

## Pro Domo Sua

Conceptual History, *Begriffsgeschichte*, one of whose main present developments goes under the guise of a critical analysis of central political concepts, was originally studied from a theoretical perspective and, at the same time, applied, together with the reaction to historicism, through scholarly research by German historians, following the path opened by contemporary hermeneutics (Heidegger, Gadamer). The names of Otto Brunner, Reinhart Koselleck and Werner Conze are intimately related to this approach.

Conceptual History expanded and gained strength in other countries, initially as a discipline ancillary to social history and rapidly becoming thereafter a roadmap –Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Finland, France, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Rumania, Russia, Spain, United Kingdom and the United States among other countries– in the fields of philosophical politics, law history, political history, constitutional law and the history of constitutions. At the same time, it also disclosed its heuristic potential via the interaction with neighbouring sciences –sociology, economy and anthropology–. This experience goes hand in hand with intense theoretical discussions reflecting at times well-nigh incompatible premises. Since 1998 the History of Political and Social Concepts Group (HPSCG) is the organizer of annual international congresses and the publisher of *Contributions to the History of Concepts*.

By examining the concepts and terminology of the political lexicon, the *Begriffsgeschichte* premises help determine the modern period of politics coinciding with the era of the *State and ius publicum europaeum*. This era is at present close to *usque ad terminum*. Globalization seems to have left out in a large area of the world, the State and the concepts associated with it such as sovereignty, the individual, representation and democracy, through which, during the period of late European modernity –between the second half of the XVIIth and the beginning of the XIXth centuries–, the state and constitutional experience of politics was organized. We say “European” for the sake of simplicity, mindful of the Continent’s internal conceptual differences – that which XIXth century Russian thinker Alexandre Herzen called the «different historic

algebrae of Europe». By identifying the genesis of modern politics, becoming aware of historicity, allows us to reconstitute the otherness of the past and to avoid the common practice of examining it by applying the categories and concepts specific to the legal and political order of late modernity.

While *Historical Concepts* positions itself on the path opened by German Begriffsgeschichte, its specificity resides, however, in the study of the genesis, logics and aporia of modern concepts. This field of research is, therefore, vast: theoretical analysis, sources research, the birth of social sciences, new forms of politics... The development of Conceptual History in this direction, together with, or at the intersection of human and social sciences, highlight the limitations of modern concepts and their inability to account for the present-day processes, and frees our imagination to entertain other possible ways of legal and political ordering. Such possibilities comprise what the universal claim of European modernity prevents from arising in other regions of our planet: that which would lead to imagining differently political and social relationships - that is, what unites human beings.

From those premises, or as Gadamer would put it, from these “legitimate prejudices”, it can be inferred that, from our perspective, Conceptual History does not restrict itself to the historiographical sphere. Instead, it redefines our discipline’s role and gradually evolves into a specific mode of thinking and researching that, due to the heuristic potential of its theoretical assumptions, penetrates and problematises the domains of neighbouring disciplinary fields. Its peculiarity resides precisely, in problematising their respective theoretical assumptions (history, philosophy politics, law, sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, economy) in close association with research in their subject areas.

Our journal seeks to contribute to international debates through two kinds of texts: (a) *theoretical* and *methodological studies* on historical semantics, the history of political and juridical lexicon specific to the Western European tradition, the concepts used by human and social sciences as well as the political and state experiences that in other areas of the world –Latin America and Eastern Europe, the colonial and post-colonial contexts of Asia and Africa– challenge its claim to universality; (b) *monographs*: archive and field studies, historical, juridical, sociological and political research, on basic concepts as well as on everyday vocabularies.

All these studies carried out from the *perspective of conceptual history* critically confront common sense understanding of the past as well as the tradition of thought that renders the state-centered paradigm absolute by depriving it of its temporal dimension. More generally, they

confront a-historical approaches to the history of ideas, which consider concepts as invariable nodes of meaning that merely adapt themselves to changing contexts.

Two interconnected approaches come together in these pages: The first one assumes an intense interdisciplinary involvement, which reconstructs Western political experience in order to expose the limitations and potentialities of Law, categories and the concepts of political science. It implies envisioning the past both vertically, in a historical diachronic sense, and horizontally, across different civilizations, decentralizing the hegemony hitherto exercised by the European conceptual tradition.

The second one relates the present and its potentiality. It does not merely problematise rigorously the clichés of social and human sciences, but also entails viewing the present as an area of intervention, as what must be conceived and interpreted beyond its apparent balance. The present must be studied with different categories, going beyond the horizon of the modern conceptual approach, which is no longer able to understand social, constitutional and political reality or to orientate praxis. Such a Conceptual History based on an awareness of the aporia of modern concepts, affected also by the crisis of a historical era, is not only a methodology of historical work but a responsible way of thinking, since it is committed to the present.

It is not by chance that this journal is published by the Universidad Nacional de San Martín, a Latin American institution of higher learning. The –mainly academical– analysis of the European past and present experience has direct pragmatic implications when it approaches certain regions, such as Latin America, which has recently recovered and rehabilitated politics, placing it once again within the management of economic and social processes, which has led to an increased discussion, inter alia, of the quality of political representation, the role of the State, and the new possible forms of federalism that may be able to express more coherently the social and ethnic complexity of our peoples. The violent nature of the crises we have lived through and our intense awareness of the changes we have seen make us more sensitive to theoretical, political and constitutional stagnation. The present European political plurality, *which cannot be restricted to the state and sovereignty horizon*, ought also to go hand in hand with a novel manner of thinking about politics, democracy and constitutions. We can legitimately wonder whether the inability in intellectual circles to understand what is new in Latin America is not due precisely to a lack of conceptual-historical awareness.

Today, the much vaunted globalisation includes intellectual reflection. To think about what is new is a common challenge in Asia, Europe, Latin America...