THE EXPANDING HORIZONS OF CONCEPTUAL HISTORY: A NEW FORUM

Not long ago, conceptual history was an approach restricted to German-speaking academic circles and to very few scholars worldwide. This situation has markedly changed in the last two decades, primarily of the appearance of research projects for studying concepts in historical perspective in other European countries — such as Finland, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, France, and Spain — and because of Melvin Richter's endeavor in promoting an encounter between German *Begriffsgeschichte* and English speaking approaches for the historical study of political languages, discourses, and rhetoric. The History of Political and Social Concepts Group (HPSCG) is among the most significant results of these developments.

The HPSCG was created in 1998, during a conference organized by the Finnish Institute in London subtitled: "A Planning Meeting for Co-operation between Scholars and Research Projects." In the words of one of its organizers, the goal of that meeting was "to establish a forum where the many different approaches to conceptual history" could be "discussed, intellectual and organizational experiences shared, and comparative studies prepared."

The participants at that conference agreed to form an international society that would meet regularly, publish a newsletter, and establish an e-mail network. Since the foundation of the HPSCG, meetings have been organized annually, each time in a different country, and in collaboration with local scholars and institutions. The newsletter was edited from 1998 to 2001 by Karin Tilmans, Wyger Velema, and Freya Sierhuis at the Huizinga Instituut of the University of Amsterdam; then, from 2001 to 2003, Henrik Stenius, Kari Saastamoinen, Suvi Ervamaa, and Jani Marjanen at the Renvall Institute for Area and Cultural Studies at the University of Helsinki, were responsible for editorship. Meanwhile, the HPSCG kept enlarging its mailing list of group members and other scholars interested in conceptual history and related disciplines. The newsletter published articles and essays on

methodological and substantive research and also disseminated news about conferences, new research projects and works in progress, publications, and other related matters.

The second international conference was held at the École Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud, Paris, 1999. In the following years meetings were held in Copenhagen (2000), Tampere (2001), Amsterdam (2002), Bilbao (2003), and finally in Rio de Janeiro (2004). As HPSCG's membership increased, its goals expanded. Members also organized smaller events and conferences in several European countries and in the United States. This process led also to disciplinary encounters between the methodological approach of German *Begriffsgeschichte* and other ways of doing historical research such as metaphorology, the theory of iconology, historical semantics, the history of ideas, etc.

At the last of HPSCG's executive committee meeting, held during the VII International Conference in Rio de Janeiro, the members decided that it was time to launch a publication with more ambitious goals. The name, chosen after much discussion, was *Contributions to the History of Concepts*. It is indeed a risk to name a periodical publication after a discipline. Given that the subject matter and linguistic focus of conceptual history is common to a number of other historical disciplines, that choice might suggest excessive disciplinary orthodoxy and a bit of narrow-mindedness. However, nothing could be farther from the truth. *Contributions* is animated by the spirit of conversation among disciplines and of methodological encounters and exchanges. Conceptual history is certainly *Contributions'* central focus but not its only one. Furthermore, the international profile of the HPSCG and of *Contributions'* Editorial Board calls for a high level of tolerance and openness to the diverse scholarly traditions of different national contexts.

For now *Contributions* will only publish texts in English. This *lingua franca* of today's world has been a major instrument in the international reception of *Begriffsgeschichte*, allowing for the rapid circulation of texts, and the successful organization of international events where scholars from different national contexts can easily exchange works, ideas, and contacts, and for daily electronic communication. Nonetheless, this immense benefit does not come without adverse consequences, particularly when the subjects discussed are not methodological but substantive historical cases. We should be the last ones to deny the linguistic embeddedness of concepts, their dependence on the entire linguistic context in which they operate. Thus, translating a study

of a particular concept from another language into English entails severe limitations for understanding what is being said and, of course, what is not being said. The ideal solution to this conundrum would be to accept and publish articles in several languages. Although as of now *Contributions* does not have the resources to implement this policy, this is a goal that will be worthwhile pursuing in the future.

In continuing with the tradition established by the Newsletter, *Contributions* publishes articles and book reviews on subjects that are pertinent to conceptual history and neighboring fields of inquiry (history of political and social thought, intellectual history, etc). The new publication also allows for authors to submit short summations of their recently published books. In addition, it has sections on news and announcements, annotated bibliographical references and lists, and conference reports.

Contributions will be issued biannually both in printed-paper and in PDF format. The electronic format enables readers to print the issue using regular computer printers and thus be easily assembled into a brochure format. Alternatively, the PDF file can also be read on the computer screen. The idea behind this two-fold strategy is to promote wider circulation, a necessary measure given the international profile of the publication. Paper copies will be mailed to members of the HPSG, members of *Contributions'* editorial board, authors, and subscribers.

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We hope you have an enjoyable reading.

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