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Author(s): Palonen, Kari

Title: Aspects of Conceptual History of Parliamentary Politics

Year: 2020

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

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Please cite the original version:

Palonen, K. (2020). Aspects of Conceptual History of Parliamentary Politics. In C. Benoit, & O. Rozenberg (Eds.), Handbook of Parliamentary Studies : Interdisciplinary Approaches to Legislatures (pp. 67-85). Edward Elgar. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789906516.00011

Chapter 5

Aspects of a Conceptual History of Parliamentary Politics

Kari Palonen

In the preface of *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought,* Quentin Skinner writes: "For I take it that political life itself sets the main problems for the political theorist", and the "clearest sign of … the possession of a new concept is … that a new vocabulary will comes to be generated, in terms of which the concept is then articulated and discussed" (Skinner 1978 I, p. xi, x). Thinking about politics is a part of politics itself. Parliaments have formed their own concepts out of debates, decisions, precedents and conventions, as collected in the Standing Orders and procedural commentaries. For members of parliament, having a command of the distinctly parliamentary language of politics is a precondition of their ability to make moves in parliament. The recent digitalisation of the plenary debates of European parliaments provides empirical sources for analysis of the conceptual changes around parliamentary politics.

'Parliament' refers in this text to an institutional ideal type of acting politically. This chapter analyses the modes of conceptualising parliamentary politics, its vocabulary and rhetoric. The Skinner quote illustrates how the use of concepts provides an interesting key to understanding the formation of the distinctly parliamentary style of politics, its various facets and its historical changes.

5.1. Approaches to conceptual history

For some decades ago, it was common to regard agreement upon the meaning of the concepts used in a debate as a condition for contributing to debate. The value of the conceptual–historical approach lies in its emphasis on how such a consensus has never, in fact, existed, nor would it be anything worth striving for. Conceptual historians follow Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1953) view that the meaning of concepts lies in their uses. The actual uses of concepts tend to alter them: the speakers learn to use them more fluently, can alter their range of reference, change their normative value or revise the rhetorical tone and so on. Political concepts remain contingent, controversial and have a history of their own. Revising concepts in order to support a

motion is an old parliamentary move. William Georg Hamilton in his maxim from the eighteenth century described how virtues can be devalued and vices made harmless in a debate (1927, p. 6).

Conceptual history or *Begriffsgeschichte* refers to a set of approaches articulated by an international network of scholars.[1] They come from different national, intellectual and disciplinary traditions, including such authors as Quentin Skinner and Pierre Rosanvallon. Its best known project is the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (7 vols. and 2 index vols., 1972–1997) with Reinhart Koselleck the main theorist. The lexicon focuses on German concepts in the so-called *Sattelzeit* period from 1770 to 1850, with a focus on the regularly revised competing *Konversationslexika* (see Koselleck 1972), whereas parliamentary debates hardly play a role in the "GG" (even in Boldt 1978, see Palonen 2006).

A major international project in conceptual history is the *European Conceptual History* series (Berghahn books). The programmatic volume *Conceptual History in the European Space* (edited by Steinmetz, Freeden and Sebastián, 2017), for its part, shows a wide range of the current methodological approaches. As of August 2019, six volumes have been published in the latter series, including volumes on democracy and liberalism (https://berghahnbooks.com/series/european-conceptual-history). In addition, the approaches have increasingly been applied to non-European topics (see Pernau and Sachsenmaier, eds., 2016)

Parliament and Parliamentarism (Ihalainen, Ilie and Palonen eds., 2016) was the first volume in the book series. Its historical section links parliament to political events and processes, the rhetorical section to the oratorical and linguistic tools of parliamentary speaking, and the political theory section to the conceptual presuppositions of parliamentary politics in the context of the democratisation of politics. As seen in recent decades, parliamentary debates have been reactivated as a key to politics (see Roussellier 1997, Ilie ed. 2010, Peltonen 2013, Vieira 2015). The *Parliament and Parliamentarism* volume follows this line of scholarship.

Parliamentary debates and documents form a well-recorded and systematically commensurable type of source for the study of political concepts. Studying the

changes in the parliamentary language of a distinct set of political concepts, á la John Pocock (1971), offers a useful perspective for understanding the parliamentary style of doing politics. The language manifests the political value of debate as a core parliamentary activity as well.

Parliamentary debates themselves are increasingly available online. The possibility to search for key concepts provides a new way of reading how concepts are used in parliamentary controversies. The digitalised debates allow us to identify how, when and by whom central political concepts have been subject to parliamentary debate. Such studies can better situate the actual use of concepts: some conceptual disputes closely correspond to the divide between parties or between the government and the opposition, whereas e.g. disputes on parliamentary procedure are more complex. The digitalisation further allows us to establish links to past debates as well as to make cross-references to the parliamentary language used in other countries and other types of parliaments (on this practice, see Ihalainen and Palonen 2009, Pekonen 2014, Ihalainen 2017).

In this chapter, the main empirical sources for studying parliamentary language are selected debates from a number of West European parliaments. These are complemented with newspaper reports on debates, commentaries on the rules of parliamentary procedure, writings of parliamentarians, parliamentary journalism as well as scholarly writings on parliaments.

5.2. The parliamentary language of politics

Parliament is a West European political innovation. The historically existing parliaments provide approximations of the parliamentary type of acting politically. The English/British parliament at Westminster forms the paradigm, which is followed in part by most other parliaments.

There are several candidates for the origins of the parliamentary-type assemblies. J.R. Maddicott traces the English nationwide assembly back to the year 927 (Maddicott 2010). The meetings of magnates became a regular institution with the Provisions of Oxford of 1258: ‘What had hitherto been merely an occasion was converted into a

political institution, and a vague, untechnical colloquialism became a clearly defined and precise constitutional term' (Treharne 1959, p. 84; see Maddicott 2010, p. 226).

The Icelandic *Althingi* claims to be 'the oldest … supreme national institution', established 'on the plains of Thingvellir AD 930… a general assembly of the nation, where the country's most powerful leaders met to decide on legislation and dispense justice' (http://www.althingi.is/kynningarefni/index_en.html). 'Ting' refers to a court or a political assembly and is still used in the name of the Danish *Folketinget* and the Norwegian *Stortinget*.

The assemblies of Italian city-republics acted as counter-powers to the Empire and the Church from the twelfth-century onwards. Their organisation was based on the guilds, representing the interest of *homines oeconomici* (see Weber [1922] 1980, p. 805), and their discussions included both negotiations of interests and deliberation over political alternatives. They had different intellectual sources of justification, such as Roman Law, rhetoric or Scholasticism (see Skinner 1978; 1987; 1992). Beginning in the twelfth century, certain assemblies began to be called by the Latin term *parlamentum* or *parliamentum* (Kluxen 1983, p. 17), a site of speech (it. *parlare*; fr. *parler)*. Its first use in England is attested to 1236 (Richardson and Sayles 1967, p. 748). The *Modus tenendi parliamentum* from the 1320s is the first known tract of English parliamentary rules (see *The Manner of Holding Parliaments*, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/medieval/manner.asp).

What makes an assembly a parliament? Regularity, a distinct type of procedure and debate and real political powers are the main criteria, providing the setting in which the contestations in parliaments turn. According to the degree of parliamentarism attained, we may speak of semi-, proto- and quasi- or pseudo-parliamentary assemblies. National parliaments have enjoyed a priority over sub-, supra- and cross-national parliamentary assemblies, but analytically, the parliamentary form is more important than the polity-level.

Parliamentarians of all countries speak a relatively similar language, independently of their 'natural' language, conceptions of parliament or parliamentary traditions. This can well be seen clearly in the bi- or multi-lingual parliaments (Switzerland, Belgium,

Finland, Canada) and in the European Parliament. The existence of a cross-national parliamentary vocabulary has sometimes supported parliamentary powers even against existing rules (on applying European parliamentary language to the Finnish estate diet, see Pekonen 2014). Learning parliamentary language to act politically took place even in the Eastern European façade parliaments, which in 1989/90 suddenly began to act like real parliaments (see Ornatowski 2010; Ilie and Ornatowski 2016, Tüffers 2016).

The procedural documents and commentaries on parliamentary rules and practices provide perhaps the best access to parliamentary language. Such commentaries exist for Westminster since the late sixteenth century (see Redlich 1905, Palonen 2014). The works of John Hatsell, Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Erskine May in Britain and Jules Poudra and Eugène Pierre in France are the classics of this genre. Bentham's and May's commentaries obtained numerous translations, and May's and Pierre's work are today regarded as nearly canonical parts of parliamentary procedure (see Evans ed. 2017 and the website of the Assemblée nationale, Pierre, http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/connaissance/droit_eugene_pierre.asp).

A number of concepts possess a distinct parliamentary sense. The parliamentary meanings of 'motion', 'amendment', 'commitment', 'reading' and 'speaker' deviate from their everyday use. A 'motion' refers to any proposal that a member puts on the agenda; an 'amendment' contains additions, omissions and substitutions; a 'commitment' in parliament refers to sending a motion to 'committee'; and 'Speaker' (with capital S) is the Westminster title of the president of the parliament. 'Reading' refers to the round of debate on a motion. 'Question' originally referred to a stage of debate; 'putting the question'; then also to the matter on the agenda; in the nineteenth century 'asking a question' from a minister become a third layer of the concept (see Hatsell 1781, Campion 1929, Palonen 2012).

The politics of time is inherent in parliamentary concepts. Parliamentary procedure contains multiple stages of deliberation in plenum and committee and sets procedural time on the calendar on a daily, weekly, annual and parliamentary term basis. Major parliamentary concepts operate with the politics of time: for example, amendments interrupt debate (in the present), require a re-assessment of the item under debate

(past) and open up a new debate on the amendment motion (future) (See Palonen 2014 and 2018).

The extension of the suffrage and the parliamentarisation of government led Westminster to face an increasing scarcity of parliamentary time, manifested both in a longer agenda and in a new expectation that every member should speak in the plenum. In order to manage parliamentary time, controversial measures to limit speaking time (*clôture*) and the length of debate (*guillotine*) became necessary, and were passed only after strenuous debate. The fair distribution of time between members and motions became a new topic in parliamentary politics (see Redlich 1905; Palonen 2014, Vieira 2015, Ridard 2018).

5.3. Parliamentary freedom

The English parliament lost its estate character already in the fourteenth century, unlike the diets of the Netherlands, France, Spain and Sweden (see Müller 1966, Post 1943, Chrimes 1936, pp. 81-126). This was the decisive step in making the Westminster parliament the model of an independently deliberating assembly with a distinct mode of proceeding and parliamentary language. In a parliament where speaking is organised around debating *pro et contra* on items on the agenda, members ca be regarded as 'free' in their political action. Historically, we can distinguish four main aspects of parliamentary freedom, namely *free mandate*, *free speech*, *freedom from arrest* (parliamentary immunity) and *free and fair elections*.

Parliamentarians are free in the 'neo-Roman' sense of not being dependent on any arbitrary powers. In the Justinian *Digest* of Roman law, persons are either free or they are *in potestate domini,* as the slaves and serfs (see Skinner 1998). In opposition to the Tudors and Stuarts, English parliamentarians understood that they could not be free if their possibilities for political action depended on the monarch (see Peltonen 2013). Freedom of speech, freedom from arrest and free elections are included in the 1604 document known as 'From Apology and Satisfaction'. The Triennial Act of 1641, for its part, prevented the monarch refusing to summon the parliament (see Yerby 2008).

English parliaments claimed freedom of speech already in medieval times: 'Hence the change from the fifteenth century, when free speech was a customary right, if a right at all, to the Elizabethan age, when it was a formal privilege, formally petitioned for, and formally granted, is a profound change' (Neale 1924 [1970], p. 161). Still the principle remained contested, and MPs such as Peter Wentworth were sentenced to death for using it (Mack 2002, Colclough 2005).

Parliamentarians' 'freedom from arrest and molestation' in their sittings and when travelling to parliament is another old privilege at Westminster (see May 1844, pp. 83-102). A decision of parliament is required in order to remove it. Its extent and interpretation remained contested (on early seventeenth-century cases, see Hexter ed. 1992). It roughly corresponds to 'parliamentary immunity', which has been widely accepted since the French Revolution, but which remains controversial, when used to shield members from corruption.

The exclusion of the imperative mandate is a precondition for parliament to act as a deliberative assembly. In the late thirteenth century, the king demanded that members act in parliament with full powers, *plena potestas*, and thereby a break was made with the narrow interests of their constituencies. The members, however, soon learned to turn this freedom to deliberate against royal power (Müller 1966, esp. pp. 125-161, also Post [1943] 1980, Edwards 1934). In France the imperative mandate was replaced by the free mandate in 1789 during the French Revolution (see Tanchoux 2004), although the break was not absolute (Müller 1966, pp. 161-198). The Swedish Riksdag explicitly rejected the imperative mandate by the 1809 Riksdag as did the 1869 Finnish Diet Act (see Kurunmäki 2000, Pekonen 2014).

English constituency-based associations in the eighteenth century wanted to introduce a quasi-imperative mandate. Edmund Burke (1774) parodied the attempt as one that would render the parliament into a 'congress of ambassadors', able to negotiate between interests, but not deliberate between political alternatives. In France, the Republicans' *Programme de Belleville* (1869) attempted to bind members to the views of their supporters. Social Democratic parties supported a party-based mandate. For Kautsky, a German SPD parliamentarian was 'not a free man but a delegate [*Beauftragter*] of his party' (1911, p. 115). Classical claims for direct democracy, the

Paris Commune and the soviets as well as corporatist models of representation, have been bound to the imperative mandate.

For free and fair elections, however, Westminster was no model. Mark Kishlansky's book title, *Parliamentary Selection* (1986), characterises its practice until the early nineteenth century. The parliamentary reforms of 1832 and 1867 against the 'rotten boroughs' as well as secret voting (1872) were intended to strengthen fair competition over parliamentary seats. Struggles over electoral fraud and the validation of mandates remained on various parliaments' agendas until WW I (on the increase in electoral fairness in Germany, see Anderson 2000). Universal and equal suffrage created a basis for free and fair elections, but the fairness of electoral systems, campaign costs and unequal resources of candidates are still debated.

5.4. Conceptions of parliament

The government, with its bureaucratic apparatus, is a permanent fixture in every polity. Taking lessons from the failure of *the Long Parliament* under the English Revolution (1641–1653), the *Glorious Revolution* of 1688/89 left the everyday rule of affairs to the government and administration. Max Weber's characterisation of parliament as representing those ruled by bureaucracy[2] (Weber [1918] 1988a, p. 226) encourages parliaments to use their powers as a counterforce to government and administration. Parliament's counter-powers are also much more effective than the direct rule of 'self-government' (Weber [1917] 1988b).

Focussing on the political activities of parliamentarians, we can name at least four ideal types: *debating, representing, legislating* and *scrutinising* (i.e. inspecting the acts of government and administration). These can be regarded as different dialects that have contributed to the parliamentary language.

Parliamentary scrutiny has its origins in the 'power of the purse', i.e. in the English parliament's power to grant the finances to the monarchy it needs to keep court and to conduct wars. Parliamentarism, or parliamentary government, refers to the government's responsibility to parliament due to the various means parliament exercises control and oversight over government. To this purpose, different

instruments have been formed, above all the vote of confidence, parliamentary questions and committees of examination.

Legislation refers to the law-making powers of the parliament. The late medieval English separation of 'bill' from 'petition' distinguishes the legislative power of the parliament over that of common law. The sovereignty of parliament over both the crown and the courts of law means 'to make and unmake any law whatever' and 'no person or body is recognised … as having the right to override or set aside the legislation of parliament', as A.W. Dicey ([1885] 1915, pp. 39-40) put it. Referring to Locke and Montesquieu, the *Founding Fathers* of the US Constitution of 1789 developed the 'separation powers' doctrine, focusing on the Congress's parliamentary powers on legislation. The opposition between parliamentary types of polities and polities based on a separation of powers became fully understood only when Walter Bagehot famously spoke of cabinet government as a 'fusion' of legislative and executive powers ([1867] 2001, p. 11-12).

Representation as an activity divides the citizenry into the representatives and the represented (Ankersmit 2002, esp. p. 115). The representative powers are opposed to those of monarchs, autocrats and dictators as well as officials, experts and specialists. But who will be represented and how? The conceptual history of parliament has largely been the history of the victory of elections over other bases of representation, and of universal and equal suffrage over other modes of electing representatives. A further distinction therefore concerns the principles of representation in different electoral systems.

Debate is the distinctive activity of parliaments connected to freedom from dependence. The deliberative practice of speaking *in utramque partem,* now established as the standard of conducting business in the Commons, was first recognised in 1593 (see Peltonen 2013, p. 139). Gilbert Campion emphasises that the primacy of debating over voting marks the Westminster style of parliamentary politics: 'Motion, Question and Decision are all parts of a process that may be called the elementary form of debate' (Campion 1929, p. 143). Parliament proceduralises the deliberative genre of rhetoric into the rhetoric of debate (see Palonen 2016). This parliamentary mode of decision-making is the very paradigm of non-violent politics.

For Max Weber, four criteria need to be met for parliamentarism: 1) parliamentary selection of ministers among members; 2) confidence of the government in the parliament; 3) the addressing of ministers to the parliament in plenum and in committee; 4) parliamentary control of administration (Weber [1918] 1988a, p. 227). The two first refer to parliamentary government, the latter two to the procedural and rhetorical aspects of parliamentary politics.

5.5. The language of parliamentary government

The actors in the Glorious Revolution recognised the need for a government, but at the same time they understood the parliament as the strong counter-power to it. During Robert Walpole as the 'first minister', the parliamentary opposition to government was formally recognised in the 1730s (see Kluxen 1956; Skinner 1974). On 13 February 1741 a new powerful tool to dismiss the Walpole government, a 'vote of no confidence', was initiated by Samuel Sandys. His motion opposed the government on the grounds of pure political expedience, as opposed to legal devices, such as impeachment (see Turkka 2007).

That a government must be responsible to parliament, i.e. that it must at least avoid a loss of confidence among the parliament's majority, has been accepted as standard practice in the House of Commons since 1835 (see Andrén 1947). For Walter Bagehot ([1867] 2001, p. 11), cabinet government is only an executive committee of the parliament itself, which the parliament can dismiss, although the cabinet does have the power to dissolve parliament as well. For Bagehot, the distinctive criterion for parliamentary government was that the members of the cabinet be elected from the houses of parliament. This gave them both a degree of independence from their ministries and the possibility to defend the government as members of parliament (ibid. pp. 122-149, see also Weber [1918]1988a, pp. 226-227).

'A few examples of Westminster debates illustrate the establishment of the vocabulary. 'Parliamentary government' was earlier presented as an existing practice but the term itself preceded its institutional recognition. John Macintosh sees 'the establishment of a parliamentary government' as 'the most important consequence of

the Revolution of 1688' (HC Deb 2 March 1819). The young Lord John Russell projected the concept even farther back when saying that Charles I 'abolished parliamentary government' (HC Deb 25 April 1822). Baring uses the formula 'under the present system of parliamentary government' (*The Times* 10 December 1819).

Marques of Wellesley spoke of 'our parliamentary system', arguing against the reform of parliament (HL Deb*,* 29 January 1817). George Sinclair speaks of a 'no-confidence question', with a hyphen in an explicit procedural sense, although referring to a phenomenon of the recent past (HC Deb, 12 June, 4 1841). The minister Ralph Bernal Osborne speaks of the power to dismiss government as the 'Parliamentary system': 'Under our Parliamentary system none of the Members of the Government were permanent' (HC Deb, Committee 28 May 1857). The Duke of Argyll used the term *official opposition* and blames it and the cabinet for not defending freedom in Europe (HC Deb, 8 July 1864).

In France, the Restoration, and especially the Orléans monarchy have been given the reputation of *gouvernment parlementaire* or *régime parlementaire* by some posterior scholars (e.g. Barthelémy 1904). Contemporary scholarship only recognises a degree of parliamentary quality to them (see Laquièze 2002, also Rosanvallon 1994, Roussellier 2005). Anglophone politicians since Mirabeau argued for the legitimacy of a regular opposition, but this was never recognised during the Revolution (see Gunn 2009). For example, Benjamin Constant, despite his pro-parliamentary sympathies, does not speak of parliamentary government (see esp. Constant 1815).

During the Orléans monarchy, Prosper Duvergier de Hauranne explicitly defended *gouvernement parlementaire* (1838, p. iv). The parliamentary responsibility of government means the principle that a government that has lost its majority should resign and be replaced by a cabinet of the victors[3] (ibid. p, xxiii; see also p. xxxi). Duvergier de Hauranne even speaks of a *démocratie parlementaire* (ibid. p. 55), although as a threat to the current monarchical regime.

Of the Belgian parliaments, digitised records exist from 1844. There we can find early terms such as *gouvernement parlementaire* and *système parlementaire*, which, though they refer to the existing state of affairs, hardly constitute a conceptual debate.

In Germany, Robert Mohl regarded the British ministry as a committee of the two Houses supported by the majority (Mohl 1846, p. 453). In the 1848 Revolution, the term *parlamentarische Regierung* was used widely and largely accepted in the Landtag and Frankfurt Nationalversammlung debates, although the criteria remained vague (see Botzenhart 1977, pp. 92-100; Boldt 1978, pp. 655-657).

5.6. Parliamentarism

The term 'parliamentarism' has Francophone origins. As many other 'isms', its original uses are pejorative. Victor Hugo in *Napoléon le petit* famously attributes the term to Louis Bonaparte, regards it as an enrichment of the dictionary[4] and proposes a 'paradiastolic' revaluation of the concept (in the sense of Skinner 1996) (Hugo 1852, p. 274). Hugo himself means by *parlementarisme* neither a parliamentary government nor a deliberative assembly, but a number of different things, including freedom from dependence and from forms of financial control of government (ibid. pp. 275-276).

In the Belgian Chambre de Représentants, F. de Slérode speaks pejoratively of '*ce mélange de particularisme, de gouvernementalisme et de parlementarisme*' (Plenum.be, 11 April 1851), already before Hugo's book was published. Later, the leading politician Woeste claims that the regime then in power illustrated the weaknesses of parliamentarism in its failure to enable bold changes[5] (Plenum.be, 5 June 1877).

Parliamentarism arrived in the English press by the second half of the 1850s. It referred then to cases abroad, mainly to France, and usually pejoratively. In the *Manchester Guardian,* Charles de Rémusat is seen to be 'a very mirror of English parliamentarism' (12 February 1856). The first expression of 'parliamentarism' in the House of Commons can be found only during WWI, when an Irish member, William O'Brien, comments: 'It … is that miserable collapse of Parliamentarism which is responsible for the Dublin rising, which is … responsible for the contempt and hatred of Parliamentary methods which has undoubtedly taken possession of a large portion of Ireland' (*Parliamentary Papers* House of Commons, 21 May 1917). The variant

‘parliamentarianism’ was also used pejoratively and referred to cases outside Britain (see William Wyndham, HC Deb. 28 November 1912).

In Germany, the Brockhaus lexicon used *Parlamentarismus* soon after Hugo and connected it to the necessity of parliamentary government (Brockhaus 1853, vol. 11, p. 675). Lothar Bucher’s *Der Parlamentarismus, wie er ist* (1855) was a pamphlet directed against British parliamentary government.

In the Reichstag, the Social Democrat Georg Vollmar responded to the attacks of the member Hänel against the parliament (1 September 1883). Wolfgang Gans, a Conservative, typically rejected *Parlamentarismus* as a threat to the crown, the army and officialdom that incited passion and intrigues of parties (13 December 1909). The Chancellor Theobald v. Bethmann-Hollweg saw in the non-responsibility of the Chancellor to the Reichstag a counterweight to the male suffrage of the Reichstag elections (16 February 1912). The Social Democrat Georg Ledebour regarded the system of the empire as essentially bureaucratic, but that employed parliamentary decoration[6] (15 March 1910). Eduard David, a reformist Social Democrat, took a stand in favour of a parliamentary government and state (*parlamentarische Regierung*, *parlamentarisches Staatswesen*, 26 October 1910). (See also the discussion of Jörke and Llanque 2016.)

The constitutional change in October 1918 opened a possibility for the members of Reichstag to enter to the government, and thus a parliamentary way to lead the Reich. The Chancellor Prince Max von Baden did not, however, speak of parliamentarism or of the parliamentarisation of government (22 October 1918). Among the party leaders, the majority Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert spoke of an irreversible transition to a *parlamentarische Regierungsform*, Friedrich Naumann of the Left Liberals and Gustav Stresemann of the National Liberals referred to *parlamentarisches System*, the latter also to *Parlamentarisierung*, whereas the Conservative Kuno Westarp merely stated the fact that the Reich had become a ‘*parlamentarisch regierter*’ state (all three 22 October 1918). Hugo Haase from the left-wing USPD was ready to support the parliamentarisation of the government (23 October 1918), but the ultra-left member Otto Rühle rejected democracy and parliamentarism (25 October 1918).

In Norway, a court confirmed in 1884 that a government that had lost the majority in the Stortinget must resign, and Johan Sverdrup formed a liberal majority government. Already in 1851, Sverdrup had referred to parliamentary government in a speech in the Stortinget (*parlamentarisk Styrelse, Regjering* or *Ministerium*, 6 May 1851, quoted from his *Virksomme ord*). In an interpellation debate from 25 February to 2 March 1888 between the Sverdrup government and the conservative opposition, such issues were taken up as the British and the French parliamentary systems, and the criteria for parliamentarism, and whether the government had broken with parliamentarism (Stortingsforhandlingar 1888, vol. 37. Nr 7). Up to the dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905, fierce disputes on *parlamentarismen* were held in the Stortinget.

In Sweden, the terms *parlamentarism* and *parlamentariska styrelsesättet* (parliamentary government) were used in debates in the Riksdag, which was bicameral after 1866. Nordström and Wallenberg held parliamentarism to be inapplicable to Sweden (Second chamber, 9 March 1869), but Rydin stated that there are almost as many meanings of the concept as there were members in the Riksdag (ibid.). In 1871, R. Carlén, in a motion (Nr 195, 1871) in the lower chamber, expected parliamentary government to have 'a future before it'. In the debate, he defended the principle that the king's council cannot maintain anyone who has lost the confidence of the representatives (Second chamber, 17 April 1871). This applied only to single ministers, whereas the principle of the responsibility to parliament of government as a whole was accepted only in the aftermath of World War I.

The end of WW I marked the adoption of parliamentarism by both the losers of the war and the new states of Europe. However, 'the crisis of parliamentarism' soon became the dominant theme as authoritarian and totalitarian regimes gained ground, and even adherents of parliamentary democracy supported the strengthening of executive powers (see Gusy ed. 2008; Ihalainen, Ilie and Palonen 2016). The Weimar Republic became the symbol of failure, ultimately due to the anti-parliamentary parties in it winning a majority (see Mergel 2002). The French Third Republic got the reputation of governmental instability and was frequently derided as a *régime d'assemblée* (for a reappraisal Roussellier 1997, 2000).

5.7. The language of debate

Debate marks the parliamentary form of deliberating by speaking *pro et contra.* This was not the case in the origins of Westminster parliamentary politics, but became so by the mid-sixteenth century, as Campion emphasises:

> The House of Commons had, to start with, no official right of debate. … Its return, 1547, to the Palace of Westminster as a body with the privilege of freedom of speech was a measure of success with which it has solved the essential problem of debate – that of focussing and expressing the will of a numerous body. (Campion 1929, p. 11)

Beginning in the Tudor era, debate gained ground in the description of what the House of Commons did. Sir Thomas Smith's formula, '[i]n the disputing is a mervelous good order used in the lower house' (published in 1583), makes the point that parliamentary order is an order of debates. Henry Scobell, of the Cromwell era, saw in debate a link between motion and question: 'When a Motion hath been made, the same may not be put to the Question until it is debated, or at least have been seconded and prosecuted by one or more persons' (Scobell 1656, p. 21). The Bill of Rights from 1689 guarantees freedom of speech and debate, as Thomas Erskine May noted: 'By the 9th article of the Bill of Rights it was declared, "that the freedom of speech, and debates or proceedings in Parliament, ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament"' (May 1844, p. 80).

In opposition to the pre-revolutionary French assemblies, Jeremy Bentham strongly supported the Westminster practice in which debate precedes vote: 'To vote before anyone else has spoken in the debate, is to judge altogether without documents – altogether without grounds: to vote while there still remains any one to speak, who has anything to say, is to judge without documents pro tanto.' (Bentham 1843, ch. VI.5.) For Campion, 'unwritten rules, or [the] "practice", of the House … [exist] … principally for the sake of ensuring fairness and fullness of debate' (Campion 1929, p. vii), and parliamentary debate includes making of a motion and a question (ibid. p. 145). For Griffith and Ryle, too, 'The process of debate […] is the main process used

for the most House business' (2003, p. 86). In short, debate *pro et contra* in its different forms, conducted in multiple stages, with different rules for plenum and committee, and including the final vote on a resolution, is the basic form of acting politically in the Westminster parliament (see also Palonen 2014, chapters 4 to 6).

The situation has been different in France. Valette and Saint-Marsy regard debates as secondary compared to legislation[7] (1839, p. 4). In the Third Republic, however, debates gained ground. In Eugène Pierre's view, there are no major differences between the French and British practices regarding the importance of the rules of procedure (Pierre 1887, pp. 18–38). This applies to amendments (ibid. 69–78), rules for plenary debates on motions (ibid. pp. 98–109), and the rotation between *pro* and *contra* speakers, as well as the extensive powers of the President of the Assembly to regulate debates (ibid. pp. 101–102).

In line with the growing importance of procedure, the deliberative genre of rhetoric acquired a new, parliamentary form. The parliamentary rhetoric of debate replaced classical eloquence, which was judged in aesthetic terms. Parliamentary rhetoric changes the unit of action from speech to debate.

Renaissance rhetorical culture (Skinner 1996) continued at Westminster, as manifested in William Gerard Hamilton's maxims. In the late eighteenth century, the *grand style* oratory flourished for a period, with Pitt Sr (Chatham), Burke, Sheridan, Fox and Pitt Jr as the master speakers, who were celebrated in the new genre of parliamentary speech collections (for example, Browne (1808/10)). Later parliamentarians themselves, from the young Gladstone (1838) and the old Macaulay (1859) to O'Connor Power (1906), Curzon (1913) and Ponsonsby (1938) well understood that parliamentary rhetoric must be a rhetoric of debate (see Palonen 2016).

George Jakob Holyoake makes the respect for adversaries a precondition for parliamentary debate: 'The victory in a debate lies not in lowering an opponent, but in raising the subject in public estimation. Controversial wisdom lies not in destroying the adversary, but in destroying his error – not in making him ridiculous but in making the audience wise' (Holyoake 1897, p. 70). He presents a methodological

principle: offering opposite perspectives as a necessary condition for understanding the question (see also De Mille 1878, pp. 471–473; Graham 1910, p. 16). The value of a continual dissensus between perspectives is what gives the *pro et contra* debates of parliament justification.

The radical difference between parliamentary and 'platform' speeches in public meetings was noted by former Irish member John O'Connor Power:

> The rules of debate enforced in legislative assemblies exercise an important and, on the whole, a beneficial effect on parliamentary rhetoric. They prevent its degenerating into coarse invective or vulgar abuse, and help to concentrate attention on the question under discussion. (O'Connor Power 1906, pp. 54–55)

The centrality of debate is clearly present in the works of John Stuart Mill and Walter Bagehot. The former MP Georg Grote's reinterpretation of ancient Greek history inspired both of them (discussed in Palonen 2016). Mill, in particular, insisted on the value of dissent: 'The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it' (Mill [1859] 1989, p. 20). Here we can speak of a parliamentary model for a theory of knowledge.

Bagehot's formulation, *government by discussion,* 'breaks with the custom' and sets new topics on the agenda. 'As far as it goes, the mere putting up of a subject to discussion, with the object of being guided by that discussion, is a clear admission that that subject is in no degree settled by established rule, and that men are free to choose in it' (Bagehot [1872] 1956, pp. 117–118). He further regards parliamentary debate as a model for treatment of controversies among citizens. 'The great scene of debate, the great engine of popular instruction and political controversy, is the legislative assembly. A speech there by an eminent statesman, a party movement by a great political combination, are the best means yet known for arousing, enlivening, and teaching a people.' (Bagehot [1867] 2001, p. 14)

The examples illustrate how parliamentary debate has served as a model for other debates (see Haapala 2016), including scholarly ones. Max Weber with his idea on the

ubiquity and value of scholarly controversies ([1904] 1973), as well as his rhetorical suggestions on how parliamentarians can dispute and thereby control the knowledge claims of officials and experts ([1918] 1988a, pp. 235–237), was indebted to Mill, Bagehot and the Westminster rhetorical culture (on Weber's 'parliamentary' view of knowledge, see Palonen 2010, 2017).

While Westminster recognised the rhetoric of debate as a defining characteristic of parliament, the French *éloquence parlementaire* was still longing for a transcending of dissensus and politics (see esp. Pagnon 1846). The parliamentarian Cornemin prefers the French style of speaking to the English and the Italian (1844, p. 8), although he sympathises with the 'improvisers' over 'readers' and 'declarers', (ibid. p. 13). Poudra and Pierre reject the exclusion (à la Westminster) of pre-written speeches in the *Assemblée nationale*[8], although they recognise that such speeches are not necessarily responsive (1878, p. 606).

In the anti-rhetorical 1930s in Sweden, for example, Pauli prioritised 'matters of fact' (*saklighet*) over 'parliament-aesthetical' points of view, and Lindström preferred to curb parliamentary bavardage (*pratsamhet*) (both comments made in the upper chamber, 6 March 1935). Against the current, the Labour MP Arthur Ponsonsby regarded Westminster debate as the key to parliamentary politics: 'There is a most important parliamentary art he must try and cultivate, namely debating: that is to say, picking out points from other speeches, giving reasoned answers to them, refuting them, enlarging on alternatives, and making suggestions' (1938, p. 47).

Nicolas Roussellier regards the Assemblèe nationale of the Third Republic as *Le parlement d'éloquence* (1997). It not only frequently dismissed the government, it also left it no political initiative. Rhetoric, the exchange of arguments and oratorical tools were inherent parts of decision-making in the state[9] (Roussellier 2002, 367). As in Westminster, guides for parliamentary speakers were presented (see the chapter *La tribune* in Barthou 1923). Still, in the Third Republic, parliamentary debate was seen rather as a governmental technique than as the main mode of acting politically.

5.8. Deliberative assembly

‘Debate’ appears almost everywhere in parliaments, but a look at the Burkean *topos* of parliament as a ‘deliberative assembly’ can offer an interesting perspective on conceptual change. In Westminster debates, different aspects of this *topos* are present throughout the period of the Hansard documentation.

This *topos* is occasionally used in self-congratulatory statements of the parliament. Responding to Prime Minister Lord Castlereagh’s motion for a long adjournment of the House, Abercombie insists that the members of ‘one of the few free deliberative assemblies of the world … were deserving of no confidence’ (HC Deb 20 December 1813). Macaulay celebrated the 1832 parliamentary reform debate as an extraordinary deliberation: ‘If there ever was a time that demanded the highest characteristics of a deliberative assembly – which called for its firmness, its wisdom, its energy, and its public spirit – … that time was at present’ (*The Times* 11 May 1832; not found in the Hansard report on Macaulay’s speech on 10 May 1832).

With Burke, many opponents of parliamentary reform were afraid that negotiation would replace deliberation. For Wilmot, in ‘an assembly elected upon the purest principles of representation, … such a degree of freedom of debate was not practically enjoyed’ (HC Deb 17 April 1821). Scarlett saw the coming of a quasi-imperative mandate, ‘if every Member within the circulation of the morning journals was to be compelled, the day after he had given a vote, to account for that vote at a popular meeting’ (HC Deb 22 July 1831). In contrast, Lord Lyndhorst supported a more representative suffrage and claimed: ‘I am inclined to pay more deference to the votes of the Commons elected under different circumstances, and exercising the power of a deliberative assembly’ (HL Deb 7 October 1831).

The nature of parliament as a deliberative assembly was also invoked against the tendency to reduce parliament to an instrument for displaying confidence in government (corresponding to epideictic rather than deliberative rhetoric). Adderley, an opponent of the Second Reform Act, wanted to ‘to ask the House of Commons to resign its functions as a deliberative assembly and to place a blind confidence, in Ministers’ (HC Deb 16 April 1866). The Radical MP Joseph Cowen saw a danger ‘to degrade … [Parliament] from a deliberative Assembly into a registry office’ (HC Deb 10 November 1882). Irish members found in the clôture also a danger of rendering the

deliberative assembly 'into a farcical Institution' (Healy, HC Deb 01 June 1882), or creating a situation in which 'the House of Commons had better give up all pretence of being a deliberative Assembly' (Sexton HC Deb 13 June 1882).

William Gladstone, as the Chancellor of Exchequer, connected deliberative assembly with parliamentary government. The Ionian assembly was not one: 'the Assembly is not possessed of the right of a free initiative in matters of money and legislation. That, I think, is far from being a free deliberative Assembly according to our idea of the meaning of the words. Further it has no legitimate means of influencing the choice of the Executive; and lastly, it does not possess the power of the purse.' (HC Deb 7 May 1861). For John Russell, the presence of opposite points of view characterises deliberative assemblies: 'Arguments, both for and against the Bill, will be such as ought to be submitted to a deliberative assembly; and that on both sides there will be such a discussion as will befit the dignity of your Lordships' House and the importance of the subject' (HL Deb 17 April 1866; see also Grey HL Deb, 17 March 1867).

The principle that in a parliament votes are counted, not weighted (see Weber [1917] 1988b) was supported by Mitchell Henry: 'In a deliberative Assembly the will of the majority must ultimately prevail' (HC Deb 2 February 1881). John Bright thought that 'a large minority will always have its influence, and always be secure from unjust treatment in a deliberative Assembly wherever they do not resort to brute force to express their views' (HC Deb 30 March 1882).

To quote a recent view, Lord Philip Norton, a political science professor, opposes parliament to referenda, which is also to say, to the epideictic rhetoric of acclamation: 'Parliament is the deliberative assembly of the nation. … To say that matters should be decided by referendum is to say either that Parliament does not have the intellectual competence to decide the issue or that it does not have the political authority to do so, or both. I do not accept either argument. … The second …advantage to parliamentary deliberation is that the issue can not only be debated, but nuances can be explored and amendments offered' (HL debates 31 January 2001).

To sum up, in Westminster the *topos* of the deliberative assembly is invoked when members sense a danger that parliament's power will be diminished. For others, the deliberative parliament is compatible with a broader representation, parliamentary government, the majority principle or limiting the time for debates are topics themselves regarded as debatable in a deliberative assembly.

In the Belgian and French parliaments, *assemblée délibérante* seems to have stirred almost no controversy. For Dumortier, the plans to introduce a consumption tax were something unprecedented in deliberative assemblies[10] (Plenum.be, 2 Mai 1851). In France, Carnaud saw attempts to reduce the parliamentary rights of functionaries a domestication of universal suffrage[11] (Chambre, 11 August 1894). René Coblet could not accept any decisions made in parliament without a debate[12] (30 July 1884). Camille Pelletan parodised 'une assemblée délibérante du nouveau genre' that avoided real debate in order to maintain an accord between the chambers (31 Juillet 1884). Even during the Great War, Emile Broussais disputed the parliament's right to delegate its powers (22 November 1917).

Contra the *communis opinio*, an unnamed French minister insisted on the priority of the legislative over the deliberative, as assembly disputes over texts merely invites controversy[13] (27 October 1908). He opposed the Westminster type of parliament as a debating assembly, regarding this as inferior to the Napoleonic ideal of a legislature.

5.9. Final remarks

Parliaments are a strange political innovation. They have not been composed by anyone in advance, but rather, they have been transformed in practice over centuries. I have discussed parliament as an institution of the political, a counter-power to government and administration due to its basis in deliberation, dissensus and debate. As such, it is the product of especially the last 150 to 200 years in Westminster, and for a shorter period elsewhere.

Parliamentary language also provides resources for political actors to empower European assemblies. The Treaty of Paris enabled the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to debate on the annual report of the

High Authority, with the possibility at that single occasion to dismiss the High Authority by a vote of no confidence. After the ECSC was integrated with the European Communities, a report by Pierre Wigny judged the Assembly from the perspective of parliamentary rules and practices. The Common Assembly had established a continuous control via multiple sessions, permanent committees and utilisation of written questions. The dialogue between the Assembly and the High Authority, the predecessor of the European Commission, never broke down (Wigny 1958, p. 32). Claiming parliamentary control of everything not explicitly forbidden by the treaties has since then been a major route towards the parliamentarisation of European integration (see also Tiilikainen and Wiesner 2016). However, the European Union still does not select its commissioners among the MEPs, as Bagehot and Weber strongly insisted.

Max Weber once conducted a thought experiment on the status of the parliament, asking to think what power could replace it[14] (Weber [1918] 1988a, p. 255). As of today, there is still no answer to Weber's rhetorical question.

There are attempts to create non-elected deliberative assemblies by means of lottery or rotation (see e.g. Buchstein 2009). They aim at improving representation, whereas for internal debates, there are no models other than parliament. As for parliament's power to exercise daily control and oversight of government, make it accountable and dismiss it when warranted, no serious alternatives exist. Bagehot's old arguments on the weakness of debate in presidential systems holds also for applying a presidential style to parliamentary elections. The parliament has also been the model for academic debating societies since the nineteenth century (see Haapala 2016).

It is high time to stop talking about parliaments as 'out of date', and instead to learn more about the historical resources of parliamentary politics as well as spell out the ideal-typical possibilities for acting and thinking politically at this juncture in history. The distinctive value of parliamentary-style politics lies in understanding that dissensus and debate form a precondition for politics as such. The parliament is the model for their proceduralisation and institutionalisation. This institutionalisation of a debating style of politics could be extended to other institutions and practices, including academic controversies.

The value orientation of the parliamentary style of politics corresponds also to that of conceptual history, namely, that the use of concepts is contingent, controversial and contested. Furthermore, as concepts tend to change through their use, it would be wise to look at parliamentarians when we wish to discover political innovations in concepts.

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[1] For example, by the *History of Concepts Group*, the research training network *Concepta* and the journal *Contributions to the History of Concepts* (https://www.historyofconcepts.net). Other projects include *Political Concepts Standing Group* of the European Consortium of Political Research (https://ecpr.eu/StandingGroups/StandingGroupHome.aspx?ID=53) and the *Forum für Interdisziplinäre Begriffsgeschichte* (http://www.zfl-berlin.org/projekt/forum-interdisziplinaere-begriffsgeschichte.html).
[2] 'Vertretungen der durch die Mittel der Bureaukratie Beherrschten'
[3] 'Ministère, pour rendre hommage au grand principe des majorités parlementaires, devait se dissoudre sur-le-champ et laisser aux vainqueurs du jour le soin de former un cabinet'
[4] 'Qu'est-ce que c'est ça, la tribune? s'écrie M. Bonaparte Louis: c'est du parlementarisme. Parlementarisme me plait. Parlementarisme est une perle. Voila le dictionnaire enrichi'
[5] 'L'atmosphère du parlementarisme est fatale. Jamais nous trouverons en son sein la foi audacieuse qui marche droit au but, n'ayant souci que du devoir'
[6] 'mit parlamentarischem Aufputz, mit parlamentarischer Redebegleitung'
[7] 'Les débats … ne sont que des accessoires'
[8] 'Il serait injuste de les interdire absolument'
[9] 'L'exchange d'arguments et les techniques de l'éloquence constituaient bien les méthodes principales de décision dans l'état'
[10] 'Jamais pareille chose ne s'est vue dans aucune assemblée délibérante'
[11] 'Punir un élu parce que il manifeste hautement son opinion dans une assemblée délibérante'
[12] 'Je ne crois pas … que, dans une assemblée délibérante, une question de cette gravité doive être tranchée sans discussion'
[13] 'Voulez-vous nous transformer en assemblée délibérante, discuter les textes, instaurer des controverses spécieuses. … Notre mission est de faire des lois, les faire claires et précises'
[14] 'Es ist schlechterdings durch keine andere Macht zu ersetzen. Oder: durch welche?'