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An Application of Conceptual History to Itself

*From Method to Theory in Reinhart Koselleck's
Begriffsgeschichte*

With the exception of some studies of Melvin Richter, the history of the Koselleckian conceptual history has been hardly thematized. Reinhart Koselleck himself has, however, recently made an interesting comment on this, which legitimates a closer historical discussion of the changes in his programme. In his *Reflections*, published in 1994, he writes on the experiences around the publication of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*:

Publication of that lexicon has been going on for two decades by now and, for me at least, its theoretical and methodological presuppositions, first formulated some twenty-five years ago, have grown into an intellectual straightjacket. While it was necessary to maintain these presuppositions in relatively unchanged form in order to be able to proceed with the collaborative project of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, my own

thought on conceptual history has kept changing. It should therefore not surprise you if the positions I shall be defending in this paper are somewhat different from the one that originally inspired the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Indeed, it would be dreadful and depressing if years of reflection had not lead to significant change in my approach to conceptual history (*Reflections*, 7).

Koselleck does not say how his views on conceptual history have changed. His statement challenges me to explicate the changes. Instead of departing, in an anachronistic manner, from Koselleck's present position and looking for its 'roots', I take the early formulations as a starting point and relate the later variants to them.

My discussion of Koselleck's programme is based on a sketch of the layers of meaning implied by his concept of *Begriffsgeschichte*. These layers have at least implicit formulations in the published writings of Koselleck. My intention is to identify the diverse layers and to discuss the relations between them. I begin by discussing the original formulation of the programme in the texts from 1967 to 1972 and the comment, after which I appraise the changes in the programme in the later texts.

The origins of Koselleck's programme are very modest, but during the progression of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* the level of ambitions has, at least implicitly, risen. The set of questions to which conceptual history may contribute has been understood as larger than in the original formulation. However, it may be asked whether Koselleck himself has accepted the more radical consequences of his programme.

The Horizon of Meanings of *Begriffsgeschichte*

Using Koselleck's programmatic articles, the discussion on them, my earlier comments on them, as well as my intuition, I have constructed six different layers of meaning for conceptual history.

They can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Conceptual history as a subfield of historiography
- 2) Conceptual history as a method of historiography
- 3) Conceptual history as a strategy of textual analysis
- 4) Conceptual history as a micro-theory of conceptual change
- 5) Conceptual history as a macro-theory of conceptual change
- 6) Conceptual history as a revolution in the understanding of concepts.

In the first three layers, conceptual history is seen as a kind of method, while in the latter three it rather appears as a theory. My point is that an important aspect of the conceptual changes in Koselleck's programme manifests the shift of interest from method to theory.

For non-specialists, speaking of conceptual history obviously means a historical study on concepts. They assume that it treats the units named concepts as the object of historical analysis, being in this respect analogous to any sort of historical writing on specific object-units. Conceptual history can be differentiated from e.g. the histories of words, metaphors or discourses (cf. e.g. Busse et.al. [ed] 1994).

It is, of course, impossible to write about conceptual history without writing about concepts. However, not every historical treatment of concepts deserves the name of conceptual history in the Koselleckian sense (on the older usages of *Begriffsgeschichte*, cf. Meier 1971). To speak of conceptual history presupposes reflection on how we can speak of 'histories of concepts' and write about them; furthermore, one must ask why precisely concepts appear as units worth special historical analysis. An answer to both questions is programmatically discussed by Koselleck. In his programme, *conceptual history is always more than conceptual history*. It forms a perspective on or a method of approaching the histories of other units as well: "In our method, concepts are treated as more than meanings of terms that can be unambiguously defined", (*Response*, 64).

Today it is obvious that conceptual history has not remained the monopoly of professional historians. The representatives of other

human sciences have not only used the articles of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* as 'historical background material' but have also written about conceptual histories in their own fields. For example, my studies on the history of the concept of politics arose 15 years ago from the problems of the historiography of political science. When I made my first research plan, I did not yet know that there already existed a specific *Begriffsgeschichte*. Even now my practice differs from that of historians, and I would like to characterize my style of using conceptual history as a strategy in textual analysis. In this sense it offers an alternative to semiotics, content analysis, hermeneutics or rhetoric, etc.

Besides these 'methodological' aspects, Koselleckian conceptual history contains a perspective on the practices of using concepts in politics and culture. An obvious layer of discussion concerns the relations between words, concepts and 'the object' (*Sache*). I call this layer a micro-theory of conceptual change. It is mainly around this aspect that the debates on Koselleck's programme between linguists, historians, philosophers, etc. are going on.

The specific profile which distinguishes Koselleck's programme from other related enterprises is provided by his 'macro-theory' of conceptual change. With his famous *Sattelzeit* thesis, Reinhart Koselleck identifies a period during which socio-political concepts underwent a paradigm shift. He relates the changing paradigm of concepts to a wider theory of a "semantic of historical times".

Finally, the paradigm shift from topological to temporal concepts can also be interpreted as a revolution in the very understanding and usage of the units called concepts. One of the famous slogans of Koselleck is that concepts are always ambiguous, *vieldeutig* (*Begriffsgeschichte*, 119). Avoiding this sort of ambiguity has been a major enterprise in both politics and especially the human sciences. Students are still taught in most academic introductory courses that concepts should be as atemporal, univocal and uncontroversial as possible. Against this academic ideology the conceptual history à la Koselleck makes the historical, ambiguous and controversial character of concepts a precondition for studying politics, culture and history. It marks a real revolution.

Conceptual History as a Method

The work of Reinhart Koselleck can be divided into several kinds of texts which have different significance to *Begriffsgeschichte*. Besides the monographs *Kritik und Krise* and *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, the anthology *Vergangene Zukunft* and the articles in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, his publications largely consist of articles published in collections, sometimes not easily attainable even in German university libraries. This has led to a situation in which Koselleck often repeats some themes, examples and even formulations, which makes close reading difficult if the texts are read in relation to each other. It is not easy to distinguish 'similarities' from 'differences', and the same holds for deciding on which are just reformulations and where significant conceptual shifts can be identified.

In *Kritik und Krise* Koselleck "verknüpft geistesgeschichtliche Analysen mit soziologischen Bedingungsanalysen" (4), although, especially in the notes, he already thematizes the concepts of critique and crisis, revolution and politics in particular. In *Preußen* he declares the method to be "entsprechend den Fragestellungen, sozialgeschichtlich" (*Preußen*, 17). The social history was completed by histories of words, partially of concepts as well, but in opposition to his previous work: "Verzichtet wird auf die Geistesgeschichte (ibid.)."

Koselleck's first programmatic article, *Richtlinien für das Lexikon politisch-sozialer Begriffe der Neuzeit*, written in 1963 and published in 1967 in *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, hardly claims to initiate a new and 'revolutionary' research programme. It is based on the teamwork of the redactional committee of what was to become *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. The purpose is not a general presentation of *Begriffsgeschichte*, but that of the *Lexikon*. The point of the project is presented in the following formulation:

Das Lexikon ist also insofern gegenwartsbezogen, als es die sprachliche Erfassung der modernen Welt, ihre Bewußtwerdung und Bewußtmachung durch Begriffe, die auch die unseren sind, zum Thema hat. (op.cit, 81).

Linguistic conceptualization plays here only an instrumental role. Conceptual history is understood as a 'method' (op. cit., 83-84) or as an auxiliary discipline to 'world history'. It is limited to the understanding of the past: contemporary concepts are taken as if they were 'given' and well-known to the readers. The interest in the concepts after ca. 1900 remains limited and their history is presented as a "more registering" one. They do not need any "translation" (op.cit., 82).

The 'method' of the *Lexikon* was understood as a critique of the older philosophical and philological forms of *Begriffsgeschichte*, dominating in the annual *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* and in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. The editor of *Wörterbuch*, Joachim Ritter, (1967) also acknowledged that a more radical departure from its predecessors was necessary. For Koselleck it was not possible to start by simply writing histories of concepts in terms of their internal history, without placing the whole enterprise into a wider context:

erst ein theoretischer Vorgriff, der einen spezifischen Zeitraum festlegt, öffnet überhaupt die Möglichkeit, bestimmte Lesarten durchzuspielen und unser Lexikon aus der Ebene einer positivistischen Registratur auf die der Begriffsgeschichte zu transponieren. (*Theoriebedürftigkeit*, 22)

In *Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte* (1972) Koselleck emphasizes two crucial points: "Kritik an der unbesehenen Übertragung gegenwärtiger und zeitgebundener Ausdrücke des Verfassungslebens in die Vergangenheit" and "Kritik an der Geschichte von Ideen, sofern diese als konstante Größen eingebracht werden" (op.cit, 115). These points were already central to Otto Brunner's classical work *Land und Herrschaft* (cf. Koselleck's comment on it in *Probleme*).

It appears surprising that contemporary political concepts were treated as more or less 'established'. To understand this, a recourse to *Sachgeschichte* seems to be helpful: the *Lexikon* was sketched in the late fifties and early sixties, which was a high time of the ideas of the 'end of ideology' or 'depoliticization'. If one of the aims of the

Lexikon was "eine semantologische Kontrolle für unseren gegenwärtigen Sprachgebrauch" (*Richtlinien*, 83), the application of conceptual history to the past already meant a questioning of abstract and ahistorical definitions (*ibid.*). To understand the contemporary period as one of interesting conceptual controversies and changes (cf. Ball 1988, 10-11), remained, however, beyond the horizon of the original intentions of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

Seeing conceptual history as an auxiliary discipline to social history or as a "variant" of it (cf. *Preußen*, 17) was initially related to Koselleck's Prussian studies, and Koselleck also refers to the hegemonic position of sociology among the contemporary 'critical' academics (Cf. *Historie*). Still, his discussion of the relations between conceptual and social history is different from that of his colleagues in Bielefeld, like Hans-Ulrich Wehler und Jürgen Kocka. This is clearly manifested in the close links to texts, which Koselleck emphasizes already in *Preußen*:

Im Maß also, wie wir Texte zu überschreiten genötigt sind, werden wir wieder auf sie zurückverweisen. Die historisch-philologische Methode kann durch keine Frage nach soziologische Größen allgemeiner Art überholt – wohl aber ergänzt – werden. Daher werden alle Aussagen immer wieder auf Textinterpretationen zurückgeführt, aus ihnen abgeleitet, durch sie erhärtet. (*Preußen*, 17)

According to Koselleck, the significance of conceptual history has three levels: as a method it can conceptualize themes of social history; as an autonomous discipline it is parallel to social history; and it has its own theoretical ambitions (*Begriffsgeschichte*, 108). All of them apply, however, equally well to the relations of conceptual history with political or cultural history.

The autonomous significance of conceptual history is due to a decontextualizing move in which concepts are turned into specific units of study, each of them forming a diachrony of its own.

Indem die Begriffe im zweiten Durchgang einer Untersuchung aus ihrem situationsgebundenen Kontext gelöst werden, und ihre

Bedeutungen durch die Abfolge der Zeiten hindurch verfolgt und dann einander zugeordnet werden, summieren sich die einzelnen historischen Begriffsanalysen zur Geschichte eines Begriffs. Erst auf dieser Ebene wird die historisch-philologische Methode begriffsgeschichtlich überhöht, erst auf dieser Ebene verliert die Begriffsgeschichte ihren subsidiären Charakter für die Sozialhistorie. (op.cit., 115-116)

This decontextualizing move is one of the most important 'methodological' claims of Koselleckian history of concepts. It indicates, for example, a difference to Quentin Skinner, for whom "there can be no histories of concepts as such; there can only be histories of their uses in argument" (Skinner 1988, 283). When Koselleck insists on the significance of the concepts as key units of study, this is not only related to specific lexical purposes. The concentration on single concepts allows diachronic comparisons transcending at least some of the contextual borders, which are treated as otherwise insurmountable. The history of single concepts allows one to avoid a priori classifications of concepts, which easily turn into obstacles to the attempt to sketch the specific historical profile of the concept studied.

A programmatic statement of Koselleck, important for understanding conceptual history as a strategy of textual analysis, links *Begriffsgeschichte* to other forms of 'linguistic turn' in the historical sciences. In the *Einleitung* (1972) he writes:

In gewisser Weise ist die gesamte Quellsprache der jeweils behandelten Zeiträume eine einzige Metapher für die Geschichte, um deren Erkenntnis es geht. (op.cit., xiii)

To understand the "language of the sources" as a metaphor of history emphasizes that precisely in the conscious one-sidedness of the concentration on concepts something of "the world" outside them can be said. The study of the contemporary vocabulary of the sources gives a key to understanding other contemporary subjects, too. It is in this sense that conceptual history becomes "more than itself".

Conceptual history as a strategy of textual analysis is only indicated by Koselleck (cf., e.g., on Bund, *Begriffsgeschichte*, 125).

It is perhaps best 'applied' to a single text (cf. Palonen 1995b or Beck 1993). As a textual interpretation, conceptual history is opposed especially to ahistorical approaches, like Greimasian semiology or Gricean conversational analysis. If "applied to politics", they tend to take politics as something known and more or less the same everywhere. The Koselleckian variant of the "linguistic turn", by contrast, directs attention to the changes in concepts by using the language of sources as "heuristischer Einstieg, die vergangene Wirklichkeit zu erfassen" (*Begriffsgeschichte*, 127).

The value of Koselleck's approach to the textual analysis of politics can be illustrated by the trivial case of an electoral debate of party leaders. A conceptual history of the debate could look for a) the thematization of concepts, b) the interpretation of concepts, c) the nuances on conceptual vocabulary and d) the art by which the concepts are said to be related to 'real' events and processes. These levels give a conceptual matrix, which could be connected with more specific questions about them, like conscious strategic usage of conceptual inventions, returns etc., as opposed to implicit conceptual commitments. In both aspects the thematization of concepts could give rise to unexpected interpretations concerning either the common conceptual horizons or the cleavages between the conceptual horizons among the politicians in question.

The temporality of concepts can be discussed in terms of the horizon of expectations and the space of experience: today it is by no means certain that 'conservative' politicians are more past-oriented and 'radical' ones more future-oriented. The analysis of the concepts could detect the presence of different historical layers in the usages of concepts such as "republic" or "democracy". Again, both the 'innocent' usage and the 'strategic' references, either to tradition or to a break with it, could be evoked e.g. by borrowing slogans originally attributed to opposed political languages. As opposed to 'media studies' appealing to 'non-verbal' elements in the discussion, conceptual history can offer a broad but specific apparatus. It could create some distance to the debates possible, without turning the politicians into instruments of 'higher' and impersonal forces, as the structuralistically oriented approaches tend to do.

The Marginality of 'Methodological' Changes

It seems to me that during the years Koselleck has become less interested in the methodological questions and more interested in the theoretical ones. Still, there are some methodological changes worth noticing. I classify them roughly as a) nuancements, b) shifts of interest, c) de- or recontextualizations and d) by-products of theoretical changes. The last-mentioned refer to theoretical levels to be discussed soon, but I shall first give some remarks on the first three.

A critique of Koselleck by Busse (1987) concerns the sources of conceptual history. In his later writings Koselleck now divides the sources into three types according to the temporal layer: short-term sources (like journals), more long-term ones (like lexica) and those striving for timelessness (like the classics). (*Reflections*)

Koselleck no longer understands conceptual history as an auxiliary to social history, and he even speaks now rather of *Sachgeschichte* or *Ereignisgeschichte* than of social history. In *Sozialgeschichte und Begriffsgeschichte* (1986) he explicitly turns against the idea of a "total history" in the name of the temporal discrepancies between linguistic and social changes. (cf. also *Sprachwandel, Ereignisgeschichte*)

De- or recontextualizations of Koselleck's approach outside its original methodological interests are equally noticeable. I will illustrate this with my favourite subject, the polemic against "die Gesellschaft". In *Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte* there is a formula which sounds astonishing to my Weberian nominalism:

Ohne gemeinsame Begriffe gibt es keine Gesellschaft, vor allem keine politische Handlungseinheit. (op.cit., 108)

When reading Koselleck historically, I think the formula may well have a point, although hardly one intended by the author. My thesis is that when there are today no common concepts in political and social matters any longer, there is no *Gesellschaft* or "society", in a strong sense of the concept, left either. No unitary, total or mo-

nopolizing form of *Vergesellschaftung*, in the Weberian sense, exists. The increasing conflicts and incommensurabilities in the political and social language in the contemporary world are, *pace* Koselleck, both indicators of and factors in the dissolution of such quasi-topological concepts as 'society'.

Hannah Arendt (1960) and Alexander Demandt have stressed that the German *Gesellschaft* has its origin in the word *Saal*. "Mein 'Geselle' ist, wer mit mir im gleichen 'Saal' schläft", writes Demandt (1978, 288). Let us take this point seriously and link it with the interpretation of Koselleck's formula as well as of the *Sachgeschichte*.

Are there, in the contemporary western world, some big collective dormitories left? In the early seventies one still could find them in students' hostels or in Maoist *Wohngemeinschaften*. Today they are experienced as inhuman and intolerable. To me at least, the same holds for speaking about *die Gesellschaft* or society, used either as a collective singular which acts, makes demands, etc. or as a unitary meta-place to which all other places are subordinated.

Similarly, political action is no longer related to some Schmittian 'unities of action'. "The politics in the first person" or the Beckian (1993) sub-politics appear much more relevant. The search for a unity in politics is a nostalgic and repressive vision¹.

The Micro-Theory of Conceptual Change

A starting point for the discussion of Koselleck's micro-theory of conceptual change is offered by "das linguistische Dreieck von Wortkörper (Bezeichnung) – Bedeutung (Begriff) – Sache" (*Begriffsgeschichte*, 119, cf. *Einleitung*, xxii). Conceptual history is not only a history of concepts in the narrow sense, but also a history of the relations of concepts to words and to objects. The point of Koselleck's programme is to include the *external* history into conceptual history and to relate the *internal* to it, and vice versa. Or, we could distinguish *Konzeptionsgeschichte* from *Begriffsgeschichte* in the wider sense (cf. Palonen 1985, 1989).

A key to Koselleck's program is the dual, both semasiological and onomasiological approach. For the lexical purposes of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* semasiology, the history of meaning (*Bedeutung*), is obviously of the primary interest, while onomasiology, the history of naming (*Bezeichnung*), remains complementary (*Richtlinien*, 84-85, *Einleitung*, xxi-xxii). For more specified, monographic studies, the introduction of neologisms or the use of synonymous expressions for some concepts and the politics of naming can, however, be of greater value.

It is problematic to understand conceptual changes as "indicators" of changes in the object (*Sache*, cf. e.g. *Begriffsgeschichte*, 118). Koselleck's programme does, by no means, assume a correspondence between the angles of words, concepts and objects as an ideal. On the contrary, it is precisely their discrepancies that constitute its primary subject matter, and there are no *a priori* commitments as to how to deal with them.

Immer wieder ist ein Hiatus zwischen sozialen Sachverhalten und dem darauf zielenden oder sie übergreifenden Sprachgebrauch zu registrieren. Wortbedeutungswandel und Sachwandel, Situationswechsel und Zwang zu Neubenennungen korrespondieren auf je verschiedene Weise miteinander. (op.cit., 121)

The point of the linguistic triangle lies in the discrepancy thesis. I will not open here the debates on the meanings of concepts, words and objects (cf. the contributions in *Historische Semantik und Begriffsgeschichte*, Busse 1987, Richter 1986, 1990, 1994, Palonen 1995a). The obvious value of the discrepancy thesis is to point to the chances and challenges involved in the hiatus between the angles of the triangle. There is no reason to expect an end to conceptual changes one day, at least if the language and the objects continue to be subject to change.

I would like to interpret *Sachverhalte* nominalistically as products of 'referential languages'. Then the 'object'-side of the triangle, too, would be compatible with Nietzschean-Weberian perspectivism. It considers 'the reality' to be inexhaustible with

words and concepts, but subject to perspectivistic and partial attempts at conceptualization (cf. Weber 1904, 180-181). The referential language consists of expressions of some experiences, for which neither the conventional vocabulary nor the existing forms of conceptualizations appear as adequate. *Fait accompli* -situations or sudden occurrences, like the fall of the Berlin wall, are examples in which both the current language and conceptual apparatus appear as insufficient to understanding the novelty. I would reserve the term *Sache* to the references to the inexhaustible aspects of 'reality'.

If reinterpreted in this manner, the types of conceptual change in Koselleck's early programmatic statements could be classified as follows:

- 1) semasiological changes of meaning in the interpretation of the concept
- 2) onomasiological changes of naming in the vocabulary related to the concept
- 3) referential changes in the relations of the concept to the object.

Conceptual Changes in the Micro-Theory

There are, however, some noticeable conceptual changes in Koselleck's program at the level of micro-theory. His most enigmatic article in this respect is the address before the constitutional historians, *Begriffsgeschichtliche Probleme der Verfassungsgeschichtsschreibung* (published in 1983). While he earlier quotes with approval Nietzsche's dictum "Definierbar ist nur was keine Geschichte hat" (*Begriffsgeschichte*, 120), Koselleck here relativizes the very same thesis, by emphasizing the historicity of the definitions themselves. Some 'definitions' of a concept are always necessary, in order to mark the problem:

Was überhaupt wissenschaftlich begriffen werden kann, hängt von der Definition oder Umschreibung und der Verwendung der Begriffe ab. (*Probleme*, 8)

A 'definition' does not determine a concept but, rather, demarcates or identifies a problem. Another criterion for the need of a 'definition' refers to a critique of Otto Brunner's path-breaking studies of conceptual and constitutional history:

Meine These lautet, daß auch eine stringente, gerade eine stringente Begriffsgeschichte nicht ohne gegenwartsbezogene Definitionen auskommt. Das ergibt sich aus Brunners Werk. Eine quellsprachlich gebundene Darstellung der Verfassungsgeschichte wird stumm, wenn die vergangenen Begriffe nicht übersetzt oder umschrieben werden. Sonst handelt es um eine Textwiedergabe alter Quellen im Verhältnis von 1:1. Übersetze ich aber Begriffe wie Land und Leute, Haus und Herrschaft, Schutz und Schirm, so bin ich genötigt, sie für heute zu definieren. Auch jede umschriebene Interpretation läuft logisch auf eine Definition ex post hinaus. (op.cit.,13-14).

Defining means here a demand of translation related to contemporary problems, concepts and vocabularies. This demand serves to increase the consciousness of the historicity of contemporary concepts. The demarcations of the problem as 'definitions' mark a certain continuity of the problems beyond the limits of specific concepts. Koselleck's proposal to use definitions is valuable for making long-term comparisons possible, as he indicates with the example of connecting the pre- and post-etatist histories of the constitution with the modern etatist ones (op.cit, 11-12). Still, to speak of a "definition" here seems to turn down the ambiguity and controversiality of contemporary concepts, their character as knots of problems, "die Fülle eines politisch-sozialen Bedeutungs- und Erfahrungszusammenhangs" (*Begriffsgeschichte*, 119), which is, to me, one of the main merit of the Koselleckian view on concepts.

Another aspect in the address, which even more seems to make Koselleck "a traitor" to his own ideas, concerns the very concept of *Begriffsgeschichte*:

Was jeweils auf einen Begriff gebracht wird, muß seine Geschichte gehabt haben. Sonst handelt es sich um einen empirie-

freien Vorgriff. Aber einmal auf einen Begriff gebracht, sind die damit von einem Wort gebündelten Phänomene nicht mehr veränderlich. Das jeweils mit einem Begriff gemeinte ist mit dem Akt der Begriffsbildung der geschichtlichen Veränderung entzogen. Der Begriff der Polis des Aristoteles oder der *res publica* des Cicero ist einmalig, auch wenn er etwas Dauerhaftes oder Wiederholbares thematisiert. Ein solcher einmal gebundener Begriff entzieht sich der Veränderung. (*Probleme*, 14)

Koselleck even regards *Begriffsgeschichte* as "eine logische Lästigkeit" (ibid.). This does not, however, mean a rejection but a precision of his programme. My distinction between conceptual and conceptional history gains relevance here: the Aristotelian conception of polis has its singular history, a history of tentatives, formulations, etc., which is closed by the final exposition in the sense of "auf den Begriff bringen" (cf. also *Reflections*, 8). It does not, however, end the history of the concept of the polis, to which another interpretation has been given. The ambiguity of the concepts means that they are subject to different interpretations or conceptions, each of which may be definite and even terminated in its internal history.

Against this background, Koselleck argues that conceptual history is not only a history of conceptions, but one of the whole set of problems related to the linguistic triangle.

Wenn wir also leichtfertig von Begriffsgeschichte sprechen, so meinen wir exakter definiert, daß sich mit dem Sachverhalt auch die Bezeichnungen, Benennungen und Wortbedeutungen ändern, die alle von demselben Wortkörper transponiert werden mögen. Ebenso können natürlich neue Worte gebildet werden, um Neuerungen sprachlich aufzufangen oder gar hervorrufen zu können. Dann mögen neue Begriffsbildungen gelingen wie 'Staat', 'Verfassung', 'Ökonomie', die zwar an überkommenen Worten kleben, aber als Begriffe seit dem 18. Jahrhundert neu sind. (*Probleme*, 15)

In this wider sense Koselleck is still prepared to speak of *Begriffsgeschichte*:

Begriffsgeschichte im strengen Sinne ist eine Geschichte der Begriffsbildungen,-verwendungen und -veränderungen. (ibid.)

An undifferentiated use of *Begriffsgeschichte* consists in viewing in the changes in the *Sachverhalt* or in the vocabulary *automatically* already a change in the conception, or in the art of thematizing the concept, too. This indicates a reason, why an old conception may become obsolete without being 'changed' in itself (cf. op.cit., *Aus-sprache*, 33-34).

I would like to summarize this discussion with distinguishing levels, which more or less all belong to the "history of meanings" (point 1. in my above list):

- a) history of *thematization* of a concept, by conceptualizing some experiences or by turning a word into a concept
- b) history of the *formation* of a definite conception (like Aristotle's 'polis)
- c) history of the of *conflicts* on the interpretation of a concept
- d) history of *modification* of a conception by reception.

If the conceptional angle of the linguistic triangle is differentiated, conceptual history becomes more complex. Each of the histories has its own rhythm as well as specific relations to the vocabulary and to the referential languages. The histories of thematization are closer to the questions of naming as well as to the conceptualizing abstraction from new experiences, the questions of formation concern primarily the work of a single author or a specific debate closed by a definite formula, the histories of conflict concern the interpretations of meanings, and the histories of modification are related to linguistic or thematic decontextualizations.

Koselleck's self-interpretation on the relations between the types of histories is contained in the *Vorwort* to the VII volume of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*:

Auch die Geschichte eines Begriffs hängt von der Fragestellung ab, die an die Quellenbelege herangetragen wird. Aber die Grenzen unserer Begriffsgeschichten sind strenger bestimmt.

Grundbegriffe suchen und untersuchen heißt zunächst, Texte und Kontexte der Quellsprache beim Wort nehmen. Die Analyse vollzieht erst einmal nach, worum es sich eigentlich gehandelt haben mag, wenn etwas (wann, wo, wie, warum und von wem) auf einen unverwechselbaren Begriff gebracht worden ist und welche Adressaten damit angesprochen werden sollten. (op.cit, v)

For Koselleck, the history of a concept thus originates with the formation of a definite and singular conception, to which modifications and reinterpretations are joined. I prefer (cf. Palonen 1989) to see the primary movement in the thematization, in the conceptualizing naming of the problem, to which then more or less open controversies are related. This corresponds better to the experience that there are no "contemporary meanings" of a concept, only contemporary controversies.

The object-level is explicated more closely in some of Koselleck's articles in mid-eighties. In *Sozialgeschichte und Begriffsgeschichte* he tries to explicate what is the *Sache* which transcends conceptualization:

Es gibt also außersprachliche, vorsprachliche – und nachsprachliche – Elemente in allen Handlungen, die zu einer Geschichte führen. Sie sind den elementaren, den geographischen, biologischen und zoologischen Bedingungen verhaftet, die über die menschliche Konstitution allesamt in die gesellschaftliche Geschehnisse einwirken. (op.cit., 95)

Koselleck well admits that the objects are "sprachlich eingeholt und ... vermittelt" (ibid.). This mediation consists, at least partly, in the theory names he presents in the quotation. To speak of extralinguistic elements, however, tends to claim that the objects themselves are prior to the classifications applied to them. Weberian perspectivism would leave only the non-conceptualized 'reality' unnamed.

The anthropological thesis that "keine Sprachhandlung ist die Handlung selbst, die sie vorbereitet, auslösen und vollziehen hilft" (op.cit., 94) does not convince me. In a later article Koselleck,

however, seems to admit both the action character and the constitutive role of speech acts and warns only against a linguistic reductionism of actions: "Wenn jedes Sprechen ein Tun ist, so ist lange nicht jede Tat ein Akt des Sprechens" (*Feindbegriffe*, 84).

Koselleck's thematization of the linguistic triangle has a point in the insistence of the significance of thematization and formation of a concept. The first actualizes the links to the macro-level of conceptual changes, the second leads to more detailed histories of single concepts by single authors. They extend both the range of conceptual history into forms better suited to monographs and case studies. In this sense the limits to discourse analysis, rhetoric, etc. in their historical forms become more relative as well (cf. *Vorwort*, vi, viii).

The Macro-Theory of Conceptual Change

Reinhart Koselleck's most original contribution to the theory of conceptual history is, perhaps, his thesis on the conceptual paradigm shift in the *Sattelzeit*. He has given to the thesis different formulations, which thematize more or less independent aspects of it. Again, the origins of his program are modest. In the first programmatic article Koselleck presents *Sattelzeit* still with a triple mark of caution (qualification, quotation marks and division of the word with a hyphen).

Das heuristische Prinzip dabei ist, daß ein solcher Begriffswandel sich vornehmlich zwischen 1750 und 1850 vollzogen hat, derart, daß bei gleichen Worten erst seit der Mitte des vorigen Jahrhunderts der heutige Bedeutungsgehalt soweit feststeht, daß er keiner 'Übersetzung' mehr bedarf. Der heuristische Vorgriff führt sozusagen eine "Sattel-Zeit" ein, in der sich die Herkunft unserer Präsenz wandelt. (*Richtlinien*, 82)

A sketch on temporalization can be found already in the article *Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichte* (written in 1969, published in 1972). Koselleck sees in a "theory of historical times" a precondition for conceptual history.

Die Begriffsgeschichte, wie wir sie versuchen, kann ohne eine Theorie der historischen Zeiten auskommen. (op.cit., 21).

Koselleck connects this theory with a variant of the *Sattelzeit* thesis, which sees in it a change of the temporal experience in general:

Der theoretische Vorgriff der sogenannten Sattelzeit zwischen rd. 1750 und rd.1850 ist nun der, daß sich in diesem Zeitraum eine Denaturalisierung der alten Zeiterfahrung abgespielt habe. Der langsame Schwund aristotelischer Bedeutungsgehalte, die noch auf eine naturale, wiederholbare und insofern statische Geschichtszeit verweisen ist der negative Indikator für eine Bewegung, die sich als Beginn der Neuzeit beschreiben läßt. (op.cit., 22)

The *Sattelzeit* signifies a replacement of "topological" concepts by "dynamic" ones, "concepts of movements", which have a temporal structure. The change is made possible by metaphorical reinterpretations of originally spatial concepts into temporal ones.

Wir verwenden nämlich immer Begriffe, die ursprünglich räumlich gedacht waren, aber doch eine temporale Bedeutung haben. So sprechen wir etwa von Brechungen, Friktionen, vom Aufbrechen bestimmter dauerhafter Elemente, die in die Ereigniskette einwirken. (op.cit., 23)

According to Koselleck, the only way to speak of time is metaphorical, because time is not independently observable (*anschaulich*):

...daß sich die Historie, soweit sie es mit der Zeit zu tun hat, grundsätzliche ihre Begriffe aus dem räumlichen Bereich entlehnen muß. Wir leben von einer naturalen Metaphorik, und wir können dieser Metaphorik gar nicht entrinnen aus dem einfachen Grunde, weil die Zeit nicht anschaulich ist und auch nicht anschaulich gemacht werden kann. Alle historischen Kategorien, bis hin zum Fortschritt, sind ursprünglich räumliche Ausdrücke, von deren Übersetzbarkeit unsere Wissenschaft lebt. (ibid.)

The metaphorical character of historical concepts is a precondition for Koselleck's theory of historical times.

Die Historie als Wissenschaft lebt im Unterschied zu anderen Wissenschaften nur von der Metaphorik. Das ist gleichsam unsere anthropologische Prämisse, da sich alles, was temporal formuliert sein will, an die sinnlichen Substrate der naturalen Anschauung anlehnen muß. Die Anschauungslosigkeit der reinen Zeit führt in das Zentrum der methodischen Schwierigkeit, über eine Theorie historischer Zeiten überhaupt sinnvolle Aussagen machen zu können. (ibid.).

A consequence of the metaphorization of concepts is their de-substantialization. It enables their temporalization and makes the constituted "historical subjects" always relative to those of the opposing agents.

Die Entsubstantialisierung unserer Kategorien führt zu einer Verzeitlichung ihrer Bedeutung. So etwa läßt sich die Skala vergangener oder zukünftiger Möglichkeiten nie von einem einzigen Handlungsträger oder von einer Handlungseinheit her umreißen. Vielmehr verweist die Skala sofort auf die der Kontrahenten, so daß erst die zeitlichen Differenzen, Brechungen oder Spannungen die Tendenz zu einem neuen Realitätsgefüge ausdrücken können. Unversehens kommen so unterschiedliche Zeitverhältnisse, Beschleunigungs- und Verzögerungsfaktoren ins Spiel. (op.cit., 25)

The ambiguity and controversiality of concepts has its political reference both in the decontextualization, denaturalization and desubstantialization of concepts and in the corresponding plurality of agents. In this sense temporalization and politicization of concepts appear to be more closely connected than presented by Koselleck (e.g. in the *Einleitung*).

In Weberian terms, the metaphorical character of temporal concepts signifies a moment of their *Entzauberung*. This means an increased consciousness of the constructed, nominalistic character

of political and social concepts. More precisely: for Koselleck concepts are nominalistic historically, since the *Sattelzeit* (cf. esp. *Geist*). The "indicatory" role of concepts has been more and more replaced by their constructive role as a "factor" in history.

Das Verhältnis des Begriffs zum Begriffenen kehrt sich um, es verschiebt sich zugunsten sprachlicher Vorgriffe, die zukunftsprägend wirken sollen. (*Einleitung*, xviii)

The reverse side of the metaphorical character is the fragility of temporalized concepts, which still are bound to the 'natural time' and to quasi-objective spatial metaphors. All this makes the legitimacy of temporal concepts always contestable. A naturalistic and substantialistic reaction, a reduction of the temporalized meanings to their spatial "origins", is always possible (by neglecting that metaphorical temporalization turns also spatial concepts into constructions, i.e. shows that they also have a metaphorical character). A further internal connection between temporalization and politicization of concepts concerns the contestability of the responses to the chances of temporalization.

The legitimacy of a temporalized language is not simply established or rejected, but it is also an object of struggles over the paradigmatic style of temporalization. A plurality of conceptions, ideologies or strategies of the temporalization of concepts is realizable. Koselleckian conceptual history gives a good starting point for a rewriting of the history of political theories in the post-*Sattelzeit* period as a history of controversies over the politics of time.

Rethematizations of Temporality

The article on *Theoriebedürftigkeit* is a rich source for themes of temporality in Koselleck's work, later taken up in more detailed and nuanced forms especially in the articles *Fortschritt und Beschleunigung* (1985) and *Zeit und Geschichte* (1987). Koselleck also asks about the consequences of temporalization in diverse

contexts, from war memorials (*Kriegerdenkmäler*) via archives (*Archivalien*) to utopias (*Utopie*). I shall only shortly discuss the potential significance of some specific aspects of temporalization for conceptual history.

One of the most important consequences of Koselleck's thesis on the paradigm shift from topological concepts to concepts of movement is the politicization of time in more explicit forms than in the early articles. Which attitudes are adopted towards temporalization of experience and concepts has become a key subject of politics.

Seit der zweiten Hälfte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts häufen sich zahlreiche Indizien, die auf den Begriff einer neuen Zeit in emphatischen Sinn hinweisen. Die Zeit bleibt nicht nur die Form, in der sich alle Geschichten abspielen, sie gewinnt selber eine geschichtliche Qualität. Nicht mehr in der Zeit, sondern durch die Zeit vollzieht sich dann die Geschichte. Die Zeit wird dynamisiert zu einer Kraft der Geschichte selber. ('*Neuzeit*', 321, cf. *Jahrhundert*, 278)

Koselleck's pair "the space of experience" vs. "the horizon of expectation" (*Erfahrungsraum-Erwartungshorizont*) has become a commonplace in contemporary discussion. In *Kritik und Krise* he still speaks of *Erfahrungshorizont* (e.g. 184). In the article of 1976 the concepts are introduced as "metahistorical categories", which, however, together mark the turning point from topological to temporalized concepts:

Meine These lautet, daß in der Neuzeit die Differenz zwischen Erfahrung und Erwartung zunehmend vergrößert, genauer, daß sich die Neuzeit erst als eine neue Zeit begreifen läßt, seitdem sich die Erwartungen immer mehr von allen bis dahin gemachten Erfahrungen entfernt haben. ('*Erfahrungsraum*', 359)

The differentiation of the horizon of expectations from the space of experiences can be seen as a further legitimation of the denaturalization and desubstantialization of concepts. The primacy of

expectations over experiences is presented by Koselleck above all by means of two paradigms: progress and acceleration. The latter in particular signifies a radicalized denaturalization of temporal experience.

The *Sattelzeit* paradigms of progress and acceleration are, of course, not the only alternatives in the politicization of time. Although Koselleck remarks in 1980 that progress has become "altmodisch" ('*Niedergang*', 228), he did not sketch alternative options of temporalization. He, of course, mentions e.g. Walter Benjamin's view on history at the end of the *Fortschritt*-article in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, without discussing it in detail, and he has short critical remarks on postmodernity and posthistoire in *Geleitwort* (11). In a recent paper on Goethe (1993) Koselleck takes up Goethe's untimely view on temporalization: living in midst of the *Sattelzeit*, Goethe also rejects the Aristotelian topology but refuses e.g. to speak of *Geschichte* as a collective singular (on Goethe, cf. also *Zeit.*, 214-215).

On some occasions Koselleck speculates with alternative schemes for temporalization without reflecting on their consequences for the politics of time. In the essay on *Zeitgeschichte* he first rejects as "extreme" a view that "alle Zeit ist Gegenwart" (op.cit., 18). Then he expands the temporal horizon so that "die drei Zeitdimensionen selbst verzeitlicht werden": past, present and future have all of their own past, present and future and we get nine types of temporal dimensions (op.cit., 20). Koselleck does not develop the idea further, but I think this scheme could be valuable in studies on conceptual history and in textual analysis.

Another typology of immediate significance for both conceptual history and politics of time is the triad of history writing: *aufschreiben*, *fortschreiben*, *umschreiben* (in *Erfahrungswandel*). It offers, when its consequences for the politics of time are discussed, a means of questioning the narrative of progress implied by the growing gap between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation.

Let me explicate this idea more closely. Today the experience of contingency appears as so radical that there are hardly any definite expectations for the future. The space of experience, although it is expected not to be valid in the future, however, still appears as a

more definite space, which is not easily accepted as revisable. On the contrary, it is often regarded not only as a background but also as a kind of foundation for one's present actions: if the space of experience is rewritten, the 'foundations' fall like a card house. In the former Communist countries the rewriting of history was an important moment in dethroning the whole order, while nobody believed in the five-year plans any longer. In general, the rewriting of the space of experience seems to me to be important as a subversive "politics of the past", independent of the authorial intentions of the historians. In this perspective conceptual history appears as such a political force against all sorts of 'foundationalism'.

My examples of rethinking the temporality in the later works of Koselleck direct attention to the chances of a radicalization of the temporalization thesis. He himself has, however, also reflections that tend go in the opposite direction. He now stresses the continuities transcending the *Sattelzeit*, like the Aristotelian concept of citizenship (cf. the *Einleitung to Bürgerschaft*, 14-21, and *Reflections*, 10-11).

For me the most irritating novelty of Koselleck's later writings is his 'anthropological turn'. Through a reinterpretation of some Heideggerian categories he introduces a "historical anthropology" (*Historik*, 13), which inquires into the "conditions of possible history", asking especially whether there are extra- or pre-linguistic conditions of this kind (op.cit., 11, cf. also *Sozialgeschichte, Ereignisgeschichte*). In the Gadamer address Koselleck presents five elementary pairs of categories – *Sterbemüssen-Totschlagenkönnen; Freund-Feind; Innen-Außen, Geworfenheit-Generativität, Oben-Unten* (*Historik*, 13-20). Their common point is explained as follows:

Es handelt sich, im Gefolge Heideggers, um existentielle Bestimmungen, d.h. in gewisser Weise um transzendente Kategorien, die die Möglichkeit von Geschichten benennen, ohne deshalb schon konkrete Geschichten hinreichend beschreibbar zumachen. (op.cit., 20).

The interesting idea of the categories is their presentation as pairs of oppositions. They introduce an elementary political dimension into the "possibilities of history". Somewhat analogously to Benjamin's

claim to replace historical categories by political ones (*Das Passagen-Werk*, 495), this seems to mean an appraisal of politics as an experience which is more fundamental than history.

Sie sind geeignet, als Oppositionspaare, Strukturen der Endlichkeit aufzuzeigen, die durch gegenseitige Ausschließlichkeit Zeitspannungen evozieren, die sich zwischen den und innerhalb der Handlungseinheiten notwendigerweise einstellen müssen. Geschichten ereignen sich nur deshalb, weil die in ihnen angelegten Möglichkeiten weiter reichen als sie hinterher eingelöst werden können. Dieser Überschuß von Möglichkeiten muß abgearbeitet werden um etwas "in der Zeit" verwirklichen zu können. (op.cit., 21)

One of Koselleck's points is thus to indicate possibilities which transcend the linguistic horizons of action in the name of its 'existential' horizons, which means an extension of politicizability beyond the 'linguistically possible'. The anthropological categories tend, however, also to mark insurmountable limits for the horizons of action. By them Koselleck tries to indicate spatial limits to temporalization, i.e. limits of historicity and of the politicizability of the human condition.

One possibility to criticize the 'anthropological' categories is to question their universal significance or validity for human action, history and politics. This can be done e.g. by viewing their "elementary" role not as a foundation but rather as a margin, which could be relativized or delimited in the course of temporalization of the categories. This is just what is done with the categories of above – below and inside – outside in the course of politicization and temporalization of the spatial metaphors, and the significance of this is wholly acknowledged by Koselleck in the *Feindbegriffe* (83-85). In some cases the universality of the categories can be questioned. I think especially of that of generativity, from which more and more human beings are liberating themselves. For them, myself included, it becomes e.g. increasingly possible to accept the view that the present is the only real form of temporality.

It is, of course, regrettable that Koselleck never wrote the articles *Raum* and *Zeit/alter* to *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, "wie der

Herausgeber aus Zeitmangel einräumen muß" (*Vorwort* to *GG VII*, vii). Several articles from the seventies to the nineties which perspectivically deal with some themes around time and temporalization partly compensate for this lack. The dual tendency in Koselleck's later writings is also intelligible: he wants to insist both on the chances of radicalization in temporalization and on some general limits to the 'despatialization'. According to my interpretation, the dual perspective can explicate both the common ground for and a possibility of differentiation between temporalization and politicization of concepts. As a specifying horizon both for conceptual history and for studies of the politics of time, which has been actualized not at the least through Koselleck's studies (cf. e.g. Osborne 1995), Koselleck's dual perspective doubtlessly deserves closer examination.

The Revolution of Conceptual History

To speak in the presence of Reinhart Koselleck, the author of the article *Revolution* in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, on "the revolution" of conceptual history, requires an explication, especially as I just talked about the non-revolutionary aspects in his recent work. Maybe it is better to speak à la Skinner of conceptual history as a *revolutionary move* in the understanding and usage of concepts.

Conceptual history signifies, above all, a revolution against two paradigmatic uses of concepts. In analytical philosophy, concepts are equated with definitions and are required to be as unambiguous, ahistorical and uncontroversial as possible. The popular dictionaries try to give to each word a definite 'ordinary' or 'basic meaning'. Both paradigms, still taught to us in schools and universities, are powerful 'enemies' of conceptual history, although some sense of contextualization and historialization has made an intrusion into more qualified versions of both.

In both paradigms the determination of the concepts is seen as a preliminary move, after which 'real' philosophical and scientific problems can be dealt with. One of the points of conceptual history is to turn attention to concepts, as knots of problems from which the

unproblematic or definitory usages of concepts may be 'deconstructed' as strategies of dethematizing the historical, linguistic, philosophical and political problems surrounding them. The ambiguous, controversial and historical character of concepts can then be understood as a sort of resource in the Weberian sense of a *Machtanteil* in approaching the questions and contexts in which the concepts are used.

A third opponent, the conceptual realism in the Hegelian style, with an ontologization of concepts, is no less an enemy of the 'revolution' of conceptual history. Against it Koselleck stresses², with Max Weber (cf. *Geist*, 134), the heuristic value of concepts as keys to thematizing and rethinking problems

Koselleck's theses on the metaphorical character of the temporalization of concepts appears to form a decisive move. Instead of the quasi-naturalness of the spatial metaphors in the topological concepts, the metaphORIZATION in the temporalization is consciously constructive and contains a warning against both the unlimited extension of the metaphORIZATION and against a resubstantialization of the temporalized concepts. The danger of progress and acceleration turning into substantial entities appear to be less relevant today, although there again are some freaks of technology who may be inclined to a new ontologization of progress and acceleration.

The point of understanding temporal metaphors as constructions is that both the temporal and the linguistic aspect of the concepts appear as highly contingent: the constructions could always be otherwise. If contingency is understood as a resource of the temporalized concepts, both time and language are turned into a specific playground of action. The temporalizing *Entzauberung* of concepts opens new chances for politicization of the human situation.

Perhaps it would be hard to imagine a world in which the consciousness of the historical, metaphorical and constructive character of the concepts used would be part of our everyday lives. As opposed to the conventional apologies of information and communication, it would signify a more critical, subversive and playful world.

Notes

- ¹ This is, in a sense, acknowledged in Koselleck's recent comments on federalism (cf. *Nationalstaat, Europa*), which hardly demand 'common concepts' but rather are based on the use of the diversities in the political and natural languages (cf. also *Feindbegriffe*).
- ² Emphasizing the closeness of his position to Skinner's Koselleck writes: "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", (*Response*, 62).

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(Quotations underlined)

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