Introduction

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This thematic section of *Contributions to the History of Concepts* takes up the necessity – and at the same time the problematic nature – of studying metaphors as a part of conceptual history. As Frank Beck Lassen argues in his article, “Regular, Dependable, Mechanical: J.F. Struensee on the State of Denmark,” not only concepts but also metaphors must be considered by historians of political thought as politically significant figures of speech. Metaphors may constitute condensed political arguments, the applications of which play an important role in the continuous semantic struggle over the definition of political reality.

The authors of this issue tackle the challenges of the study of political metaphors by focusing on a set of metaphors used to describe political systems in the eighteenth century, an era in which modernity was an emerging force in European political cultures. While the frequency of bodily and mechanical metaphors in eighteenth-century political texts has already been widely acknowledged, specific studies of their political uses are few. This section of *Contributions* presents a macro-level analysis of these uses in eighteenth-century English political debate plus three more specific case studies concerning Scottish, German and Danish political discourses. This variety of national contexts and primary sources allows the authors to identify both specific uses of bodily and mechanical metaphors in particular speech acts and more general trends in the description of political constitutions in medical/biological/organic or mechanical terms.

The English case is examined empirically by making use of full-text databases sustaining a macro-level analysis that has not yet been attempted. In “Towards an Immortal Political Body: The State Machine in Eighteenth-Century English Political Discourse,” I argue that distinct trends in the use of bodily and mechanical analogies in parliamentary and public

debates are traceable, even though the meanings of scientific analogies remain bound to the particular political arguments, that is, to the argumentative historical contexts in which they are employed. Bodily analogies, despite the inclusion of mechanical features and occasional attempts by reformers to make innovative points with them, were mostly favoured by the defenders of the established order. Mechanical metaphors, by contrast, were frequently used by the advocates of the popular element of the mixed constitution who, from the 1770s on, explicitly questioned the applicability of bodily analogies in depictions of political life. Mechanical analogies thus gradually prevailed over bodily ones in a century that witnessed an extensive mechanisation of various branches of thought. However, this mechanisation of politics was also to become an object of scepticism in the eras of Revolution and Romanticism.

In “Political Bodies as Living Mechanisms in Scottish Political Theory during the Late Eighteenth Century,” Oili Pulkkinen examines the frequency of mechanical metaphors and other ways of expressing Newtonian conceptions of politics in the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment. Pulkkinen emphasises an evident linkage between biological and mechanical metaphors that mirrored the prevailing mechanical conception of the body. While they might have used a variety of metaphors to express a mechanical conception of political life, Scottish philosophers saw politics as a contingent mode of life, thus, not analogous to a fully controllable machine. They were interested in describing the operations of historical mechanisms, and their metaphors did not convey any strong ideological stances.

While the analysis of the English political discourse suggests that adherents of the popular element of a mixed constitution eagerly used mechanical metaphors to vindicate their cause, the German case shows how enlightened absolutism gave these metaphors different nuances. In his article “The Machine of State in Germany – The Case of Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717-1771),” Ere Nokkala discusses the uses of the state-machine metaphor in the mid-eighteenth-century German debate on the ideal state. Unlike some previous research on the history of metaphors, Nokkala shows that Justi – despite his support for the idea of an enlightened ruler – shared Montesquieu’s admiration of the intricate, well-balanced machine of the English constitution. Justi also used the metaphor of the machine of state to analyse Chinese, Swedish and Polish forms of government, arguing in favour of a mixed constitution that combined a strong

monarchy and an opposing hereditary aristocracy. Justi's appreciation of the English constitution, argues Nokkala, should lead to a revision of the historiography which portrays him as a spokesman for the mechanical authoritarian order.

Other Continental applications of bodily and mechanical metaphors are presented by Frank Beck Lassen in "Regular, Dependable, Mechanical: J.F. Struensee on the State of Denmark (1770-1772)." Lassen's study discusses the meanings of bodily and mechanical metaphors in this exceptional period, when the country was run by a royal physician – and thus an expert in medical language. Struensee applied both French materialist and Prussian cameralist ideas creatively, and sometimes illogically, to describe the functioning of the Danish state machine. While a variety of arguments could be made with these metaphors, Lassen concludes that bodily metaphors often carried more conservative connotations while mechanical metaphors more reformist ones. Mechanical conceptions of politics were not necessarily more "dynamic" or "democratic," although Lassen's article – together with the others – shows that mechanical metaphors did open up alternative secular ways of conceptualising political life. This, in turn, distanced eighteenth-century political discourse from classical and biblical models.

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