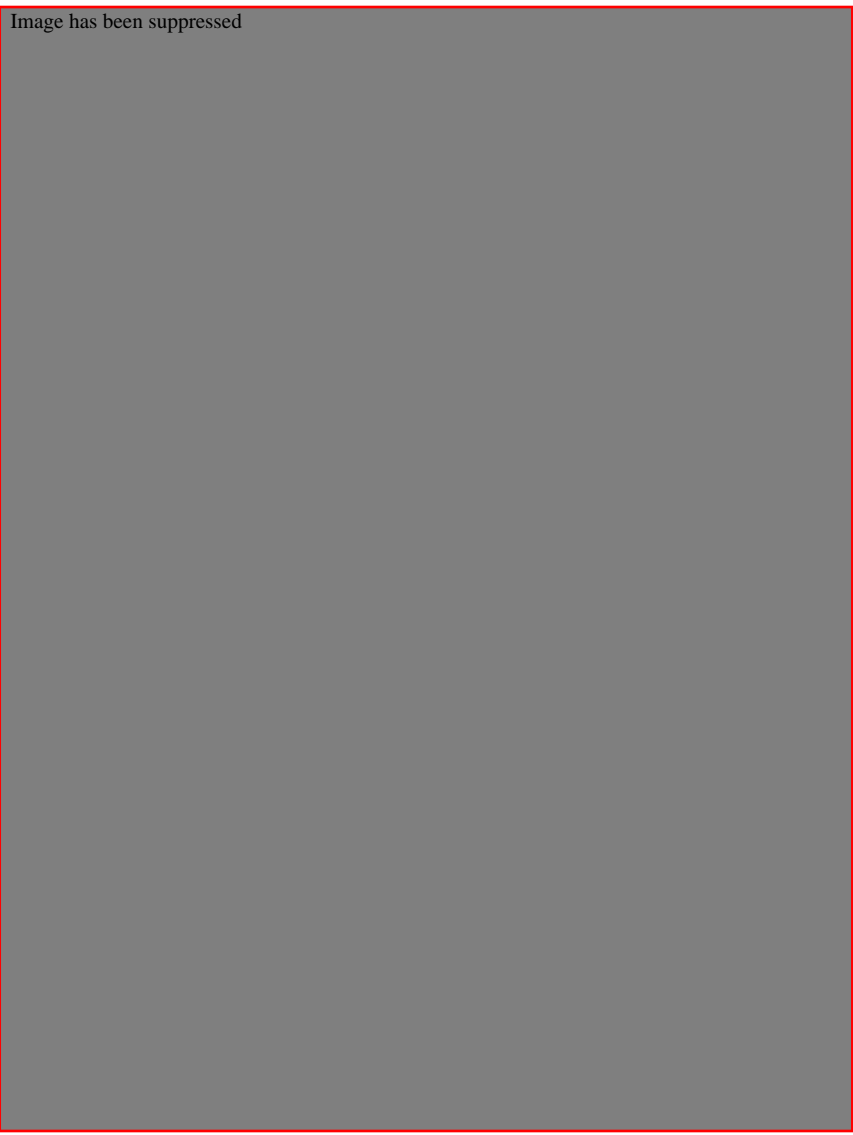


FUTURES PAsT

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Albrecht Altdorfer, Die Alexanderschlacht, Inv.Nr. 688 (The Battle of Alexander [Issus])
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich

FUTURES PAST

ON THE SEMANTICS OF HISTORICAL TIME

REINHART KOSELLECK

Translated and with an Introduction by Keith Tribe

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INTRODUCTION

Keith Tribe

Reinhart Koselleck's *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* was published in 1979; translations of two essays from this collection were published in the English journal *Economy and Society* during the early 1980s,¹ and in 1985 MIT Press brought out a complete translation of the book under the title *Futures Past*.² Reviewers noted at the time the manner in which Koselleck played upon concepts of time and space in the construction of historical meaning. Moreover, his emphasis upon "conceptual history" struck a chord among scholars already familiar with the efforts of Quentin Skinner, John Pocock, and John Dunn to direct our attention to the *use* of political language as the proper object of the history of political thought. There are many important differences in both intellectual genesis and actual implementation of Koselleck's project and that of the "Cambridge School"; but the generally supposed existence of the latter³ certainly

1. "Modernity and the Planes of Historicity," Vol. 10 (1981) pp. 166–83; "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History," Vol. 11 (1982) pp. 409–27.
2. This is a revised and corrected version of the same translation. The revisions are almost entirely stylistic, seeking a more accessible and less literal rendering of the original; in the process a few errors in the original translation have been identified and corrected.
3. See for a recent example of the prevalent belief that there is such a thing as a "Cambridge School" centered on Skinner, Pocock and Dunn the essay by Mark Bevir, "The Role of Contexts in Understanding and Explanation," in Hans Erich Bödeker (ed.) *Begriffsgeschichte, Diskursgeschichte, Metapherngeschichte* (Wallstein: Verlag, Göttingen, 2002) pp. 159–208. It has been noted by several writers that Cambridge historians have a notable blind spot with respect to both the German language and German political thought. Pocock opens the sole balanced response to the "conceptual history" of Brunner and Koselleck by baldly stating that "I know little of German history or historiography and am therefore not competent to speak on the matters raised by Professor Melton [regarding the work of Otto Brunner]." J. G. A. Pocock, "Concepts and Discourses: A Difference in Culture? Comment on a Paper by Melvin Richter," in Hartmut Lehmann, Melvin Richter (eds.) *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts. New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte*, German Historical Institute, Washington D.C. Occasional Paper No. 15 (1996) p. 47.

rendered Koselleck's work more accessible to the Anglophone intellectual world. Nonetheless, that from this Anglophone perspective Koselleck's writings appeared to follow on from the development by Skinner and Dunn of a new approach to political theory is evidence merely that Anglophone has too often meant Anglocentric.

Skinner and Dunn could be said to have drafted the manifesto of this "Cambridge School" in the late 1960s;⁴ but Koselleck's characteristic emphasis on the importance of historical concepts in the reconstruction of meaning predated these two essays by many years. In fact, the essay included below on von Stein and historical prognosis first appeared in 1965, the year that Koselleck's *Habilitation* dissertation, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, was accepted. Furthermore, Koselleck's original proposal to develop a new kind of conceptual history is much older, drafted in the later 1950s. He had first conceived the construction of a comprehensive, one-volume dictionary of historico-political concepts, reaching from antiquity to the present, while working on his *Habil*, as *Assistent* to Werner Conze in Heidelberg. Conze was receptive to the idea, but suggested that its scope be restricted to the German-language area; and in 1963 a meeting in Heidelberg which included Koselleck, Conze, and Otto Brunner translated this proposal into a research project that eventually stretched into the 1980s and eight very substantial volumes.⁵

That English-speaking scholars noticed an affinity with the work of Skinner, Pocock, Dunn, and their students does not of course imply that Koselleck had constructed a German variant of a broadly common project. The work of the "Cambridge School" is typically associated with a contextual understanding of the political language of a limited range of leading thinkers—respectively for instance Hobbes, Harrington and Locke⁶—while

4. John Dunn, "The Identity of the History of Ideas," *Philosophy* Vol. 43 (1968) pp. 85–104; Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* Vol. 8 (1969) pp. 3–53.

5. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (eds.) *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 volumes, (Stuttgart: Klett, 1972–97).

6. Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). J. G. A. Pocock, *The Political Works of James Harrington* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); although this focus is atypical of Pocock's work, from his *Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (1957) to *Barbarism and Religion* (1999). J. Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1969.

Koselleck has generally directed attention to variation in the meaning of specific terms, or shifts in the semantic force of “history.” Underlying this is Koselleck’s detailed knowledge of the writings of Kant and Hobbes, for example; but his primary interest is not directed to these writings. And although in the German context the creation of a “history of concepts” met with some criticism from specialists in linguistic theory, it was a growing interest in structural linguistics, originating during the 1960s in France and by the early 1970s increasingly influential in North America, Britain, and Australia, that created an audience receptive to the argument that conceptual structures dictated structures of meaning. Added to which, of course, was the manner in which Michel Foucault’s *Order of Things*⁷ directed attention to a general reordering of conceptual structures around the end of the eighteenth century, a periodization which coincided with Koselleck’s own minting of the term *Sattelzeit* to denote this period. In Germany, Koselleck was, and remains, recognized as a brilliant historian;⁸ but elsewhere his reputation was initially established among social, political and literary theorists, and only secondarily among historians.

Generational factors also play a part in the reception of his work outside Germany—in 1965 Koselleck was already 42 years old, having studied history, philosophy, law, and sociology in Heidelberg and Bristol between 1947 and 1953. He submitted his doctoral dissertation in 1954 and in the same year left Germany for a two year period as Lektor at the University of Bristol.⁹ He returned to Heidelberg in 1956, and from 1960 he was a member of the Arbeitskreis für Moderne Sozialgeschichte, a grouping of historians brought together in 1956/57 by Werner Conze that, in effect, introduced modern

7. First published in 1966, translated into English 1970. See the opening of ch. 7: “The last years of the eighteenth century are broken by a discontinuity similar to that which destroyed Renaissance thought at the beginning of the seventeenth; then, the great circular forms in which similitude was enclosed were dislocated and opened so that the table of identities could be unfolded; and that table is now about to be destroyed in turn, while knowledge takes up residence in a new space—a discontinuity as enigmatic in its principle, in its original rupture, as that which separates the Paracelsian from the Cartesian order.” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970) p. 217.

8. In 1989 he was awarded the Munich *Historikerpreis*.

9. This period in Britain appears to have made little impression upon Koselleck, although his first article, “Bristol, die “zweite Stadt” Englands. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Skizze” (*Soziale Welt* 6 1955 pp. 360–72) gave an account of the city. On the other hand, both time and place were inauspicious in regard to either history or philosophy.

social history into a German context before the idea of a social history had developed in Britain and North America.

Koselleck's revised 1954 dissertation was published in 1959 as *Kritik und Krise*,¹⁰ and from this study of freemasonry and Enlightenment his early interest in the relation of historical concepts to social organization and historical understanding is clear. During this second Heidelberg period, however, Koselleck shifted his attention to a domain that at first sight has more in common with Otto Hintze than Carl Schmitt, personal acquaintance with whom had been important for Koselleck as a student when writing his dissertation. Koselleck's 1965 Habilitation thesis was published in 1967 as *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution*, carrying the subtitle "*Allgemeines Landrecht, Administration and Social Movement from 1791 to 1848.*"¹¹ Essentially a study of administrative structures and social reorganization, picking up a long-established German interest in *Verfassungsgeschichte*, "constitutional history" in its broadest possible sense, this if anything prefigured many of the themes that were later to be picked up from Foucault's *Surveiller et Punir*, linking the formalized rules of social behavior and organization to problems of "reform" and "progress." The principal difference, perhaps, is that Koselleck was a historian and Foucault was not; the motivating intellectual context of his account of law and administration in Prussia is nowhere spelled out in Koselleck's dense study, while Foucault's own work is both more immediately accessible in theme, and in some respects builds upon an existing literature on incarceration.¹² And so this connection proves to be no more than an allusion, but nonetheless suggestive of the impact that Koselleck's work had in the 1980s on an English readership whose schooling had been shaped by Parisian masters.

An early review of *Futures Past* pointed to the clear influence of Heidegger in the general architecture of the essays. The linkage that Koselleck makes

10. Translated into English and published by Berg (Oxford, 1988); also translated into Spanish (Madrid/Mexico, 1965), Italian (Bologna, 1972); French (Paris, 1979); Japanese (Tokyo, 1990); and Portuguese (Rio de Janeiro, 1999). Anthony La Vopa provides a detailed evaluation of its intellectual genesis and theses in his review article "Conceiving a Public: Ideas and Society in Eighteenth-Century Europe," *Journal of Modern History* Vol. 64 (1992) pp. 79–116.

11. Stuttgart: Klett, 1967; second corrected edition 1975; third edition 1981; UTB paperback 1989; Italian translation Bologna 1988.

12. When Foucault's work appeared it could be read against an existing English-language literature on prison reform, which pointed to similar phenomena and the same chronology of incarceration; the real puzzle at the time was how this departure related to the intellectual history which Foucault had hitherto practiced.

between a chronological past, a lived present that was once an anticipated future, and expectations of the future—such that any given present is at the same time a “former future”¹³—is clearly indebted to the hermeneutic circle that Heidegger identified linking a past, present, and future that are understood in terms of each other.¹⁴ Koselleck’s founding idea is that chronology and lived time coincide but diverge; that the former is a datum against which temporality can be registered, but that this conception of temporality is itself the outcome of the structure with which we endow lived events. Heidegger’s trinity of self-understanding, self-interpretation, and self-constitution is here recovered historically. *Being and Time* considers persons with respect to their possibilities and futures, such that the subject matter of history becomes not simple facticity, but possibilities, “more precisely past possibilities and prospects, past conceptions of the future: futures past.”¹⁵ Koselleck had direct contact with Heidegger: during the later 1940s and early 1950s Heidegger was a regular visitor to the Heidelberg seminars of Gadamer and Löwith that Koselleck also attended. Koselleck inflected this hermeneutic influence, historicizing what had originally been philosophical reflection on the constitution of humanity in space and time.

How the realization of this vision relates on the one hand to the essays collected here, and on the other to the monumental project on conceptual history that would eventually dominate Koselleck’s career for more than twenty years, is best understood through an account of the genesis and development of what became known as the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* project. As already noted, Koselleck had in the later 1950s proposed a one-volume lexicon of political concepts to Conze, and the future editorial team of Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck first came formally together at a planning meeting in 1963. The three future editors did not however share a common intellectual background. Conze’s prime interest was the transformation of a pre-industrial world into modernity; and this became “social history” inso-

13. The term *vergangene Zukunft* is translated in the text below as “former future(s),” and this should have been the title of the book. However, in casting around for a suitable English translation, considering for example grammatical models analogous to the title of the French translation, *Futur passé*, or metaphors from commodity trading, the publisher seized upon one of my earlier and more casual suggestions, “futures past,” and this became set in stone. I have always thought that the person responsible for this choice must have had the Moody Blues 1967 concept album at the back of his or her mind, “Days of Future Passed” (Decca Deram Stereo SML 707).

14. David Carr, Review of *Futures Past, History and Theory* Vol. 26 (1987) pp. 197–204.

15. Carr, p. 198.

far as this transformation was conceived in terms of successive reclassifications of the social groups involved. Conze had studied in Königsberg with Ipsen and Rothfels,¹⁶ and Conze continued in the 1950s the former's work on demography and Prussian agricultural organization. Otto Brunner's writings by contrast laid emphasis on the importance of understanding a conceptual world in the work of historical reconstruction. His essay on the function of the household in the economic understanding of early modern Europe¹⁷ became a routine point of reference in historical literature, emphasizing the linkage to the Greek sense of *oikos* on the one side while denying the relevance of a market-oriented economics to the early modern agrarian world on the other.

The title of *Land und Herrschaft*, his 1939 monograph, denoted not simply a theme, but a problem—what was *Land*, how were territory and allegiance constituted and linked together? What was the nature of the power and domination that cemented this linkage in medieval Lower Austria? The subtitle, “Basic Questions concerning the History of Territorial Organization in Medieval Austria” points to a sustained interrogation of the concepts linked to “territorial organization”: peace and feuding; state, law and constitution; *Land* and *Landrecht*; household and power; *Landesherrschaft* and *Landesgemeinde*. These chapter titles follow on from an initial discussion of the nature of “politics” in a world in which social organization escapes modern conceptions of political conflict and political order, and yet where plunder and feuding are clearly subject to regulation—there is a political order, but not one that is immediately identifiable through modern concepts of the political.¹⁸ And the first section of the work moves quickly from a discussion of the politics of feuding, through four case-studies, to a discussion of the *Grundbegriffe*: “state,” arbitrary power, peace; feuding; peace, friendship, enmity; and revenge.

16. See Ingo Haar, “<Revisionistische> Historiker und Jugendbewegung: Das Königsberger Beispiel,” in P. Schöttler (ed.) *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft 1918–1945*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997) pp. 52–103.

17. “Das ‘ganze Haus’ und die alteuropäische ‘Ökonomik,’” first published in 1956, *Neue Wege der Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte*, 3rd. edition, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1980) pp. 103–27.

18. This was Brunner's principal agenda: to demonstrate the scope of Germanic custom and tradition in the construction of the pre-modern world, and to register its reinstatement in the “post-modern” world of National Socialism—see for a detailed discussion of this Howard Kaminsky and James Van Horn Melton, “Translators’ Introduction” to Brunner, *Land and Lordship. Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) pp. xiii–lxi.

But although Brunner had termed his conceptual approach to medieval history “social history,” and specified *Grundbegriffe* as the keystones of such a history, the manner in which these basic concepts were identified sharply differentiated him from both Conze and Koselleck. For Brunner, basic concepts were basic because they were an expression of a concrete order¹⁹ linking the present to older Europe, concepts that grew out of contemporary understanding and were not imposed from a later period. What made “basic concepts” basic was, in short, their *völkisch* character. This aspect of Brunner’s work was suppressed by his later revision of the work,²⁰ in which the “f” words as Kaminsky called them—folk, folk-community, folk-order—were systematically deleted or replaced.²¹ Moreover, the “folk history” with which Brunner had countered existing constitutional history, which was preoccupied with the “genesis” of the early modern state out of late medieval political order, was replaced by “structural history.”²²

And so while Brunner’s reputation was linked to a conceptual history of a kind, and Conze had sought to reconstruct social classifications without resort to later terminology, neither historian shared the basic hermeneutic principle that Koselleck brought to the project. In a valedictory review of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* project Christof Dipper suggests that Brunner’s editorial contribution went little further than selecting the title, and his single article, on “Feudalism,” presented little more than a history of feudal relationships and their changing terminology.²³ Conze on the other hand

19. A term borrowed from Carl Schmitt who suggested in 1934 that “medieval Germanic thinking was through and through *konkretes Ordnungsdenken*,” quoted in Gadi Algazi, “Otto Brunner—‘Konkrete Ordnung’ und Sprache der Zeit,” in Schöttler, *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft* p. 172.

20. *Land und Herrschaft. Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Südostdeutschlands im Mittelalter* was first published in Vienna in 1939; the third edition appeared under the same title in 1943. The revised fourth edition was published in 1959 under a revised title—instead of referring to “Southeast Germany,” the official designation of Austria after the *Anschluß* which Brunner, as a pan-German nationalist, had welcomed, it now referred to Austria.

21. James Van Horn Melton, “Otto Brunner and the Ideological Origins of Begriffsgeschichte,” in Lehmann and Richter, *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts*, p. 30.

22. Although it is easy to see these changes as purging the text of National Socialist associations, the important point is that “modernisation” of the terminology left the general argument intact; and that the allusion to the *Annales* school in the use of the term “structural history” reflects the impact of *Landesgeschichte* on Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre at Strasbourg after 1918. See Kaminsky and Van Horn Melton, “Translators’ Introduction” p. xxvi.

23. Christof Dipper, “Die ‘Geschichtlichen Grundbegriffe’. Von der Begriffsgeschichte zur Theorie der historischen Zeiten,” *Historische Zeitschrift* Bd. 270 (2000) pp. 287, 294. The

contributed a number of articles, focusing chiefly on concepts that designated social groups—"nobility," "worker," "peasant," "middle stratum"—but, like Brunner, these articles turn on the classification of social groups and relationships rather than the manner in which these classifications were expressive of a shifting conceptual field. And many other contributions suffer from related problems, rendering the published project as a whole a distinctly uneven enterprise. The enduring reputation, if not entirely the reality, of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* project turns in fact upon Koselleck's understanding of the project; not only the sole surviving editor, it is Koselleck whose vision is most closely identified with the considerable achievements of the work.

Originally the editors had in mind 150 basic concepts; by the time the first volume appeared this had been reduced to 130, while ultimately 119 articles were published. What counted as a basic concept was determined by the project's purpose, Koselleck wrote in 1967: to examine "the dissolution of the old world and the emergence of the new in terms of the historico-conceptual comprehension of this process."²⁴ At this time the *Sattelzeit*, roughly 1750–1850, was central to the determination of these concepts; but it soon became apparent that this principle was by no means decisive, since neologisms such as "fascism" were included that were quite remote from this period. Koselleck sought to provide guidance to contributors by posing a series of questions: Is the concept in common use? Is its meaning disputed? What is the social range of its usage? In what contexts does the term appear? Is the term articulated in terms of a concept with which it is paired, either in a complementary or adversary sense? Who uses the term, for what purpose, and to address whom? How long has it been in social use? What is the valency of the term within the structure of social and political vocabulary? With what terms does it overlap, and does it converge with other terms over time?

Clearly a concept's meanings were thought to involve its placement within a hierarchy of meaning, the cumulative effect of the lexicon being to

article is a lightly reworked version of his 1958 essay, and Dipper points out that the title of an English translation, "Lordship and Community in Medieval Europe" properly reflects its conventional historical cast.

24. Reinhart Koselleck, "Richtlinien für das Lexikon politisch-sozialer Begriffe der Neuzeit," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* Bd. 11 (1967) p. 81. The same phrasing is used in Koselleck's "Einleitung," in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (eds.) *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Bd. I (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972) p. xiv.

elucidate a complex network of semantic change in which particular concepts might play a varying role over time. In this respect a basic diachronic perspective would be supplemented by synchronic insights. These guidelines were aimed at a body of contributors with various academic backgrounds, and despite the sterling efforts of the editors some contributions had to be excluded, cut, or supplemented with newly commissioned work. Later, Koselleck emphasised three qualities that the contributions should assess: the term's contribution to the question of temporalization, its availability for ideological employment, and its political function.²⁵ Of necessity, a general pragmatism ruled the project's execution: beginning with the identification of key concepts, continuing with the selection of suitable contributors, and eventually determining the allocation of space to the final contributions. Necessary compromises made at each of these stages inflated the length of the finished collection, while leaving gaps in the structure where a term was either missing, or inadequately treated.

In his 1967 guidelines Koselleck had laid down a tripartite structure for the articles—introduction, main section, future developments. As Dipper notes, this scheme inevitably focused attention sharply upon the *Sattelzeit*, limiting the treatment of earlier and later periods that might be of relevance for a particular term.²⁶ But not even the editors adhered to this pattern, Koselleck least at all. Moreover, in the course of time understanding of the *Sattelzeit* has changed, becoming chronologically more differentiated. But given all qualifications, Dipper can summarize the core project of conceptual history as follows:

Its object is not the objectification of social material circumstances, but rather the objectification of states of consciousness, that is, it concerns the relationship of situational and structural language use in the past. In this way it not only contributes to the historical dimension of language use, but also to the history of social formations, since history can only be understood to the extent that it is articulated in specific concepts, as Koselleck never tires of emphasising.²⁷

Theoretical criticisms based on the difficulty of rigorously defining the distinction between “word” and “historical concept,” and the consequent

25. Koselleck, “Einleitung,” *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* Bd. I, pp. xv–xviii.

26. Dipper, “Die ‘Geschichtlichen Grundbegriffe’,” p. 293.

27. *Ibid.* p. 296.

impossibility of elaborating a method specific to this mode of doing history, ignore the fact that *Begriffsgeschichte* is more a procedure than a definite method. It is intended not as an end in itself but rather as a means of emphasizing the importance of linguistic and semantic analysis for the practice of social and economic history.

Such is the background against which the essays translated here were written. The themes which run through them—historicity, temporality, revolution, modernity—also find expression in Koselleck's contributions to *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, principally in the entries "Geschichte, Historie, and "Revolution." The actual mode of argument employed below owes on the other hand a great deal to the influence of Gadamer and Schmitt, besides having aspects in common with the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* as developed by Jauss. Chief among these influences is however Hans-Georg Gadamer.

It was, as already noted in passing, in Gadamer's Heidelberg seminar that Koselleck encountered Heidegger and consequently became interested in the use of concepts to solve historical problems. More generally, there is much common ground between Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, first published in 1960, and the basic, interpretative framework within which Koselleck moves. Shared by *Truth and Method* and these essays is the construction of a hermeneutic procedure that places understanding as a historical and experiential act in relation to entities which themselves possess historical force, as well as a point of departure in the experience of the work of art and the constitution of an aesthetics.²⁸ Gadamer elaborates aesthetic experience by examining the development of the concept *Erlebnis*, or experience in the sense of the lived encounter.²⁹ This term was developed in response to Enlightenment rationalism and is characteristic of an aesthetics centered upon the manifestation of the "truth" of a work of art through the experience of the subject. Gadamer then asks: what kind of knowledge is produced in this way? There is a discontinuity between modern philosophy and the classical tradition: the development of a historical consciousness in the nineteenth century made philosophy aware of its own historical formation, creating a break in the Western tradition of an incremental path to knowledge that had hitherto shaped philosophical discussion.³⁰ Koselleck takes up this

28. Koselleck's interest in art history and aesthetics led him to develop a comparative project on war memorials, commemorating the dead of European wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—see the discussion of this project below.

29. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Seabury Press, New York 1975 pp. 55ff.

30. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. xiv, xv.

problem and presents it as a historical, rather than philosophical, question: What kind of experience is opened up by the emergence of modernity?

The dimensions of this experience can be charted in time and space, specifically through consideration of the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectations," terms which form the subject of Koselleck's final essay and which in many ways summarize the themes of the preceding essays. More emphasis is given to the latter notion, combining as it does the spatial extension apparently available to a historical subject with the temporal projections that issue from this space. The perspective that opens up to a historical subject is doubled by the perception of the site occupied by this subject as one characterized by a conjuncture of heterogeneous dimensions—the *Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen*, or the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous.

These ideas have been developed most explicitly by Jauss in the context of literary history conceived in terms of *Rezeptionsgeschichte*. Like Koselleck, he joins historicity and experience, treating the reception of a literary work as a progression through the horizons of expectation of a succession of readers, whose expectations are constituted both by their historical circumstances and the unchanging literary forms they successively encounter.³¹ The study of literature moves away from a consideration of works for their literary qualities to study the work of transformation effected by the ongoing reception of a text. In this new conception, attention is drawn to the fact that when we today read for example a 1776 edition of Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*,³² we do not read it as its contemporaries would have done, but rather through the filters imposed by two and a half centuries of readings, re-readings, and commentaries. The text is no longer considered to be a stable and objectively verifiable entity, but subject to profound transformation by the process of reception; in turn, it is an element in the transformation or modification of the experience of its

31. The phrase "horizon of expectations," to which Koselleck draws attention below in a memorable Soviet-era joke, was introduced by Jauss in his 1959 work *Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Tierdichtung*. The idea already existed in sociological literature—Jauss points to Karl Mannheim's *Man and Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1940) pp. 179ff. See H. R. Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in Ralph Cohen (ed.) *New Directions in Literary History*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) p. 36.

32. It is worth noting at this point that today the history of the book has begun to supersede the line of argument presented here, drawing attention to the physical form of the book, the production and distribution of books, and the physical circumstances of the act of reading.

readers, and is thereby reproduced as a work of political economy. As Jauss emphasizes, not only is it necessary to overcome the diachronic emphasis of literary history through the construction of synchronous structures of perception; one must also recognize that it is the junction of synchronic and diachronic orders and the place of the reader at this junction which make historical understanding possible. By its nature, this junction is constituted by a concatenation of diverse elements, of different histories advancing at different rates and subject to varying conditions. Hence was developed the characterization of the moment of experience as a point of contemporaneity in which all that occurs together by no means enters into this moment in a uniform fashion.

In its own way, *Begriffsgeschichte* is a form of *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, charting the course of the reception of concepts and examining the experience that they both contain and make possible. Overlying this is the continuing influence of Carl Schmitt,³³ the man from whom Koselleck learned the merit of posing good questions. As with *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, the essays presented here are concerned more with the modern world's process of formation than with its actual structure. The perception of modernity as a problematic, if not crisis-ridden, condition is, in these essays, not so obvious as in *Kritik und Krise*, but it nevertheless plays a significant organizing role. Enlightenment rationalism raised the prospect of unending progress and human improvement, and this vision was transformed into a future, realizable utopia through its articulation in the political programs of the French, and later, European revolutions. These broke decisively with the closed and cyclical structure of the eschatological world view in which predictions of the coming End of the World and the Final Judgment set the limit to human ambition and hope; instead, society was now perceived as accelerating toward an unknown and unknowable future, but within which was contained a hope of the desired utopian fulfillment. Utopias and the hopes embodied in them in turn became potential guarantees of their own fulfillment, laying the basis for the transformation of modern conflict into civil war. Because the fronts of political conflict are now based upon ideological differences, conflict becomes endemic, self-generating, and, in principle, endless. In one sense, then, we exist in a modern world traversed by such conflicts, in which permanent civil war exists on a world scale; and which,

33. Carl Schmitt was banned from teaching after the war but Koselleck came into private contact with him in Heidelberg, where Schmitt's wife was in hospital.

while it is directly related to the aspirations of Enlightenment rationalism, is a world quite different from the one anticipated. The modern world represents a future which once existed, is now realized, and is perpetually in danger of outrunning the power of its inhabitants to control its course.

This understanding of modernity and historicity was transposed into the physical representation of former pasts by Koselleck's project on war memorials, the first manifestation of which was an article published among essays directed to the issue of identity in 1979—the same year that *Vergangene Zukunft* originally appeared.³⁴ Koselleck here drew attention to the range of simultaneous functions performed by the systematic commemoration of those who met a violent death: the memory of the death of soldiers is transmuted into political and social meanings for the future of survivors, while the dedication of such memorials to all who died, first in general terms, later by individual name, is both secular and egalitarian.³⁵ This practice developed from the time of the French Revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic Wars, replacing the tombs of military leaders with monuments to the sacrifices of the led. Associated with this was the idea that fallen soldiers should have individual graves close to the site of their death, a sentiment most extensively represented by the British and French Great War cemeteries marking out for all time its Western Front. The associated conception of the “unknown soldier” developed from the practice of giving each dead soldier an individual grave. First developed during the war between the United States and Mexico, the increasing number of “missing” during the American Civil War promoted the creation of cenotaphs in Baltimore and Arlington.³⁶ The line of argument to be found below—that the conceptual is the social, it is a means of conceiving our place within a social world—is thus extended into its physical manifestation as a modern cult of the dead.

Koselleck's work should therefore be understood as a contribution to our historical self-understanding, and not primarily as a “method” of historical analysis to be replicated, applied, or compared. As an instrument in

34. “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden,” in O. Marquard, K. Stierle (eds.) *Identität*, Munich 1979 pp. 255–76; published in French in 1998 and now translated into English as “War Memorials: Identity Formations of the Survivors” in Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford University Press, 2002) pp. 285–326.

35. “War Memorials,” p. 291.

36. R. Koselleck: “Einleitung,” in R. Koselleck, M. Jeismann (eds.) *Der politische Totenkult. Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994) pp. 14–15.

efforts to transform intellectual history into the history of discourse it certainly provides a powerful stimulus, especially as manifested in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* project, as Melvin Richter has shown.³⁷ But ultimately that project can be read against a German philological tradition reaching back to the Brothers Grimm and their *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. That it is occasionally suggested that the English speaking world does not need the *GG* because we already have the *Oxford English Dictionary*³⁸ merely confirms a lack of familiarity with the very different scope of these two projects. Koselleck did not invent the history of concepts; when he published his “guide-lines” for the *GG* project in 1967 it appeared in the *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, a journal founded in the late 1950s quite independently of the new social history being developed in Heidelberg. Besides the overall design of the *GG* project, the fact that it was ever brought to completion depended vitally upon a shared understanding of the existence of this tradition among German historians, a circumstance not open to replication elsewhere. It is what Koselleck has done with this tradition that deserves our attention, and which is elaborated in the essays that follow.

37. M. Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts. A Critical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). See Peter Baehr's review of this, “The Age of New Words,” *Times Literary Supplement*, October 3, 1997.

38. Referred to by David Armitage, “Answering the Call: The History of Political and Social Concepts in English,” *History of European Ideas* Vol. 25 (1999) p. 15.