponds more or less to the social history of which concepts, or terms locating concepts, are indicators. For contexts, or socio-historical reality, must be constructed out of texts that one reads from a significant cultural distance and a linguistic medium with which people communicate and remember as well as formulate and argue. Our concepts and terms do not really permit us, for example, to re-think our way back to pre-Copernican or pre-revolutionary intellectual horizons, but only to devise a historical rhetoric that derives its main force from employment of the past tense and various imaginative conceits.

Many of you have heard of the Indian myth that represents the earth as resting on the back of a turtle that, in its turn, rests on another turtle, and the associated anecdote about the response of an Indian to the question, “What does the last turtle rest on?” The answer was, “It’s turtles all the way down.” Well, the same holds true for the understanding of cultural artifacts such as texts, myths, and concepts: it’s interpretations all the way down. This, I would suggest, is the hermeneutical condition of modern intellectual history and *Begriffsgeschichte*, and it is unwise to proceed as if this recent assault of skepticism never took place. One of the primary virtues of *Begriffsgeschichte* is that it tries to build a bridge between the old intellectual world of comfortably shared ideas and the new scene, opened up by the linguistic turn, of disputed and problematically authored texts, which are all that most of us historians can count on.

For me, this alone is good reason to celebrate the completion of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, the most substantial product of our German cousins, extending and cultivating the terrain of intellectual, social, and cultural history.

On Koselleck's Intuition of Time in History

Gabriel Motzkin

Reinhart Koselleck's entire work in *Begriffsgeschichte* (the history of concepts) has been carried out with two central parameters in mind. The first is the idea that historical discontinuity can be precisely located through conceptual analysis. If history is characterized by breaks as well as continuities, then those breaks are reflected in language. Moreover, language can be the context of origin of a historical discontinuity, which then radiates from language to events and institutions. This intuition, which replaces the history of ideas by the linguistic history of concepts as a historical reality, has been shared by many historians of the last generation. When the intellectual history of our century is written, the historicization of linguistic method will perhaps be viewed as the counter-movement to the resolute anti-historicism of contemporary linguistics.

Koselleck's thought has also been characterized by a second, no less important, somewhat more implicit intuition, one that surfaces in many different contexts of his thought and has been less noticed because of its apparent banality. It surfaces most explicitly in his thought when he talks about the sense of the "acceleration" of time occasioned by the French Revolution. This idea of acceleration, so he implies, is the modern substitute for older, messianic notions of the end of days. It can only be understood in the context of an infinite, open-ended future, thus depriving acceleration of its threat of finality. The idea that the rate of change is accelerating is not a new one in our culture, but Koselleck uses it in ways that are illuminating for his quest to understand the transition to modernity.

This perception of acceleration as a historical force is also reflective of one of Koselleck's habits of mind: namely, the quest for historical intensity. In Koselleck's understanding, concepts do not vary only according to their semantic field but also according to the temporal assumptions built into them. Thus, a concept such as *Volk* becomes a future-oriented concept at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Not only does this shift from past to future imply a different sense, for example, of the word *Volk*, it also implies a different sense of future. Moreover, this shift then assigns other concepts to the past, which itself is also reconceived.

The temporal variability as reflected in the concept of acceleration is not only a variability in tense, it is also a variability in two other facets, namely, extension and intensity. By extension, I mean temporal extension, or duration, by which I mean that a concept can be seen as implying a characterization of a moment or of a long period. Thus, in addition to its tense-orientation, a concept carries with it a reference to the period of time it intends. This aspect, I do not need to point out, is quite different from the history of the concept, since a concept varies not only according to its changing history but also to whether the future it intends is long or short, whether the past to which it refers is near or far. A conceptual shift from a near past to a long future or from a distant past to a short future can often be noticed in historical shifts. Moreover, this temporal extension of concepts can help explain how concepts affect the extra-conceptual world, which political and social concepts presume as their referent. The call to action that is sometimes implicit in a concept is often mediated by the sense of temporality it communicates to its audience.

There is a second kind of temporal variability in concepts, one that is the intuition underlying Koselleck's notion of historical acceleration. Namely, experiences vary in intensity, and, just as they vary in intensity, so, too, does the time-experience bundled up together with historical experience. Decisive moments may or may not characterize history, but they certainly characterize our sense of experience, especially when it is mediated through retrospection.

Intensity itself has a long history, and a history of intensity in the modern age would have to include the differential calculus together with apocalyptic experience. Neo-Kantian theories of knowledge assumed that the acquisition of new scientific knowledge is always an intensive rather than a linearly incremental process.

Intensity in our present context means the variable intensity and the intensity-production of concepts and linguistic structures. Concepts can vary in the degree to which they evoke a sense of the density or thinness of the time-experience associated with them. However, I take Koselleck's intuition in his description of the sense of acceleration to signify something more; namely, that he believes that intensity itself becomes a regulative ideal of modernity: the modern not only believes that time and experience and the acquisition of knowledge are speeding up, but he wants this speedup to go on—forever.

If that is so, then the process of intensification can be found elsewhere than in the French Revolution. For example, using Koselleck's categories, I think the argument could be made that Hitler's linguistic operation can be characterized as the ultimately transgressive intensification of metaphor. What I mean is that Hitler does something other than take a metaphor as such or literally. Rather, the metaphorical language, through a process of intensification, becomes the controlling linguistic reality, one that itself is to be realized in an intensive speedup process. Not only did Hitler believe that Jews are bugs; he also believed he had no time. This intensive realization then means that the distinction between metaphor and reality is constantly being erased—just as in the scientific acquisition of knowledge, the distinction between the known and the unknown is constantly being erased. The metaphorical hunger for reality devours reality by taking its objects—in this example, the persecuted Jews—and relocating them in this reality-striving metaphorical consciousness. The idea is that, just as metaphor will become reality, so, too, will reality be structured as a metaphorical reality. Hitler's Jews have to be created in order to be destroyed. The world is to become a real metaphor, and the mode of realizing that aim is to be intensive.

The idea of acceleration has been transformed from a passive sense of what is happening in the context to an active process for generating reality. The temporal extension of a concept first becomes a metaphor and then a program for action. In this way, moreover, the temporal extension of a concept has been detached from the concept itself, as if substantives take on specific adjectives, which are then separated from those substantives but nonetheless continue to contain some of the semantic field of the substantives to which they were originally attached.

When we compare these two variables, the time-intensity of a concept and its temporal extension, we see readily that each of these variables produces a different temporal effect; there is no necessary correlation between the intensity of a concept and its extension. That, in turn, has a further implication: it signifies that the past viewed through the lens of intensity—acceleration in Koselleck's language—and the past viewed through extension is not the same past; that is, that we are using words such as past, present, and future in different senses here. Not only can concepts become future-oriented, and not only can this future be of different duration or

have a different content, but, in addition, the structure of this future is prescribed by the lens or lenses embedded in the concept. We may or may not think that a long and intensive future is really a historical possibility, sensing we are uneasy about the conflation of infinite duration and infinite intensity. However, it is a question whether the concept of future is being used in the same sense here; the referent may be quite different. We would then have to say that a concept can have not only one future-orientation embedded in it but different future-orientations referring to differently structured futures that exist in different dimensions. The temporal polysemy of concepts is only possible if a concept can emit different temporal signals at the same time.

The question then arises of the degree of closeness or distance between these different time-dimensions. Reading Koselleck's contributions to the article on *Volk* in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, it becomes clear that the process of intensification of the use of *Volk* was not only a consequence of its future-orientation, but also of the degree to which these two dimensions, extension and intensity, grew closer, that a message sent out in one dimension could be mis- and reread as a message in the other dimension. The confounding of metaphor and reality is compounded by a deliberate interlacing of the concept's polysemy: *Volk* means many different things on many levels. These meanings are deliberately exchanged and confused. When they are exchanged and confused, the temporal extensions and intensities are not always carried along in the linguistic transfer. The concept then either obtains new intensities or creates new intensities from the collision, such as between pre-political and political meanings. These new intensities in turn propel the concept further.

The question that remains is one of the limit of variation. On the one hand, concepts have infinitely variable meanings. On the other hand, we recognize long-range identities. This variation is not random. My suggestion, following Koselleck and the considerations above, is that the limit of variation is not a limit of some immutability inherent in a concept; words can and do take on opposite and unrelated meanings. However, the set of possible time-variations is finite. Different futures are intended on different levels of the same concepts; but all concepts have temporal extension and intensity, and all historical concepts are embedded in tense-structures.

It is superfluous to add that such considerations would not be possible without Koselleck's work, especially in the *Geschichtliche*

Grundbegriffe. The philosophy of time has taken on a special importance in the twentieth century, and the linkage between that philosophy and its historical context has not yet been adequately characterized by historians. Koselleck's contribution has been that he has taken this sense of the questionability of temporal structures into an investigation of the language of the past. This project appears to be an analysis of concepts, but it is ultimately a synthetic one, since it seeks to bring the sense of time back into the sense of history through the medium of the analysis of language.

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**Concepts and Discourses:
A Difference in Culture?
Comment on a Paper by Melvin Richter**

J. G. A. Pocock

My comments must be limited to Professor Richter's paper. I know little of German history or historiography and am therefore not competent to speak on the matters raised by Professor Melton. I do not read German and so am debarred from profiting directly by the great work of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Thus, I shall focus on three questions raised by Professor Richter and comment on them from a point of view shaped by parallel or comparable concerns arising in the practice of Anglophone historiography and the study of Anglophone political and cultural history. I use the term Anglophone in the hope that the archaic and unwelcome term Anglo-Saxon will not again assail my ears.

The three questions raised by Richter that I mean to address are: the differences between a history of concepts and a history of discourses, languages, ideologies, or whatever you prefer to call them; Quentin Skinner's challenging assertion that a history of concepts cannot in fact be written; and what Richter has had to say concerning the hypotheses advanced by Professor Koselleck attendant upon the concept of a (more precisely, the) *Sattelzeit*. With regard to the first question, I would like to stress that a language or discourse is, in my usage and in that of Skinner and others, a complex structure comprising a vocabulary; a grammar; a rhetoric; and a set of usages, assumptions, and implications existing together in time and employable by a semi-specific community of language-users for purposes political, interested in and extending sometimes as far as the articulation of a world-view or ideology. It is not necessary, though it is possible, for one such language to exist by itself to the exclusion or even the domination of all others; more commonly, a number of such languages exist concurrently, in confrontation, contestation, and interaction with one another. They are not, though they may attempt to be, mutually exclusive; rather, a single complex of usages or terminology may display a character impure in the sense that it partakes of meanings drawn from several languages and sometimes non-congruent with one another, with the result that it may be dif-

difficult to isolate any concept in an uncontested or unambivalent condition.

These languages do not, therefore, form closed and self-sufficient language-worlds, though I have heard rumors of a philosophy of language which affirms that every discourse is so tightly woven and self-dependent that it is incapable of change, and that every transition from one discourse to another is incapable of rational explanation. Such a contention, if it has indeed been put forward, must strike the historian of my persuasion as so ridiculously holistic that there is no point in wasting time on its refutation. Nor is it the case, as critics of Skinner and myself have sought to argue, that the historical techniques employed in reconstituting a language-world are incapable of accounting for change within it. On the contrary, they employ a double stress: one resting on the language that surrounds human agents in specific historical situations and one on the humans themselves as acting or responding within the languages available to them. This leaves plenty of room for exploring both the innovations and other creative acts performed or attempted by individual users of language—some of which go or aim to go very far indeed—and the slower, multi-authored, and socially or historically induced processes of change that take place within and among the languages available in specific societies and cultures over specific and variously prolonged periods of time.¹

It is into this presentation of the history of political speech and writing that the program of a *Begriffsgeschichte* has to be fitted, as we pass from a *deutschsprechende* to an Anglophone community of historians. I am putting things in this somewhat pre-emptive way, because what I have described as the history of discourse approach is at present in command of the field among Anglophones and is not, as far as they are aware, in any state of crisis that calls urgently for innovative rescue or assistance. How, then, does a history of

¹ For this method and its assumptions see: James Tully and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Princeton, N.J., 1989); Conal Condren, *The Status and Appraisal of Classic Texts* (Princeton, N.J., 1985); Terence Ball, *Transforming Political Discourse: Political Theory and Critical Conceptual History* (New York, 1988); Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1987); J. G. A. Pocock, *Politica, Linguaggio e Storia*, essays trans. by Giuseppe Gadda Conti and ed. by Ettore A. Albertoni (Milan, 1990).

concepts approach look to historians of the Anglophone sort; what may it do that they are not doing already; in what ways might it reinforce, supplement, challenge, or subvert their existing procedures?

Here the first thing to be said appears to be that, since languages or discourses are complex structures whose components exist concurrently in time, to study them is to set a premium upon the synchronic. This group of historians is interested in the state of the language—or of the complex of interacting languages—at the time, and in forming the context, in which (let us suppose) a given author has set about constructing his text, his oration, or his participation in some conversation or debate that has been preserved for them. They are interested in what the language did to the writer by way of shaping his discourse and in what he may have done in, with, and particularly to the language by way of the acts he performed within and upon it.

These academics concern themselves with a history of contexts and texts, of language structures and the uses made of them. Their stress on particular performances by individual writers and speakers means that they set up a synchronically existing language-world in order to see how it was being used at the moment and how it was being changed in the short run. They are as heavily committed to the dynamic as they are to the static. But they are better at establishing the character of innovations in the synchronic than at tracing the more long-term pattern of changes in the diachronic; that is, at going from a world in which it was possible to say some things to one in which it was possible to say only others, or at articulating the language patterns inherent in the successive moments of that process of change. This is especially true because long-term patterns of change in language use are difficult to reduce to the performances of identifiable authors and lend themselves to description in terms of the implicit and the ideal—both of which are mistrusted. All of this has, I hasten to make dear, a definite set of ideological connotations. It is part of that constant criticism of over-confidence in knowing the course of history that characterizes this post-revolutionary age.

How, to restate the question, might an approach that I shall take to be that of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* relate to the approach I am outlining? It seems possible to visualize a diagram of web, warp, and woof (I am sure there are German equivalents for these English textile terms), in which the part of the horizontal threads is taken by the synchronically existing languages or discourses, and that

of the vertical threads by the history of individual concepts. It is true that the history of discourse comes equipped with an already existing vertical component: that formed by the changes and tensions set up by the actions, perceptions, and responses of the human agents acting within and upon the several languages. But it is also true that “historians of discourse,” alert though they must constantly be for alterations of usage, assumption, nuance, and so on, are not systematically addicted to dissolving the languages they study into the “concepts” (as I will provisionally term them) of which these languages are compounded or to tracing the history of change in each of these severally. Yet it is clear—and, in the presence of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, it would plainly be impious to doubt it—that the histories of all these component elements can be separately traced and juxtaposed, so that they can be set vertically across the horizontal histories of the various language systems, forming a vertical dimension to the pattern differing from the previous vertical dimension of which I spoke—that provided by individual innovations and their consequent effects in the form of change.

It strikes me, in short, as a genuinely interesting possibility that there might come to exist a historical lexicon of principal terms and concepts (I use these terms loosely, for the moment) in the fields of discourse that I study, in which the history of each separate item was severally set forth and made available for my instruction. By “the history of each separate item,” I mean the history of the changing contexts in which it had been used; the changing ways in which, and purposes for which, it had been used; and the changing freights of implication, assumption, and other modes of significance that had, from time to time, been attached to it. I am, in principle, convinced that such a lexicon would tell me a very great deal that I would not learn for myself, if only for the reason that its authors would have been proceeding in ways other than mine, would have been asking different questions, and, in consequence, making different discoveries. I should, I am certain, learn much information and acquire many insights from such an enterprise that would not arise from my own enquiries and would both enrich and challenge them. If I were to hear that an enterprise similar to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* were afoot with reference to the history of Anglophone political discourse, I should be delighted. But is that enough?

Knowing, as I do, no more of this great accomplishment than I have been able to learn from Professor Richter, I am aware of a diffi-

culty—which may do it less than justice—in thinking of it as more than a potentially invaluable and deeply exciting ancillary to historical study. The reason for this lies in what I have heard of its lexical structure and alphabetical arrangement. I will not make the mistake of supposing that the very distinguished historians who have written in it are mere harmless drudges, compiling data for real historians to use—the mistake, by the way, that the young Edward Gibbon denounced in d'Alembert. To write the serious history of a changing term, usage, or concept is a stark and challenging task that requires real scholarship and historical insight to carry through. But a discourse or language, such as I have tried to describe, is a complex and living entity, a system, or even an organism, and its history is composed of many interacting narratives and is the history of something affecting human life in an almost inexhaustible variety of ways. No lexicon of concepts, however comprehensive and exhaustive, can add up to—though, as Professor Richter reminded us, it may help to delineate—such a system or an organism or to anything having a history as complex as that of a language. Possibly, this is what Wittgenstein meant when employing the term *Lebensform*.

I do not mean by this that the *Begriffe*, or concepts, of which the lexicon is composed are simple integers making up the language. On the contrary, they are hard, complicated, knotty, and ambivalent, and their several histories must be by no means easy to write. I do mean, however, that, separated from one another and arranged in alphabetical order, they cannot display that interrelatedness they possess when arranged—not by lexicographers but by language-building and -using creatures in the historical past—so as to constitute languages as written or spoken in the complexity of human discourse. The history of each must have been abstracted and isolated, as one cuts a slice or sinks a shaft through stratified archaeological or geological deposits. The value of doing so is potentially very considerable; it brings to light aspect after aspect of the history of language, and of discourse, which cannot be uncovered in any other way. Still I find myself thinking of this enterprise as ancillary to the history of multiple discourses and to the people who have used and been used by them, and I do not find myself capable of imagining this relation reversed. Professor Richter speaks of the reconstitution of languages as the next item on the agenda. My difficulty arises from the fact that I and others have addressed it first.

The selection of the *Begriffe* whose history has been written must have been an awesome and daunting task. No matter how comprehensive, it must still be a selection, very hard to keep from privileging some aspects of language, politics, society, and history by the relegation or exclusion of others. That is the strongest case I can conceive for arranging the concepts to be treated in alphabetical order. Any other arrangement, except a purely random one, would have been another act of selection, carrying with it interpretative and very likely ideological consequences, and once one has decided to tell a multitude of histories in isolation from one another, one must be particularly careful to avoid arranging them in patterns with a disengaged hand, as it were, without acknowledging to the reader or to oneself that this is what one has been doing.

Yet, if one is telling a multitude of histories that never reduce themselves to a smaller number of histories, let alone to one, what becomes of the claim, which Professor Richter's English translation of the German title seemed to make, that the concepts making up the dictionary are basic in history? To what history can they be basic, other than their own? That may be the answer, and I would not quarrel with it or—heaven forbid—despise it. But the enterprise must be very different from that in which I find myself engaged, where the texts help you to see in what history they are, or suppose themselves to be, acting.

The question here (or hereabouts) arises of whether the history of concepts thus conducted leads the historian to formulate any general hypotheses about history, such those that Professor Koselleck has formulated with regard to a *Sattelzeit*. Are these essentially or accidentally related to the discipline and practice of *Begriffsgeschichte*? That is the third question arising from Professor Richter's paper that I wish to address. Before reaching it, however, I would like to speak briefly about the second.

The second question is that raised by Quentin Skinner's assertion that it is not, strictly speaking, possible to write a history of concepts at all. As I understand Skinner at this point, he is saying that the history to be written is one of language phenomena, of words and their usages, and that the conceptual freights they carry (he is, of course, not denying that the notion of a concept means something) cannot be detached from the history of language and made to have independent histories of their own. I am in considerable sympathy with this contention, since long ago I decided that I would no

longer describe what I was doing by the then conventional term “history of ideas” on the grounds that, while ideas obviously formed themselves in the human mind, the term by itself did not indicate the concrete historical form in which ideas exhibited themselves as undergoing continuity and change in history. *Ideen* and *Begriffe* are of course not necessarily identical, but I think the same difficulty may arise regarding a history of concepts as regarding a history of ideas. That is, scholars in this field shall find themselves examining a history of language, of vocabularies, grammars, rhetorics, and their usages, for the most part in written and printed form, in which words and usages convey concepts from mind to mind. Nevertheless, the history that must be written is the history of how they do this and what has been done with them in achieving their effects. I am not saying that concepts are epiphenomenal or unreal; and it is not my business to say that language is the only ultimate reality. But I am inclined to say that the concept is the effect or message of the language, and that what has been preserved in the accumulation of documents is a history of the changing content and uses of language, from which histories of conceptualization have to be inferred and from which they cannot be separated. If historians of language are satisfied that they have succeeded in inferring a great many such histories, they may announce that they have constructed a *Begriffsgeschichte*, in the language of the enterprise directed by Professor Koselleck, or a history of ideas, as in the title of the journal edited by Professor Kelley. However, I shall continue to think that these terms are instances of justifiable rhetoric, and that what has been going on all this time is a history of things done with language.

There is an important sense, if I am right in this, in which a history of the concept of, for example, “the state” will in fact be a history of the various ways in which the words *status*, *Staat*, *état*, *estate*, *stato*, and so forth have been used. In this history, these words will not have been used on every occasion to convey the concept of the state in any continuous or cumulative sense whatever, so that the history of the language usages and speech acts in which the various cognates of state have been involved is not a history of the concept of the state, even if one can be abstracted from it. One may write a diversity of synchronic histories of the ways in which these cognates have been used and made to perform a diversity of linguistic and other historical contexts, and I have indicated that this is the kind of history that I prefer writing and know how to write.

But what of the diachronic or vertical histories of particular language usages and particular words undergoing continuity and change in time, which, I have emphasized, I see as a potentially valuable supplement and corrective to the kind of history that I myself write? I have described these as shafts or tunnels sunk vertically through the stratified deposits of recorded history; but what are the life-forms whose morphology they aim to bring to light?

Here I see dangers that the authors of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* must have confronted, and I wish I knew more of the ways in which they set about overcoming them. There is (rather, there must have been) the danger of ascribing the same concept, or the components or variations of the same concept, to the same word or the cognates of the same word wherever they occur in the historical record. This one implicitly does, or comes too close to doing, whenever one uses the word *state* as a translation of the Greek *polis*, the Chinese *kuo*, the Latin *civitas* or *imperium* or *res publica*, the early modern English *commonwealth*, the Florentine *stato*, the French *état*, or the English *estate*. The users of these words may or may not have had a body of concepts in their minds that were common to all of them, and scholars cannot even test the matter empirically without setting up a hypothesis that presupposes at least the possibility that they had. This is difficult to do without imposing an ideal construct—which is to say, a body of our own concepts—upon history. Is it possible, or worth the effort, to ask whether the Chinese of the Chan Kuo period had a concept of the state? Is one not merely acknowledging that *chan kuo* cannot be translated other than as “warring states” and asking in what ways one is confusing or clarifying the understanding of their history by doing so?

Where, then, in history can “a history of the concept of the state” be located and written? The answer to this question must be given in terms of historical preconditions. There must have been a tract of time in which locally specific historical agents continuously employed language in which cognates of the word *state*—alternatively, terminology from some other language that one can regularly translate, and justify oneself in translating, by that word and its cognates—were used in ways that permit historians to establish a developmental or dialectical history of conceptualization accompanying the history of language usage as one of its effects. We may then find that some concept of the state took shape over the period we are studying, that it was established, acquired authority, obtained

verbal expression, and was itself the object of discussion, criticism, and contestation. We may even find actors in history saying that they have a concept of the state and arguing about it. However, to the extent that we do not find these things explicitly happening but nevertheless find the actors in the story behaving in such ways that it is hard to narrate them without writing *as if* they were happening, we are treading on very dangerous ground indeed, because we are imposing our interpretation and our language on historical actors inhabiting a language world other than ours, and saying that they must, ideally, be supposed to have inhabited a world that our language defines.

These are perils with which all historians are acquainted, and I am mentioning them only because they are even harder to avoid than one may suppose. Quentin Skinner himself, on one and perhaps two occasions,² laid himself open to criticism by going in search of the origins and growth of the modern concept of the state and by finding them among language users who did not employ the word state in a modern sense and did not employ the adjective modern at all. I am therefore interested in knowing how the *Begriffe* lexically and alphabetically arranged in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* were selected and characterized. Are they, in each and every case, concepts continuously verbalized as such by the actors in the histories, or are they rather taxonomic categories in which the performances of historical actors may conveniently be arranged? In the latter event, how do we avoid arriving at the point where the histories they isolate become themselves the objects of contestation?

I am accustomed to setting the history of discourse and debate anterior to the history of conceptualization and to finding in it narratives of much greater complexity and determinacy than those I have so far heard ascribed to the history of concepts. Here, of course, I suffer from not having read the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, in which I am sure narratives of exactly that character are to be found. I do not see how it could be otherwise. I confess myself uneasy, however, when Professor Richter says the objective of the enterprise has been to identify political and social concepts of three

² Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (New York, 1978), vol. II, the concluding chapter; see also his essay "The State" in Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (eds.), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* (New York, 1990).

kinds: those that have remained continuous and stable, those that have undergone archaisation, and those that have been the subject matter of neology. I am well acquainted with all three phenomena in the history of language and discourse. But I am accustomed to studying and writing histories in which the same term, concept, or construct can be seen undergoing all three at the same time, and vehement debate can be seen going on between these three ways of presenting and operating the same construct. I hope, therefore—or rather I am confident—that it is not being suggested that each and every *Begriff* must fall into one of three taxonomic categories describable in these terms to the exclusion of the others. The history of discourse as I know it simply does not look like that.

I am approaching the third question I wish to treat: namely, how far a *Begriffsgeschichte*, especially one lexically and alphabetically constructed, lends itself to the formulation of historical generalizations and hypotheses—or how far these are introduced after having arisen elsewhere—in order that the *Begriffsgeschichte* be a means of testing them. I wish to address what Professor Richter tells us concerning a period that Professor Koselleck hypothetically terms a *Sattelzeit* and four hypotheses that he has proposed about its characteristics. I am interested in this because, recently, in concluding a multi-author volume of essays on English-British political discourse in the period 1500-1800,³ I ventured to borrow the term *Sattelzeit* from Professor Koselleck and to propose it as a device for bringing that period to an end.

My *Sattelzeit*—if I may be allowed the term—ran from the early 1780s to the early 1830s and was offered as that in which the broadly Whig discourse of the eighteenth century, with its roots in the seventeenth and sixteenth, yielded place to the broadly Victorian discourse of the nineteenth century, much of which did not display evident roots in the period proceeding it. However, in yielding place, it was very far from disappearing or becoming archaic, so that very complex problems in persistence and transformation confronted the historian. I was prepared to use the figure of an early modern configuration giving way to a modern one, however, and to suggest that a point had been reached at which my colleagues and I, special

³ J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1994). See also “The Varieties of Whiggism,” in Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (New York, 1985).

ists in the earlier period, might appropriately transfer the baton to a new set of specialists. In this sense, I ventured to employ Professor Koselleck's concept of a *Sattelzeit*, but now that I have read Professor Richter's account of the matter, it is evident that my *Sattelzeit* differs from his, is situated in a history differently organized, and is the occasion of a rather different set of hypotheses. The four key proposals that Richter sets forth—*Verzeitlichung*, *Demokratisierung*, *Ideologisierung*, and *Politisierung*—are, in some cases, intelligible to me and, in several cases, recognizable (though I do not think I have yet grasped the meaning of *Verzeitlichung*), but I am fairly clear that they are not the hypotheses that I should, in the first instance, choose to test against a history of British discourse in the period 1780-1830. Furthermore, though I may yet be able to learn from thinking about them some more, there is no reason why they should be. Professor Koselleck is writing about German history and I about British. If I was justified in borrowing his term *Sattelzeit*—and perhaps I was not—it was because it could usefully be adapted to British history and made to express things about British, and not about German, history.

One can see from this statement in just how specific a sense I am prepared to endorse Richter's remark that “a newly united Europe will need to take stock of the ways each of its constituent parts has understood its past.” I do not myself believe that Europe will be united in the foreseeable future, or that it should be; I think Richter is telling us that an increasingly integrated Europe will have to take stock of the fact that it consists of many pasts and many ways of understanding them, and that things will and should remain that way. The British *Sattelzeit* I ventured to adumbrate was one in which there was an increasing discourse of administration, an increasing discourse of population and industry, an increasing discourse of the working class studied by E. P. Thompson and Gareth Steadman Jones, an increasing discourse of the professional classes studied by Harold Perkin. These discourses interacted with those arising from the period since the civil wars of the seventeenth century, and profoundly modified them without rendering them obsolete.

What I shall not find, however, in British history is that which Professor Richter's language suggests I may find in Professor Koselleck's presentation of German history: the transition from an *ancien regime* “of estates and orders,” in which “political and social concepts tended to be specific and particularistic” to a post-revolu-

tionary condition in which they became abstract, universal, and historic, serving to present the ideological conflicts of a newly unified and politicized society. I will not find this, because the British *ancien régime* (it is perfectly possible to say that there was one) was not fragmented and particularized but unified by a powerful, if unstable, central sovereignty.

The conduct of discourse was similarly centralized and unified. It was conducted by and in the London print culture and its writing, publishing, and reading publics, situated on the doorsteps of the centers of power, and, since at latest 1640, engaged in constant and furious debate over the principles—ecclesiastical, juristic, political, social, and cultural—on which central power was or ought to be exercised. Is this not the reason why, as a student of English and British history, I am obliged to see the history of concepts as a feature of, and as exhibited within, an ongoing history of discourses arranged against each other in constant and continuing debate? Is it possible that I am to learn from Richter and Koselleck that the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* could have been written only in a culture that developed a history of discourse for and against its own basic principles only after such a *Sattelzeit* as Professor Koselleck has described and one that I find sharply unfamiliar? Is this the key to the question that still puzzles me, that of the relation between *Begriffsgeschichte* as a method and a discipline and the hypothesization of a *Sattelzeit*?

If my questions should be answerable in the affirmative, the formal relations between history of concepts and history of discourses will remain as I have attempted to characterize them, and there will be no reason why the two should not reinforce, stimulate, challenge, and enrich one another. But it will have emerged that the two methods of study are each historically, culturally, and nationally specific; and that one cannot propose to extend either of them to each of the historic cultures of Europe in turn without learning that it is not a panacea; and that each culture indeed has, as Professor Richter has advised us, its own past and its own ways of understanding it. These modes of thought can be confronted, compared, and combined, but not homogenized.

**A Response to Comments
on the
*Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe***

Reinhart Koselleck

*trans. by
Melvin Richter and Sally E. Robertson*

I am most grateful to the German Historical Institute, to Hartmut Lehmann, and to his colleagues for making this occasion possible. Some thirty years ago, when work on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (hereafter GG) began, no one could have predicted that its completion would be celebrated in Washington.¹ This is all the more reason to thank my five Anglophone colleagues for acknowledging the research project with their approval and their criticism.

My reply will be directed primarily to their critical comments. Such a dialogue between English-speaking and German historians may be of some interest on both sides of this linguistic divide. I hope that it will be constructive as well. Perhaps I can clear up some misunderstandings and identify legitimate differences among alternative research strategies.

The sources for studying written language are almost inexhaustible. How should the language used in these sources be studied? There are as many methods for providing well-documented answers as there are modes of posing questions about language. Otto Brunner, a master of medieval constitutional history, argued that the vocabulary actually used in its sources should count for more than the doctrinal preferences of modern interpreters. Anticipating much of what was later to be known as *Begriffsgeschichte* (the history of concepts, conceptual history), he argued that we can best study any past period by first reconstructing the language used by its members to conceptualize their arrangements, and then translating these past

¹ *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Basic Concepts in History. A Dictionary on Historical Principles of Political and Social Language in Germany), eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-), 8 vols.

concepts into our own terminology. James Van Horn Melton has shown very clearly how Brunner's National Socialist commitments (*erkenntnisleitendes Interesse*) set his research agenda. In the place of constitutional history as written by nineteenth-century liberals, Brunner treated his subject as *Volksgeschichte* (the history of the German people or *Volk*; in its Nazi version, the Third Reich's official historiography). Subsequently, our lexicon has demonstrated that the original concept of *Volksgeschichte* derived from the wishful aspirations of those liberals and democrats criticized by Brunner. After 1945, Brunner abandoned the concept of *Volk*. In its place, he put the abstract, formal notion of structure. Combining structural social history with conceptual history, Brunner restated his findings about late medieval institutions and legal history without abandoning his method of analyzing the language used in the sources for that period. This method has proved its worth; it permits revisions as issues change from one period to another.

Gabriel Motzkin's thought-provoking remarks are compatible with that part of my own theory of *Begriffsgeschichte* in which I hold that a number of presuppositions about future time were incorporated into many modern political and social concepts. Although some of Motzkin's claims go beyond my own, we agree on two points. By surveying the fields of *Geistesgeschichte* (the history of the human as distinguished from the natural sciences), *Ideengeschichte* (the history of ideas), and *Begriffsgeschichte*, we can determine the extent to which metaphors shape and fix the formation of language. Metaphors can become concepts, as in the case of *Aufklärung* in German (enlightenment, literally "clearing" or "reconnaissance"). At the end of the eighteenth century, *Aufklärung* turned into a concept immediately identified as philosophical, in contrast to its previous uses, which had been restricted to the domains of meteorological and military language. Indeed, retrospectively, the entire century came to be termed the Enlightenment. All these questions of how figures of speech have affected language from classical antiquity to the present have been dealt with masterfully by Hans Blumenberg. Had we used his methods rather than our own, we would have produced a completely different lexicon.

The second point on which Motzkin and I agree is the significance of the temporal structures built into modern concepts. This point is crucial to the method applied in many of the lexicon's articles. Since the end of the eighteenth century, an ever-increasing

number of political and social concepts have been oriented to a new and different future not based on any previous experience and hence untestable by reference to the past. These are not concepts, that is, coeval with registered experience, but pre-conceptions. What is anticipated by such modern concepts is inversely proportional to past experience. The reason for this is extra-linguistic: the increasingly complex interactions of our modern age, linked as we now are around the world, have become less and less accessible to direct personal experience. This state of affairs has semantic consequences; it also establishes new semantic preconditions for political and social language. Concepts necessarily become more abstract, at once more general and less descriptive than ever before. The temporalization (*Verzeitlichung*) of modern concepts must be understood in terms of this context. Many basic concepts, above all those designating movements—isms—concur in the demand that future history should differ fundamentally from the past. Among such concepts are “progress,” “development,” “emancipation,” “liberalism,” “democratization,” “socialism,” “communism.”

To the extent that these concepts, by definition, cannot be tested by reference to past experience, they are easily annexed by ideologies or dissolved by criticism of them as ideological (*ideologiekritisch*). Motzkin underlines the dangers produced by confusing language, especially concepts, with reality. For all concepts have two aspects. On the one hand, they point to something external to them, to the context in which they are used. On the other hand, this reality is perceived in terms of categories provided by language. Therefore, concepts are both indicators of and factors in political and social life. Put metaphorically, concepts are like joints linking language and the extra-linguistic world. To deny this distinction is to hypnotize oneself and, like Hitler, to succumb to a self-produced ideology.

This leads us to Donald Kelley's question, at once new and old, about the relationship between *Begriffsgeschichte* and the history of ideas. Certainly they have much in common. But there are differences as well. The *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* project, as stated in the introduction to its first volume, was aimed implicitly against Meinecke's version of the history of ideas. In his book on reason of state, he deals with a set of contrasts over three centuries: between ethos and *kratos*, morality and politics, ultimately, good and evil. Meinecke presents these oppositions as paired concepts that continued to be used throughout those three hundred years. But a

history of immutable “ideas” cannot account for the entirely different functions performed by them in disparate periods: that of religious civil wars, that of enlightened absolutism, and that of bourgeois nation-states. By contrast, the history of concepts deals with the use of specific language in specific situations, within which concepts are developed and used by specific speakers.

When viewed from this perspective, every speech act is unique. No wonder that Quentin Skinner, in the passage cited by Professor Pocock, questions the very possibility of writing a history of concepts. Such a rigorous historicism views all concepts as speech acts within a context that cannot be replicated. As such, concepts occur only once; they are not substances, quasi-ideas capable of leading a diachronic life of their own. In 1981 I made the same argument in precisely this strong form.² Concepts can become outdated because the contexts within which they were constituted no longer exist. Thus, although concepts age, they have no autonomous history of their own. The concept of *politeia* cannot be separated from the practice of citizenship in the Greek *poleis*; the concept of *res publica* in Cicero depends upon the political order of republican Rome in the first century. Methodologically, I hold that such epistemological purism is required for any adequate analysis of how language may be matched to the contexts within which it functions. To that extent, a rigorous historicism registering the non-convertibility of what is articulated by language is the precondition of every conceptual analysis. But *Begriffsgeschichte* does not end there.

Every reading by later generations of past conceptualizations alters the spectrum of possible transmitted meanings. The original contexts of concepts change; so, too, do the original or subsequent meanings carried by concepts. The history of concepts may be reconstructed through studying the reception, or, more radically, the translation of concepts first used in the past but then pressed into service by later generations. Therefore, the historical uniqueness of speech acts, which might appear to make any history of concepts impossible, in fact creates the necessity to recycle past conceptualizations. The record of how their uses were subsequently maintained,

² Reinhart Koselleck, “Begriffsgeschichtliche Probleme der Verfassungsgeschichtsschreibung” (The History of Concepts and Constitutional History: Some Problems), in *Der Staat. Zeitschrift für Staatslehre, Öffentliches Recht und Verfassungsgeschichte*, Beiheft 6, 1983: 7-46.

altered, or transformed may properly be called the history of concepts.

With more or fewer, greater or smaller deviations from earlier meanings, concepts may continue to be used or reused. Although such variations may be either marginal or profound, linguistic recycling insures at least a minimum degree of continuity. To the extent that it records how component parts of older concepts continue to be reapplied, *Begriffsgeschichte* resembles the history of ideas. However, these components cannot be said to continue to exist in senses derived from either metaphysical or Platonic theories that claim to transcend experience. Rather any assertion about continuities in the use of concepts must be supported by evidence based upon concrete, iterative usages of the vocabulary.

This brings me to the much discussed subject of the relationship between diachronic and synchronic analyses. Strictly speaking, these modes are inseparable. In any synchronic exegesis of a text, the analyst must keep in mind those criteria of selection that lead a writer to use concepts in one way and not otherwise, and to do so through a new rather than an older formulation. Many concepts from an earlier period continue to be applied in almost unaltered forms. Yet other concepts, because of meanings carried in their previous uses, create obstacles for those seeking to apply them. Every author must confront the relationship between the former meanings of a concept and the author's own intended purposes. This is why in 1848 Marx and Engels did not use the title, "The Confession of Faith of the Communist League (or Covenant)," as they had been commissioned to do. To avoid using these Lutheran terms (*Glaubensbekenntnis*, *Bund*) in their title, they chose an innovative phrasing, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," or "Communist Manifesto."

We are here dealing with a general characteristic of language. No author can create something new without reaching back to the established corpus of the language, to those linguistic resources created diachronically in the near or more remote past and shared by all speakers and listeners. Understanding or being understood presupposes such prior knowledge of how the language has been used. Every word and every concept thus has a diachronic thrust against which anyone seeking to add a new meaning must work. Yet what is new can be understood for the first time only because of some recurring feature, some reference to a previously unquestioned,

accepted meaning. But it is this aspect of language that permits us to speak of some ideas as long lasting.

This brings me to the relationship between what Lovejoy called irreducible “unit ideas” and those “basic concepts” (*Grundbegriffe*) that play so large a part in the method of the GG. While conceding that meanings, concepts, and ideas are difficult to communicate without using words (leaving aside symbols and signs), both Lovejoy and the GG presuppose that word and meaning, word and concept, word and idea do not coincide.

On the other hand, a distinctive aspect of this lexicon's method is its separation of the semantics of political and social concepts from that used for all other lexemes. Because of the special characteristics of the political and social domains of language, the GG must use a sharply restrictive meaning of “concept” and “basic concept.”

With this assertion I reenter the minefield of questions posed by Professor Pocock. As my previous comments indicate, I dealt with the issues he raises already long ago. In our method, concepts are treated as more than meanings of terms that can be unambiguously defined. Rather political and social concepts are produced by a longterm semiotic process, which encompasses manifold and contradictory experiences. Such concepts may evoke complex, conflicting reactions and expectations. Obviously, a political and social concept with many facets derived from its past uses cannot be reduced to a simple basic idea. Its manifold extra-linguistic content can be clarified only by alternating two types of analysis: semasiological (the study of all meanings of a term, word, or concept) and onomasiological (the study of all names or terms for the same thing or concept).

As distinguished from concepts in general, a basic concept, as used in the GG, is an inescapable, irreplaceable part of the political and social vocabulary. Only after a concept has attained this status does it become crystallized in a single word or term such as “revolution,” “state,” “civil society,” or “democracy.” Basic concepts combine manifold experiences and expectations in such a way that they become indispensable to any formulation of the most urgent issues of a given time. Thus basic concepts are highly complex; they are always both controversial and contested. It is this which makes them historically significant and sets them off from purely technical or professional terms. No political action, no social behavior can occur without some minimum stock of basic concepts that have per

sisted over long periods; have suddenly appeared, disappeared, reappeared; or have been transformed, either rapidly or slowly. Such concepts therefore must be interpreted in order to sort out their multiple meanings, internal contradictions, and varying applications in different social strata.

Basic concepts are always controversial. This is all the more so when conflicting groups (of speakers), or all “forms of discourse” depend upon the possession of the same shared basic concepts. Only when this is the case is it possible to understand and be understood, to persuade, to negotiate, or even to fight (which involves the concepts of “peace” or “war.”) Although basic concepts always function within a discourse, they are pivots around which all arguments turn. For this reason I do not believe that the history of concepts and the history of discourse can be viewed as incompatible and opposite. Each depends inescapably on the other. A discourse requires basic concepts in order to express what it is talking about. And analysis of concepts requires command of both linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts, including those provided by discourses. Only by such knowledge of context can the analyst determine what are a concept's multiple meanings, its content, importance, and the extent to which it is contested.

The variety of questions posed about language makes it necessary that when treating any linguistic question, we adjust the lens through which we view it. The choice of an appropriate research strategy will depend upon the investigation's focus—concepts, whole discourses, or the entire language, whether considered synchronically or diachronically. The history of basic concepts can treat simultaneously both the persistence of structures and epochal transformations of them. Professor Pocock poses the exciting question of whether *Begriffsgeschichte* also proceeds taxonomically. Nolens volens, it does this as well.

The primary interest of *Begriffsgeschichte* is its capacity to analyze the full range, the discrepant usages of the central concepts specific to a given period or social stratum. Any lexicon of this subject must be alphabetical in order to leave open the question of whether, considered diachronically, a concept has or has not been transformed. In the context of seventeenth-century Germany, *status* in Latin meant both “estate, order” (*Stand*) and “state” (*Staat*). In the nineteenth century, *Stand* was placed in a position subordinate to the state, or even, in some contexts, made into the opposite of the

state. Any thematic (rather than alphabetical) arrangement of concepts would distort the diachronic transformation of these concepts.

Of course, there are other methods for investigating both change and continuity in basic concepts. This can be done either by tracking parallel concepts (onomasiologically) or opposite concepts (semasiologically). Such treatments of a concept's history are provocative, resemble the history of discourses, but also often exceed the scope of what is lexically, that is, pragmatically manageable. These points have been demonstrated in the GG's articles on *Geschichte und Historie* (history); *Volk, Nation, Masse, Nationalismus* (people, nation, masses, nationalism); *Stand und Klasse* (estate, order and status, class); *Revolution, Aufruhr, und Bürgerkrieg* (revolution, uprising, and civil war); and *Zivilisation und Kultur* (civilization and culture). In these entries, questions about basic concepts produce particularly illuminating answers. As soon as any one term becomes a basic concept, (and this can occur as the result of a shift for which no single author can be identified as the source), this basic concept may supersede a parallel concept or else convert it into the opposite of what it had formerly meant. But even when individual authors can be identified as the first to use a concept (as when Kant introduced *Fortschritt* [progress] into German), once adopted as a basic concept, it takes on a life of its own. It frames and restricts, it augments and limits the vocabulary available to subsequent generations. Rigorous historicism notwithstanding, the history of basic concepts cannot be reduced to instrumental speech acts by individuals.

The language of the past, whether spoken or written, is autonomous in ways that are not subject to individual decisions by later speakers. Conceptual change is generally slower and more gradual than the pace of political events. That is to say that changes in the language of politics do not necessarily correspond to what occurs in politics. The history of language, the history of society, and the history of politics do not change at the same rate of speed. To those living at a given time, all three types of change may seem to coincide, but this is not in fact the case.

Because they can be applied again and again, basic concepts accumulate long-term meanings that are not lost with every change in regime or social situation. This quality of basic concepts, the fact that they are repeatedly applied to different political and social

circumstances, testifies to their relatively long-lasting structures. This type of structure even permits the reception and adaptation of basic concepts from foreign languages, thus pointing to structural analogies or functional equivalents in different polities and societies. One example is the long-term translation and adaptation of *koinonia politike* or *societas civilis* as “civil society,” *société civile*, or *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. Another instance is the transposition of the Aristotelian concept of *mesoi* to the nineteenth-century *Mittelklassen* (middle classes).³

Therefore, some basic concepts have been applied again and again in very different settings. Despite the magnitude and varieties of extra-linguistic historical change, such basic concepts have been repeatedly reinstated, not in literal detail, but in terms of their structures or classifications. To that extent, the implications of *Begriffsgeschichte* include the taxonomy of such basic concepts. Of course, this should not be done quasi-sociologically, that is, by projecting present-day concepts back into the past. Rather, conceptual history provides indicators of how political and social history unfolds not only in unique events but can also be repeated in analogous structures.

Thanks to translation, Aristotle's political regime categories today remain both comprehensible and applicable. Of course, they are not exhaustive; further regime-types have been added, thus augmenting the range of possible classifications available since Aristotle. Some examples are analogies and extensions of the concepts of “despotism,” to “tyranny,” to “totalitarian dictatorship.” The history of the translation and reception of concepts shows that concepts are more than linguistic evidence of social continuity and change. Concepts, by defining extra-linguistic structures, condition political events. Yet as long as concepts, whatever their variations, continue to be applicable, their use is also affected by extra-linguistic forces, such as structures, which cannot be transformed overnight. Structures limit the changes brought by political and social events. *Begriffsgeschichte*, then, registers more than sequences of unique speech acts set within specific situations; it also registers that set of long-term, repeatable

³ Cf. the recent publication by Reinhart Koselleck and Klaus Schreiner, eds., *Bürgerschaft. Rezeption und Innovation der Begrifflichkeit vom Hohen Mittelalter bis ins 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1994), vol. 22 of Reinhart Koselleck and Karlheinz Stierle, eds., *Sprache und Geschichte*.

structures stored in language that establish the preconditions for conceptualizing events. Despite great changes, “democracy” is a concept that, however ubiquitous and exclusive of other forms in our century, already existed in Athens.

The task of *Begriffsgeschichte* is to ask what strands of meaning persist, are translatable, and can again be applied; what threads of meaning are discarded; and what new strands are added. The concept of democracy, once coined, has its own history, which is not identical with the history of constitutional forms. Yet it is impossible to write the history of constitutions without knowing how, over time, its forms have been conceptualized.

It is indisputable that translations of basic concepts have played a guiding role in the history of European speech communities, as well as in the history of such diverse units as states, associations, armies, firms, churches, sects, and parties. Members of such units may speak different languages. Indeed within any one of them, two or more languages may be spoken, as was the case when both Latin and vernacular languages were spoken within the same state by church and state chancelleries. For that reason, it is important to distinguish between those units that were in fact actors and the basic concepts, often translated from Latin, used by these units to take effective administrative and legal action. Often actors thought in one language and issued orders in another, as did Frederick II of Prussia. Even in battle, he thought in French but issued commands in German.

The theoretical vocabulary of Latin and the vernacular languages related to it was superior to that of non-Romance languages. Individual countries compensated differently for this deficiency. It is a fascinating test of a language to ask where and when concepts were made substantives, that is, when it became unnecessary to provide a subject for sentences using such concepts as state, constitution, league (*Bund*), history, progress, and revolution. After these concepts were treated as subjects—as historical actors—they achieved a previously unavailable status. The French term *état* became autonomous, shed its previous territorial limitations (to a district or province), and became a basic concept approximately two hundred years before the same semantic process was registered in Germany. In the English Civil War, “utopia,” originally a literary genre, became a conceptual weapon of combat (*Kampfbegriff*) that challenged the feasibility of opponents' proposals. In German, this usage

appeared for the first time—and for the same reasons—in the nineteenth century.

These examples are meant to show that the methods used in *Begriffsgeschichte* cannot be dismissed as applicable only to the analysis of any one language. On the contrary, as Melvin Richter suggests, comparisons are unavoidable because through translation every language incorporates borrowed words appropriated from foreign sources. This is especially true of basic concepts. Illuminating comparative analyses of conceptual usage are already available from the Bielefeld research group studying the vocabulary used to conceptualize citizenship and gender in Italy, France, England, and Germany.

What has already been said partially answers queries about the *Sattelzeit* (the period of transition between early modern and modern Germany, c. 1750 to 1850). Initially conceived as a catchword in a grant application for funding the lexicon, this concept has come to obscure rather than to advance the project. Perhaps *Schwellexzeit* (threshold period) would have been a less ambiguous metaphor. In any case, hypotheses about the existence of such a period play no part in the method used in *Begriffsgeschichte*. The *Sattelzeit* is neither an ontological notion nor is it tied to a single national language. This periodization is but one means of narrowing the GG's focus and making its goals more manageable. For this lexicon seeks to determine how German speakers perceived, conceptualized, and incorporated into their vocabulary those accelerated changes that took place between the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution.

Although the explosion of neologisms at that time is well known, it has as yet not been adequately studied from the perspective of political and social change. Classicism, Romanticism, and Idealism are nothing more than broad categories for classifying particular genres. All social groups participated in the great effort necessary for remaking the German vocabulary. This was expanded, made more flexible and productive, and, some might say, creatively enriched. This linguistic revolution was accomplished in just a few decades. It launched Germany's modern age. Similar developments occurred in our neighboring language communities, although the eras in which they took place may have differed and analogous developments may have extended over periods of different duration. Perhaps in this way, Professor Pocock's skepticism and critique may be reconciled

with Professor Richter's proposal to practice comparative *Begriffsgeschichte*.

Once again, I must thank all of the participants doubly: first for your criticisms of the lexicon's project, and second, for your contributions to the dialogue between English-speaking and German scholars on questions about the historical dimensions of language that concern them both.