

Editorial

Ism Concepts in Science and Politics

JANI MARJANEN

This issue brings together five articles that deal with particular concepts in given historical discourses and are thus seemingly unrelated, but they are brought together because of their focus on words carrying the suffix -ism.¹ The following issue will include two more articles that relate to the theme. The articles were chosen based on an open call for papers that was circulated widely. In parallel to this issue, a special issue on the political rhetoric of isms is also being published in the *Journal of Political Ideologies*.² The review and publication processes have been conducted separately in the two journals, but in the end the two issues are being published nearly simultaneously, which will hopefully benefit both *Contributions to the History of Concepts* and the *Journal of Political Ideologies*.

While the articles in this issue all have their own focal points, a few remarks should be put forward regarding the role of the suffix -ism and its relevance as a point of comparison. Conceptual history has been predominantly focused on words and the meaning articulated in their use in context. Most, if not all, studies in the field additionally pay attention to the negotiation of meaning also in larger entities by studying argumentative structures and rhetorical tropes. Also, nonlinguistic modes of communication such as sounds, smells, and visual representations have recently been put forward as central to the negotiation of meaning.³ Without forgetting these items of meaning making, this issue highlights meaning produced on an even smaller level

1. I acknowledge a debt to Jussi Kurunmäki, with whom I have discussed isms for years.

2. The issue, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23, no. 3 (2018), consists of the following articles: Jussi Kurunmäki and Jani Marjanen, "A Rhetorical View of Isms: An Introduction"; Jussi Kurunmäki and Jani Marjanen, "Isms, Ideologies and Setting the Agenda for Public Debate"; Ivo Spira, "Chinese Isms: The Modernization of Ideological Discourse in China"; Helge Jordheim, "Keeping the 'Ism' in 'Cosmopolitanism': Wieland and the Origins of Cosmopolitan Discourse"; Ainur Elmgren, "The Double-Edged Sword: Political Appropriation of the Concept of Populism"; Pauli Kettunen, "The Concept of Nationalism in Discussions on a European Society."

3. Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani, "Emotional Translations: Conceptual History beyond Language," *History and Theory* 55, no. 1 (2016): 46–65.



than words, as it enters the sublexical level by taking into account meanings produced in suffixes and suffix-like elements.⁴

Although the suffix *-ism* originates in classical Greek, the rhetoric of grouping isms together became politically relevant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At this time, there was an influx of *ism* words in French and English describing religious heresies. After this, new isms have appeared to describe constitutional arrangements, politics more broadly, psychology, science, arts, discriminatory practices, and ultimately almost anything.⁵ Consequently, which words have been regarded as core isms has changed historically and has depended on the genre of a particular text. Today, it would be difficult to think of isms without including words such as liberalism, socialism, feminism, or multiculturalism, but none of these words were used in the eighteenth century. Still, a notion of *ism* words existed, and the long history of the suffix *-ism* makes it possible to link different isms together even today. Because of this possibility, there is a double contestability in *ism* words. Not only is the root contested, but so too is the suffix, which has certain rhetorical power in itself.

Isms words have become frequent in social, cultural, and political debates. One part of their rhetorical power lies in their use for the purpose of categorization. They are words that reduce complex figures of thought or sets of practices into one word.⁶ This reduction also makes them annoying in the eyes of some. It is a common trope to regard isms (often all of them!) as negative or problematic. We can find examples of this in scholarly debate, such as in the remark by Barbara Wootton, who in an article on international politics and peace called for a “plague on your isms.”⁷ We may also turn to popular culture and find examples such as the classic teen comedy film *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (John Hughes, 1986), in which the title character explains his life philosophy by denouncing isms: “Isms in my opinion are not good. A person should not believe in an *ism*; he should believe in himself.” But *ism* words are not always negatively laden, and we can find several examples in which they are made into labels for self-identification for groups in politics, science, and the arts.

4. In some languages, the *-ism* does not work like a suffix when the word is a direct loan and the root is not a word of its own, but for the sake of simplicity, I shall talk of suffixes throughout the text.

5. See Kurunmäki and Marjanen, “Isms, Ideologies and Setting the Agenda.”

6. For an insightful discussion, see Ivo Spira, *A Conceptual History of Chinese -Isms: The Modernization of Ideological Discourse, 1895–1925* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (1936; repr., New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 4–6, notes that isms are “complexes.”

7. Barbara Wootton, “A Plague on All Your Isms,” *Political Quarterly* 80, no. S1 ([1942] 2009), S67–S75.

Perhaps it is because isms are used to categorize that there is surprisingly little work on them. Setting aside popular works that compare isms⁸ and highly informative studies that discuss isms from a linguistic perspective⁹ but are uninterested in the historical aspect of them, the body of literature is relatively small.¹⁰ Earlier studies in history and social sciences, which discuss isms as a group of words, either use them to build a structure of analytical categories¹¹ or to engage in the crucial question of on which grounds isms can be applied as analytical categories in history, politics, and the arts.¹² Studies that address the historical development and use of ism words in comparison are limited to Ivo Spira's pathbreaking study *A Conceptual History of Chinese -Isms* and the two special issues published now in *Contributions to the History of Concepts* and the *Journal of Political Ideologies*.¹³

The articles in this issue all discuss the role of the suffix -ism for the rhetorical applicability of particular words. Ruth Hemstad shows how separating the analysis of the rhetorical use of *Scandinavianism* from the rhetoric of Scandinavia in the nineteenth century uncovers some of the tensions in building and contesting Scandinavian political unity in the period. While Scandinavianism as a phenomenon has often been discussed as a pan-national movement that ultimately failed (but did have an effect on later strands of Nordic cooperation), the weight of this analytical category has

8. See, e.g., John Andrews, *The Economist Book of Isms* (London: The Economist, 2010); Arthur Goldwag, *Isms and Ologies: All the Movements, Ideologies and Doctrines That Have Shaped Our World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).

9. See, e.g., Franz Dornseiff, "Der -ismus," *Die Wandlung: Eine Monatsschrift* 3, no. 4 (1948): 346–350; István Hahn, "Die Begriffe auf -ismos," in *Soziale Typenbegriffe im alten Griechenland und ihr Fortleben in den Sprachen der Welt: Band 4, Untersuchungen ausgewählter altgriechischer sozialer Typenbegriffe und ihr Fortleben in Antike und Mittelalter*, ed. Elisabeth Charlotte Welskopf (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1981), 52–99; Hans Wellman, "Zur Problematik einer wissenschaftlicher Sprachpflege: Die 'Ismen,'" in *Brisante Wörter von Agitation bis Zeitgeist: Ein Lexikon zum öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch*, ed. Gerhard Strauss, Ulrike Hass, and Gisela Harras (New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 140–208; Michael Quinion, *Ologies and Isms: A Dictionary of Word Beginnings and Endings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

10. For an overview, see Kurunmäki and Marjanen, "A Rhetorical View of Isms."

11. A. London Fell, *Origins of Legislative Sovereignty and the Legislative State 5, Book I: Pre-Modern "Machiavellism"; Book II: Modern Major "Isms" (17th–18th Centuries); Book III: Modern Major "Isms" (19th–20th Centuries)* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993–1999).

12. Insightful examples are Harro M. Höpfl, "Isms," *British Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (1983): 1–17; the slightly updated version Harro M. Höpfl, "Isms and Ideology," in *The Structure of Modern Ideology: Critical Perspectives on Social and Political Theory*, ed. Noel O'Sullivan (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1989); Cesare Cuttica, "To Use or Not to Use . . . The Intellectual Historian and the Isms: A Survey and a Proposal," *Études Épistémès* 23 (2013), <http://episteme.revues.org/268>.

13. Spira, *A Conceptual History of Chinese -Isms*.

made it difficult to look at the often negatively laden historical uses of *Scandinavianism* as a part of a political struggle. A historical inquiry such as Hemstad's shows that talking about *Scandinavianism* as a word of abuse is clearly different from using it as a mobilizing concept for a political movement. Both uses existed in nineteenth-century Scandinavia, but they implied rather different contributions to the project of creating Scandinavian unity.

Wiktor Marzec and Risto Turunen take a comparative view in studying Polish and Finnish political uses of the concept of socialism, thus highlighting how the ism facilitated translations of labels for political movements. At the same time, the introduction of an ism as a direct loanword may have been seen as problematic. In Finnish discussions, the loanword *sosialismi* was discussed as a difficult case to transform into a movement concept because of its perceived foreignness. Still, it is clear that the loanword also created the possibility to perceive *socialism* as an international movement, and the word was accepted among most socialist groups as a label of self-identification. In the Polish case, the use of *socialism* became an integral part of the bifurcation of the labor movement and a way for two competing parties to distinguish themselves from one another.

Christian E. Roques studies the bridging quality of the term "political romanticism" (*politische Romantik*) among German interwar intellectuals, and studies the complex question of how *politische Romantik* could have reductionist qualities in a term that does not carry the suffix -ism but that does so in many translations. While the point of the article lies elsewhere, it also raises the interesting question of how names for political and intellectual traditions may have been easier to accept as labels for self-identification if they lacked the suffix -ism. Such a question cannot be given a definitive answer, but the example provided may support the idea of the suffix having a contested character of its own.

Neil Foxlee studies the changing discourse of capitalism in British parliamentary debates from the 1970s to the present by focusing on collocates as rhetorical levers used in debate to frame *capitalism* in ways suitable for particular political purposes. Of the articles in this issue, Foxlee's most emphasizes the rhetorical use of ism words and how they as labels become the objects of attempted reevaluation. By providing some quantitative findings of collocates to *capitalism*, Foxlee not only points out that phrases such as *stakeholder capitalism*, *popular capitalism*, and *crony capitalism* have very different rings to them in their respective contexts, but also shows that the changes in how *capitalism* was framed in the past fifty years were surprisingly quick.

Jean Terrier's study enters the domain of scholarly discourse by presenting a historical overview of the use of *pluralism* in the work of particularly German- and English-language political scientists, philosophers, and related

scholars. Terrier's article highlights the political contestedness of scholarly terms. By not only focusing on normative claims of *pluralism* but also providing insight into why certain scholars chose to use labels such as *pluralism* in their work, whereas others were more reluctant, the article shows how scholarly isms are not free from the rhetorical capacities we associate with isms related to ideology. The demands for precision in categorizing scholarly thought may in general be different from political discourse, but scholarly debates too are subject to similar demands of using words *pro et contra* something.¹⁴

The articles in the next issue of *Contributions*, by Pablo Facundo Escalante on French *republicanism* in the late eighteenth century and Antero Holmila and Pasi Ihalainen on *nationalism* and *internationalism* in British debates during and after the world wars, also enter domains in which the interplay between scholarly analytical concepts and historically used concepts is difficult to navigate. While this issue lies at the center for *Begriffsgeschichte* as formulated in a series of programmatic texts by Reinhart Koselleck and later amended, qualified, and disputed by several other researchers, the isms may be a particular case in this regard.¹⁵ Since reduction and categorization are central to ism words, they are often used ahistorically and in a universalizing manner. The study of historical uses of isms can therefore be particularly important in providing information about the historical baggage that concepts such as capitalism, romanticism, nationalism, internationalism, socialism, Scandinavianism, and republicanism carry. This function is especially important, as ism words have in most European languages been introduced as loanwords. In Chinese, the setting is different, as it is also in Arabic, Urdu, and Hindi (and many other languages).¹⁶ Still, there is also a need in these cases to translate the ism on one level or the other. The translation through direct loans in a sense invites one to think of the loanwords as equivalent in meaning, but a historical analysis of word use can show that universality in meaning should not be assumed. Hence, a historical reading of isms may be particularly valuable when moving toward a global perspective in studying historical change through isms as classifications in politics, science, and the arts.

14. Kari Palonen, "Speaking *Pro et Contra*: The Rhetorical Intelligibility of Parliamentary Politics and the Political Intelligibility of Parliamentary Rhetoric," in *The Parliamentary Style of Politics*, ed. Suvi Soininen and Tapani Turkka (Helsinki: Finnish Political Science Association, 2008), 82–105.

15. Also, Koselleck noted isms as a special case; see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 80, 273–274.

16. For translations of isms, see Spira, *A Conceptual History of Chinese -Isms*, 13–16, 111–135.

