IN HONOR OF REINHART KOSELLECK

Contributions to the History of Concepts has much to celebrate. On one hand, issue number 3 inaugurates the journal's second volume; its second year of existence. The reception of volume one could not have been better. We have received enthusiastic feedback from readers all over the world. *Contributions* has published authors from many different countries and from diverse academic milieus and traditions. The international reception of conceptual history has been on the rise for decades and *Contributions* is both a consequence of and an agent in this process. Our celebration, however, is not without sorrow. On February 3, 2006, Reinhart Koselleck passed away. One of the most influential historians and theoreticians of the last fifty years, Koselleck was simply the most important author in the field of conceptual history and, at the same time, an active promoter of its international reception.

Koselleck was born in Görlitz on April 2, 1923, and served as a soldier of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front during World War II, when he was captured and sent to a prison in Kazakhstan. After the war was over, he studied history, philosophy, sociology, and law at the universities of Bristol and Heidelberg. Leading German intellectuals of the period, such as Alfred Weber, Werner Conze, Johannes Kühn, Karl Löwith, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Ernst Forsthoff, were among his professors. He nurtured a special academic and personal relationship with Carl Schmitt, whose views on political theory and the theory of law influenced Koselleck's own work.

His first book *Kritik und Krise: Ein Beitrag zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (1959) offers an impressive historical analysis of the political theory and of the theory of the state of European absolutism, and a genealogy of the private sphere and of freedom of expression. The book also reconstructs the origins of the philosophy of history which helped to bring the absolutist state to its final crisis on the eve of the French Revolution. Koselleck was granted professorship with the publication of his thesis, *Preußen zwischen Reform und*

Revolution (1967) – a large book devoted to the history of the German constitution and to the social and political causes of Germany's lag in relation to other European countries.

His first position was that of professor of political theory in Bochum (1966), then professor of history in Heidelberg (1968), and finally full professor of theory of history at Bielefeld University (1974), where he founded and directed for many years the Bielefeld Center for Interdisciplinary Research. Also at Bielefeld, Koselleck was appointed emeritus professor in 1988. His interest in fields other than history eventually made him a leading figure at the *Poetik und Hermeneutik* seminars. In 1979 his most influential book, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlichen Zeiten*, came out. Between 1972 and 1988 he directed the great collective work *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (GG), whose preparation started in the second half of the 1960s. *Vergangene Zukunft* is a collection of remarkable essays the author wrote as a result of his engagement with the theoretical and methodological issues raised during the preparation of the GG project. His last book, *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik*, which contains an essay by Hans Georg Gadamer, one of Koselleck's most important interlocutors throughout his life, appeared in 2000. In addition to his books, he also edited several volumes and published a large number of academic articles and essays, many of which have been translated to other languages.

Koselleck was awarded many prizes, among them the Reuchlin Prize (1974), the Historical College Award (1989), the Sigmund Freud Prize for academic writing (1991), and the City of Münster Award (2003).

His work was crucial in the renewal of the science of history. It opened up new perspectives on historical semantics and added much depth and detail to the way we understand the advent of modernity. Without Koselleck, the History of Political and Social Concepts Group might not have been created and, thus, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* and the annual meetings, conferences, and courses organized by the Group simply would not have existed. Furthermore, the way we conduct research would be quite different.

Koselleck's theory of history was devoted to two main issues: a theory of *Begriffsgeschichte* and of historical semantics, on one hand, and a political anthropology which placed time and history at the core of human experience, on the other. His contribution reinvigorated a field of research that was initially developed in Germany by philosophers of history such as Rudolph Eucken and Erich Rothacker, by the turn of the nineteenth cen-

tury, and then applied to politics, legal and constitutional theory by social historians and historians of law such as Otto Brunner and Werner Conze. Koselleck presents the history of political concepts as a history of Western experience and imagination of politics woven together with a history of the state and the constitution.

The great *Lexikon* of basic concepts in German, the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, edited by Koselleck was underpinned by an original research hypothesis that has ever since served as a model for the history of political concepts. According to this hypothesis, during a certain period, which Koselleck called the *Schwellenzeit*, bridging the ancient to the modern world, Western political vocabulary underwent: 1) democratization, 2) politicization, 3) ideologization, and 4) internal temporalization. Sometime between the end of eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth century, general discontent with the present coupled with the social transformations brought on by the second industrial revolution created a gap between what was experienced and what could be hoped for, in other words, between space of experience (*Erfahrungsraum*) and horizon of expectations (*Erwartungshorizon*).

This novel form of a philosophy of history was thus based on the premise that the future is produced by its past and that collective action is necessary for conquering it. The past loses its effect as an assuring tradition and undergoes temporalization. Its inclusion in the chain of time becomes a simple precondition for humans to understand their world and imagine their future. In the nineteenth century, time and history began being experienced in a radically different manner, unknown to previous generations. This reflected on the semantics of political and social concepts, making it possible for researchers to identify different strata of meaning related to the ever-expanding realm of human experience.

Koselleck's theory of the history of concepts and of historical semantics was a breath of fresh air to history, constituting a powerful research tool for professional historians, scholars in social history, comparative history, law historians, political theorists, and political philosophers on both sides of the Atlantic. But that would not be so if his work had not crossed the borders of its original German birthplace. The international reception of Koselleck's work was not a spontaneous process but an effort that involved many scholars over the years. Koselleck himself was an active participant in this reception, speaking at international conferences and debating with authors from other methodological "schools of thought." Few authors had the opportunity

or the will to discuss their own work with authors responsible for its reception. Koselleck, on the contrary, was never afraid of the challenges posed by his interlocutors and, as the interview in this volume shows, was always open to consider new and unexplored issues raised by the application of conceptual history to new objects of inquiry.

In honor of Reinhart Koselleck's memory, and keeping with the international profile of *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, we have commissioned essays from leading scholars around the world discussing the philosophical, methodological, and anthropological implications of his work. These articles will appear in the following numbers. As a prequel to this homage, the present number contains Koselleck's last academic interview, conducted by Javier Fernández Sebastián and Juan Francisco Fuentes in Madrid a few months before his death. In this interview Koselleck addresses key theoretical aspects of *Begriffsgeschichte* in a very clear and straightforward manner. Above all, the interview reveals a human dimension that is rarely noticeable in his academic writings, for obvious reasons. Koselleck stands out as someone deeply concerned with normative issues, particularly the ones pertaining the troubled history of his country and continent during the twentieth century; as someone concerned with the human condition and the importance of history in it; and finally as someone aware of his own finitude.

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