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ROUNDTABLE: LANGUAGES, TIMES, AND REVOLUTIONS: CONCEPTUAL HISTORY IN THE IBERIAN ATLANTIC

Rethinking Conceptual History in an Iberian Atlantic Perspective

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Historia conceptual en el Atlántico ibérico: lenguajes, tiempos, revoluciones. By Javier Fernández Sebastián. Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2021. Pp. 571. ISBN 9788437508122.

Javier Fernández Sebastián's outstanding book, *Historia conceptual en el Atlántico ibérico: lenguajes, tiempos, revoluciones*, is already an essential reference for all those interested not only in conceptual history or the history of Ibero-American societies, but also in reflecting on history itself, as well as on the dilemmas and challenges involved in its writing. Its text is the fruit of a seasoned and remarkably erudite intellectual trajectory, which expresses the successful endeavour of uniting the theoretical, methodological, and empirical dimensions in the historian's work. This bid is unambiguous in the structure of the book, as well as in the divisions and linkages among its sections and chapters, and is embodied in its very narrative and in the way it unfolds.

The book's guiding threads are language, time, and revolutions. These threads allow it to tackle the challenge of reflecting on the transitioning of Ibero-American societies into modernity from a perspective of conceptual history. They provide a unique and pioneering entrance-point to modernity, in a continuous dialogue with the established traditions – and, particularly, a type dubbed by the author as 'elective traditions', which on an 'elected' or selected basis enable linkages between some past realities and future projections. To attain this aim, Fernández Sebastián analyses a large set of concepts, languages, metaphors, myths, and images used by historical actors in the period of transition into modernity, which testify to the complex and deep process of transformations marked by semantic displacements, ruptures, and continuities that underpin an intense reconfiguring of language and time-conceptions, while providing a large part of the substance that propels revolutions.

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Above all, the book is a sophisticated response to the challenge of reflecting on a conceptual history of the Iberian world. It is both a beneficiary and a tributary of the *Iberconceptos* project, which since 2004 has brought together a network of Ibero-American researchers to study the process of appropriating the history of concepts in Portuguese and Spanish Atlantic areas between the late eighteenth century and the final third of the nineteenth century. Javier Fernández Sebastián played and continues to play a key role in the different stages of the project's development. We may assert that in this book, in a daring and intellectually mature way, he reaches beyond the Koselleckian proposal to make headway and accomplish a number of lasting authoritative contributions to the field of conceptual history. Examples of such contributions include the temporal extension of the *Sattelzeit*, the option for a transnational and comparative focus, and the expansion of the spatial frame of reference to encompass the Iberian Atlantic, as well as Fernández Sebastián's attention to metaphors and his emphasis on the emotional and affective dimension, i.e. to non-conceptual elements, among others.

Based on these remarks, I shall now raise some topics of discussion. As he stated in the introduction, this book is a 'distillation' of the issues faced in his twenty plus years of work as idealizer, co-ordinator, researcher, and promoter of the *Iberconceptos* project. I remember that we first met in Rio de Janeiro during the seventh History of Political and Social Group meeting in 2004, when, I believe, the idea of a comparative conceptual history project for the Ibero-American world began to take shape. One year later, in April 2005, he conducted his now famous interview with Reinhart Koselleck. On that occasion, he asked his opinion on the feasibility of undertaking the project, and he suggested that to 'compare the shifting languages of the colonizers and Ibero-American populations as a result of the experience of the Spanish and Portuguese in Europe and in America' would be difficult, but certainly more feasible than comparing the cases of the French, English, German, and Slavic languages, since the former ones share a common Latin root.

At first, it seems to me that this issue of languages, of the diffusion of vocabularies and concepts in neighbouring and culturally related linguistic realms – as occurred in the Portuguese and Spanish realms, and in countries with similar historical trajectories in some respects – is what made possible the initial feasibility of the *Iberconceptos* project. However, we also know that the challenges of developing a conceptual history in many German realms go quite beyond the existence of this common linguistic basis. In this regard, after almost twenty years, and having finished this book, which observations and questions related to this experience would he take to Koselleck if he could have the chance to interview him again?

My second point is linked to one of the most interesting contributions of the book, namely Fernández Sebastián's proposal to expand the well-known four distinctive dimensions of the conceptual transformations in the *Sattelzeit* brought forth by Koselleck in his introduction to the monumental lexicon of political and social concepts: *democratization*, *ideologization*, *politicization*, and *temporalization.* To these four dimensions, he adds *emotionalization* and *internationalization*.

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In regard to *emotionalization*, he refers to the 'affective turn' that occurred in historiography and social sciences in the previous years, as well as to the increasing need to consider emotional factors when reflecting on changes in political and social concepts. Citing many contemporary authors, as well as his own work with the sources, he calls attention to the need for complementing conceptual history with the history of emotions, while shedding light on the affective charge embedded in the political concepts used to describe the social reality. Now, can he give us more comments on the idea that the period of accelerated change in the political and social language, which elapsed from the mid-eighteenth century to the early decades of the nineteenth century, was also a moment of 'sentimental revolution'? And on how this may be a relevant dimension for drawing the Koselleckian and Skinnerian perspectives closer to each other, since this affective charge permeates the concrete uses of concepts (or, as he states: 'However, both perspectives have much to win if the two dimensions preferred by each of them – the diachronic and synchronic – are added to a third dimension: the emotionality of concepts') (p. 76)?

As a third and final point, I would like to draw attention to his work with metaphors. Even based on the assumption that concepts are a privileged element for understanding cultural changes, he, as well as other authors and works, recognizes that conceptual formulas do not exhaust the possible set of expressive resources, and that grasping the historical process requires the ability to place it under a more comprehensive approach capable of including other expressions found in the spatial and temporal structure of the human reality beyond languages and discourse-forms. This sensibility is expressed in the chapters on myths, images, and metaphors, as well as in the prolific use of authored metaphors in the book's text. Part of the assumption is that they are an all-present cognitive resource in human language, and that 'revolutionary epochs seem to have been particularly fecund for their gestation, substitution and change', given their ability to help facing times of uncertainties, perplexities, and crises. Chapter 9, which is dedicated to metaphors, attempts in particular to get closer to what it calls a 'political metaphorology of the Hispanic revolutions' (p. 322).

My question goes more in the direction of entreating Fernández Sebastián to share with us a balance of how the metaphor-analyses in the book are an effective contribution to dissolve the erroneous but strong belief in an assumed incompatibility between concepts and metaphors – and, thereby, in an assumed incompatibility between conceptual history and metaphorology. His analyses go in the opposite direction, that is, towards the recognition of a fruitful complementarity between them. Even if much has been done to produce a conceptual history of the Ibero-American world, is there still much to be done in terms of studying metaphors and their inner relations?

At this point in time, as we observe an increasingly large and perilous selective use of the past with political aims, Javier Fernández Sebastián's book reminds and confirms to us that one of the key virtues of conceptual history resides in its ability to retrieve experiences based on their meanings. In so doing, it de-presentifies the past, de-naturalizes the present, and avoids a

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presentist retrospective look fraught with misconceptions that obscure the alterity of the past in all its plurality. In awareness of conceptual history, as conceived by him, we become more conscious of the historicity of the world in which we live, as well as of the contingent and precarious nature of our means to apprehend it.

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