

REINHART KOSELLECK’S WORK ON CRISIS¹

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Résumé

Le travail célèbre de Reinhart Koselleck sur la crise marque des tendances du milieu intellectuel de son temps et a eu un effet important sur le paysage académique contemporain. Cet article analyse les choix de Koselleck sur l’étude de la «crise» de l’Antiquité au 20^{ème} siècle et présente des conclusions méthodologiques, disciplinaires et socio-politiques.

Mots-clés

Koselleck, crise, critique, *Begriffsgeschichte*, concepts.

Abstract

Reinhart Koselleck’s celebrated work on the concept of crisis highlights trends present in the intellectual context of its time and bears a significant impact in contemporary academic trends. The essay analyses Koselleck’s choices in the study of “crisis” from Antiquity until the 20th century and draws conclusions on methodology, disciplinary trends and socio-political consequences of academic work.

Keywords

Koselleck, crisis, critique, *Begriffsgeschichte*, concepts

¹ The paper is a refined version of an announcement at the International Conference “Narratives of the Crisis: Myths and Realities”, held in Thessaloniki in June 2015. The author would like to thank Prof. Kari Palonen for his advice on drafts of this essay. All views and possible errors rest solely on the author’s responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

The paper presents the most popular work in contemporary academics on crisis. Crisis is a theme of particular interest for the study of present-day Greek politics, since the term is frequently used in order to designate the specificity of the current period vis-à-vis the preceding one. In particular, we refer to the work of Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006),² a German intellectual who approached “crisis” as a concept, following the steps of a specific German intellectual tradition. Our analysis begins with a brief review of the historical and intellectual background of Koselleck’s work. Subsequently, we follow Koselleck’s own chronological division of the object as found in his more detailed work, whereas a few more general conclusions are reserved for the end of the paper.

HISTORICAL AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

As far as the historical and intellectual background is concerned, it is worth pointing out that Koselleck has been remembered mostly for the gradual creation of the *history of concepts* (*Begriffsgeschichte*), a field of study which has presently managed to gain international recognition.³ Our subject-matter in this paper consists of two texts. The first one is Koselleck’s doctoral dissertation, originally presented in 1954 and published in a modified book version in 1959 under the title *Critique and Crisis: A Study on the Pathogenesis of the Bourgeois World* (*Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der Bürgerlichen Welt*).⁴ The book is a distinctively conservative critique of the Enlightenment⁵ which tries to combine the philosophical analysis of 17th and 18th century authors with the perspective of a more “concrete history” (which would be gradually substituted by “social history” - still in-the-making in West Germany at that time)⁶ and, aside from the numerous ongoing references to

² For short overviews of Koselleck’s overall work until the 1990s see Tribe (1985) and Palonen (1997). More comprehensive approaches of Koselleck’s work can be found at Palonen (2004) and Olsen (2012). The latter also provides the first complete historical documentation of Koselleck’s life and writings.

³ Basic texts and volumes reflecting the international interest in the history of concepts (also commonly known as conceptual history) can be found in Richter (1995), Hampsher-Monk, Tilmans & van Free (1998), Castiglione & Hampsher-Monk (2001), and Sfoini (2006). In addition, the publication of the international journal *Contributions to the History of Concepts* since 2005 has provided a stable site for a constant flow of refined works on relevant topics.

⁴ The book version used in this essay is (Koselleck, 1988). Quite different readings of Koselleck’s book from the one maintained in this essay can be found in Haikala (1997) and Palonen (2004). It should be noted that Olsen’s analysis (2012, pp. 51-100) rests mainly on the earlier unpublished 1954 version of the dissertation.

⁵ Cf. Olsen’s (2012, pp. 15-17) attempt to classify Koselleck’s endeavours at that time as falling within the category of “liberal conservative” German intellectuals of the time or the similar category of “constitutional patriots” (“Verfassungspatrioten”), which takes place before Olsen’s reference to Koselleck’s actual basic professors and their impact on him (see below). In fact, Olsen later (p. 28) notes Koselleck’s rejection of Karl Jaspers on the basis of the latter’s “historical philosophy of liberalism”. In all cases, the fact that liberalism and constitutionalism are usually associated with the Enlightenment does not favour the use of such categories for Koselleck’s criticism of the latter in *Kritik und Krise*. Besides, at the end of his pages on “liberal conservatives” and gradually turning his attention specifically to Koselleck, Olsen suggests that “liberal conservatives” primarily aimed at a “liberalization” or more properly a “critical reuse of certain German traditions”, mainly referring to Schmitt and Heidegger (pp. 16-17). Furthermore, it should be noted that young Habermas wrote a review on the same book as well, characterizing it as a “‘new conservative’ critique of the Enlightenment. (Olsen 2012, pp. 80-83).

⁶ In particular, Koselleck noted in his introduction (1988, pp. 7-8) that his method consisted in “a combination of analyses from the history of spirit [“geistesgeschichtliche Analysen”, inadequately translated as

“critique” and “crisis” throughout the text, it also includes an extensive footnote (1988, pp. 103-104) with Koselleck’s more detailed findings up to that time on the histories of the two concepts. This footnote seems to have evolved into our second and most extensively examined source, i.e. Koselleck’s celebrated article on “Krise” [“Crisis”] (2006), initially published in 1982 in a German dictionary (mainly) supervised by Koselleck (*Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* [1972-1997], usually abbreviated as *GG*), which is probably the best-known product of the history of concepts up to present (Palonen, 2006, Olsen, 2012, pp. 167-201).

Both “history” (including what Friedrich Meinecke in 1936 will eventually popularize under the label of “historicism”⁷) and “crisis” have a long and characteristic tradition in German intellectual life (Iggers, 1983, Bambach, 1995, Beiser, 2011), which is mainly shaped by the shifts of experience in the relations of the Germanic world with the societies in their west. For example, such experience includes the late-18th century emphasis on the “historical” particularity of the Germanic world, the 19th century self-perception of Berlin academics as “state intellectuals” bearing the task to handle these relations, and Germany’s defeat at the Great War, which seems to have brought “crisis” to the forefront of German academic vocabulary.⁸ Koselleck assimilated these debates through his well-known teachers, who are usually classified under the clearly conservative side of the political spectrum of their times: such philosophers as the legal theorist Carl Schmitt, who highlighted the “state of emergency” and the dependence from the sovereign’s decision, (Schmitt, 1996/2006),⁹ Martin Heidegger, whose particular interests included laying emphasis on the genuine character of the mood of “anxiety” in the late 1920s (Heidegger, 2008),¹⁰ and who seems to have introduced his

“analyses from the history of ideas” in the English translation] and analyses of sociological conditions”. As the rest of the introduction and the book in general make clear, Koselleck’s main influence in the philosophical “history of spirit” is probably Karl Löwith (see below), whereas the sociological analyses Koselleck mainly had in mind at that time could have been those of Karl Mannheim, even though the latter’s references to intellectuals’ “ideology” seem to have been almost explicitly substituted by Löwith’s “philosophies of history” (e.g., pp. 170-186). Also see Olsen (2012, pp. 52-53). However, Koselleck’s basic sociological tutor in Heidelberg was Alfred Weber, whereas, in all cases, Koselleck’s interest in sociology was characteristically approximating that of a person we could retrospectively describe as a “social historian”, as one may also infer from the fact that as a student he was enrolled at the department of history in Heidelberg and that already from 1955 Johannes Kühn and Werner Conze (see below) successively hired Koselleck as their academic assistant (Palonen, 1997, p. 43, Olsen, 2012, pp. 13, 24). As far as the mediation of history and sociology in Koselleck’s case is concerned, a letter of the latter to Schmitt, dated from 1953, highlights Koselleck’s complaints on the sharp distinction between the two disciplines in German universities at that time and his turn to Schmitt’s historical studies of concrete concepts as a rare combination of “systematic” and “historical” approaches (Olsen, 2012, p. 58).

⁷ For more information on the uses and understandings of “historicism” throughout the history of German intellectual life, as well as for Koselleck’s understanding of it (shaped by its uses by Ernst Troeltsch and Meinecke) as an unappealing and politically dangerous intellectual trend, see Olsen (2012, pp. 58-63).

⁸ On this last topic see Bambach (1995, pp. 187-193). Furthermore, Olsen (2012, pp. 45-47) suggests a recurrence of the post-World War I climate of “crisis” in Germany in the immediate years after World War II, during which Koselleck worked on his doctoral dissertation in Heidelberg.

⁹ Schmitt had a strong say in young Koselleck’s dissertation, especially in its early 1954 version, whereas his overall significant impact on Koselleck, with whom he retained contact in Heidelberg after Schmitt’s official post-war prohibition to teach, has already been discussed extensively in literature (e.g. Tribe, 1985, pp. x-xix, Haikala, 1997, p. 72, Olsen, 2012, pp. 23-26, 52-79, 104-116, 186-190). Our essay will argue that Schmitt’s perspective has been the crucial influence for the formation of Koselleck’s views on crisis.

¹⁰ Koselleck was introduced to Heidegger and his already famous work primarily through the academic seminars of one of Heidegger’s retrospectively best-known students, Hans-Georg Gadamer. However, it is worth pointing out that Koselleck’s positive interest in Heidegger was basically restricted in Heidegger’s early

famous “Kehre” (“turn”) of the later years of his work as a substitute for the earlier German discussions of “crisis”, (Bambach, 1995, pp. 193-203, 215-224, 250-255), and Heidegger’s student Karl Löwith, who infused young Koselleck with a vision of the present as an unfortunate mixture of the ancient Greek and the Judaeo-Christian philosophy of history, (Löwith, 1949, particularly pp. 1-19, 191-207),¹¹ as well as the historians Otto Brunner and Werner Conze, to whom Koselleck turned in the following years and who also served as Koselleck’s most immediate collaborators in the *GG*.¹² Following Wolfgang J. Mommsen (2001, pp. 41-45),¹³ we may note a post-World War II shift of these debates towards more Western-oriented themes, such as the problematization of the Enlightenment, emblematically founded in Theodor W. Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1947] (1997),¹⁴ and which will later also include Jürgen Habermas’ Ph.D. on the “public sphere” [1962] (1989). In these respects, Koselleck insists in his Ph.D. on Schmitt’s older line of argumentation, since he treats the Enlighteners as “Utopian modernists” (1988, p. 7) – using the Freemasons as their archetype (chaps. 5-7)¹⁵ – who ‘play it safe’ through their development “within the confines” (p. 16) created by the 17th century absolutist state (chap. 4 on Locke, the “spiritual father of the bourgeois Enlightenment”, and chaps. 5-11), which in turn is presented as salutary for bringing the religious civil wars to an end (chaps. 1-3);¹⁶

classic *Being and Time* of 1927. For more information on Koselleck’s relation with the work of Heidegger and Gadamer see Olsen (2012, pp. 26-29, 64-67, 75-76, 182-186, 220-231).

¹¹ For more on Koselleck’s relations with Löwith see Olsen (2012, pp. 21-23, 67-68).

¹² For more on this last topic see Tribe (1985, pp. xiii-xvi), Richter (2006, pp. 134-140). It should be noted that Koselleck’s basic historical tutor and official doctoral supervisor in Heidelberg was Johannes Kühn, who was also Koselleck’s godfather, but prior to his involvement with Conze and Brunner - the leading figures in the gradual introduction of “social history” in West Germany - Koselleck seems not to have been quite drawn into the work of the most influential German historians of the time, i.e. Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter. (Olsen, 2012, pp. 20-21, 29-31, 79-80). For Koselleck’s relation with Conze and the chronologically older Brunner since 1957 see Olsen (pp. 118-144).

¹³ Similarly, Olsen (2012, pp. 15-17) suggests the emergence of a generation divided into “left-liberal” (including W. J. Mommsen and Habermas among others) and “liberal conservative” intellectuals at that time in West Germany.

¹⁴ For an attempt to associate Koselleck’s project in *Kritik und Krise* with the numerous classical titles on Enlightenment, totalitarianism and relevant topics, which also begins chronologically from the first 1944 publication of a part of what would subsequently become the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see Olsen (2012, pp. 43-45).

¹⁵ For the purposes of our subsequent criticism of Koselleck’s views, it is worth pointing out that contemporary historical research on the 18th century “public sphere”, which actually draws from Habermas’ previously cited work, suggests that the Freemasons were not quite central within the various activities commonly associated with the Enlightenment and the public sphere so as to fit Koselleck’s suggestion of their serving as an archetype. In fact, James van Horn Melton’s presently authoritative book on the public sphere leaves the Freemasons for the final chapter of the main part of his overview (2001, pp. 252-272). Therefore, and judging also from the present-day commonsensical devaluation of Freemasonry, one is tempted to think that Koselleck’s choice to spend three chapters on its analysis before he moves to the greatest part of the other Enlighteners could be regarded as setting up a biased background for readers on their way to subsequent chapters. Finally, Olsen (2012, pp. 48-50) quite interestingly approaches these and the next group of chapters of *Kritik und Krise* as referring to the “public sphere”, using the latter term as rather synonymous to Koselleck’s actual reference to the “bourgeoisie”.

¹⁶ For example, in two quite not atypical early passages of his book, Koselleck states that “in the political order which it restored by pacifying the areas devastated by religious wars, the State created the premise for the unfolding of a moral world” and that “once implemented by the State the separation of morality and politics hence turns against the State itself: it is forced into standing a moral trial for having achieved something, i.e. to have created a space in which it was possible (for the individual) to survive” (p. 11). Quite importantly, Koselleck presents the absolutist state in these chapters almost exclusively as a carrier of achievements, not of faults, whereas the Enlighteners are for the most part blamed for a rather unconscious

“critique” is respectively presented as a “hypocritical” divergence which is ultimately reducible to the “crisis” of the absolutist state (passim, particularly pp. 9-12, 103-104, 182-186). Even though the subsequent decades in his academic career - and particularly his collaboration with the historians - turned Koselleck primarily towards devoted scientific research, these views seem to have retained a significant impact on Koselleck’s late work, as well as on the history of concepts in general, even though this form of impact might not have been quite intentional and definitively does not suggest a conscious normative defence of Schmitt’s views.¹⁷

KOSELLECK’S CRISIS

Koselleck’s work on “crisis” starts from the ancient Greek literature (2006, pp. 358-361), in which the author elaborately distinguishes three separate meanings of “crisis” («κρίσις» in Greek). Koselleck initially focuses on the classical literature in order to identify a first meaning for “crisis”, bearing such connotations as “to separate”, “to choose”, “to judge” and “to decide”, to which he usually refers as “legal” and “political” and which is specifically located with citations of Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle and later the *Acts of the Apostles* (pp. 358-359, see also Koselleck, 1988, p. 103),¹⁸ whereas at this point Koselleck does not omit to remind the readers of his article (in retrospect, probably bearing in mind his doctoral dissertation) that this meaning combines the 18th century meanings of subjective “critique”

hypocrisy vis-à-vis the absolutist state. For an attempt of mitigation of the first of these last two claims see Olsen (2012, pp. 53-56, 69-70). It is also worth pointing out that in chap. 2, which is devoted to Hobbes (who serves as the book’s archetypal theorist of the absolutist state), Koselleck is strongly influenced by Schmitt’s reading of Hobbes. See Schmitt (1996). For more on this last topic and further bibliography see Olsen (pp. 47-48, 90).

¹⁷ For a detailed attempt to highlight Koselleck’s methodological, political and “normative” differences from Schmitt’s views already in the former’s *Kritik und Krise* project see Olsen (2012, pp. 69-74), whereas Olsen subsequently (pp. 76-77) acknowledges that “Koselleck remained more subtle in expressing his intellectual-political deviations from Schmitt than Heidegger” and claims that his previously referred letter to Schmitt of 1953 “might indicate that he attempted to downplay the extent to which he in fact went beyond Schmitt”. This last author maintains that “the most direct examples” of Koselleck’s expressing his differences from Schmitt are found in the years after *Kritik und Krise*, in which Koselleck “toned down his reception of Schmitt significantly”, whereas in the following pages of the same book it is made clear that Koselleck was immediately regarded and actually stigmatized as a Schmittian by most reviewers of his published dissertation and probably by a significant portion of the German academic public in the decades preceding the first publications of the *GG* (pp. 76-78, 83-86). In fact, Olsen also maintains (p. 79) that Koselleck’s modifications in the published edition of his dissertation included a degree of self-censorship, such as the removal of his own and Schmitt’s critique to an older classic work of Meinecke, in order to avoid reaction from his academic colleagues.

¹⁸ It is worth pointing out that if one examines in the authoritative Liddell, Scott & Jones lexicon (2011, pp. 996-997) the earlier uses of «κρίσις», and mainly «κρίνω» [the Greek verb corresponding to “crisis”], in Homer’s sagas, i.e. the earliest pieces in Greek literature, one cannot help noticing that they mainly have to do with “separating”, “putting asunder” men at arms, as well as “picking out” among them. Hence, what usually counts as law or politics does not seem to be present at that moment of the history of “crisis”. In addition, Koselleck’s choice of Thucydides as his first reference to a particular author seems to reflect an interesting similar emphasis on one of the founding figures of “scientific history” in a 1956 review article of Koselleck highlighting the views of John Adams, i.e. one of the most erudite conservative ‘Founding Fathers’ of the United States. In that article, Adams is portrayed favourably for embracing the “constant set of political alternatives that were first discussed by Thucydides, but which are found throughout history: the alternatives between civil war and order” (Olsen, 2012, p. 112). The Schmittian tone on this reading and attribution of intellectual primacy to Thucydides, who was also an important reading for Hobbes himself, seems to corroborate our overall reading of this part of Koselleck’s article on “Krise”.

and objective “crisis” (p. 359). Following Schmitt, this meaning is presented by Koselleck as rather primary in relation to the other two meanings,¹⁹ which are respectively identified by Koselleck as the “theological” and the “medical” meaning of “crisis”. The theological meaning (pp. 359-360, see also 1988, p. 103) is located by Koselleck at the *Septuagint*, i.e. the Greek translation of the Old and the New Testament and is presented as drawing from the legal-political meaning and crucially infusing it with the Judean promise of redemption by the “ruler and judge” God and the Christian expectation of the future Revelation, which is subjectively sanctioned in the present through faith.²⁰ As far as the third meaning of “crisis” which Koselleck is interested to acknowledge is concerned, i.e. the medical meaning (pp. 360-361, see also 1988, pp. 103-104), it is worth pointing out that even though Koselleck’s first citation, i.e. Hippocrates, is usually dated as earlier than Thucydides, Koselleck leaves it for the end of this part,²¹ turning his readers to the extensive treatment of this topic by another earlier German dictionary on the history of concepts not supervised by Koselleck and his fellows,²² and he considers this meaning to be totally separated from the other two meanings during this time,²³ prior to his acknowledgment that it is this meaning which actually became prevalent since Latin literature.²⁴ Furthermore, Koselleck acknowledges as a crucial feature of the medical meaning of “crisis” the introduction of the possibility of relapse (to the disease) in case of an imperfect diagnose (pp. 360-361). This feature of circular regression was already used by Löwith (1949, pp. 4-9) in order to highlight the difference of Antiquity from Judeo-Christianity and seems to be underemphasized by Koselleck since it would probably weaken the analogy of the first meaning with Schmitt’s decisionist understanding of politics, which would also be weakened through the recognition of the possibility of an imperfect diagnose.

As far as the early Latin literature is concerned, aside from the limited specific citations on the prevalence of the medical meaning,²⁵ Koselleck quite interestingly states at the end of the

¹⁹ “The Greek usage of κρίνω and κρίσις generally, even if not originally, referred to jurisprudence and the judicial system”. (Koselleck, 1988, p. 103).

²⁰ Löwith’s impact at this point cannot be understated.

²¹ Judging from this chronological primacy of the medical meaning of crisis, as well as from the well-registered importance of medical innovation in ancient Greece (commonly associated with the writings comprising the *Corpus Hippocraticum*) as a major exemplar for subsequent classic intellectual life in Athens, perhaps we are allowed to suggest that it is this meaning which should actually be awarded a primary role in a retrospective history of a conceptualized “crisis”. Analogous arguments on the importance of 18th and 19th century medical innovation for a more comprehensive understanding of a wide set of spheres of modern human activity can be found in Michel Foucault’s work. (Gros, 2007, pp. 23-43, 52-63). For a more comprehensive overview of the importance of medicine in western history see Porter (1997).

²² In fact, Koselleck himself was one of the collaborative authors of this dictionary entry to which he turns his readers (Koselleck, Tsouyopoulos & Schönplflug, 1976). However, Koselleck’s precise citations are made twice (pp. 360-361) to Tsouyopoulos’ part, cited as “Krise, II” and devoted to the medical meaning of crisis, and once (p. 361) to Schönplflug’s part as “Krise, III”, marginally remembered “for the transmission of the concept of crisis into the psychological and anthropological spheres since the beginning of the nineteenth century”.

²³ To be precise, Koselleck insists that the three ancient meanings were “clearly demarcated” within their particular “spheres” and that they were “discipline-bound” and “specific” (pp. 358, 361). However, as the apparent resemblance of the legal-political meaning of “crisis” with the earlier Homeric warfare meaning suggests, as well as the earlier use of the medical meaning vis-à-vis the legal-political meaning and the rest of the evidence we provide at this part of our paper, the different meanings of «κρίσις» were not that much demarcated or bound as Koselleck maintained. In fact, adjusting transformations of the various meanings and communication among the latter seem to be the rule in this case, in which the primacy of the “legal-political” meaning should be definitely revised.

²⁴ The prevalence of the medical meaning is clearly stated in Koselleck (1988, pp. 103-104).

²⁵ One finds only a single citation of Augustine (1988, p. 104).

relevant part of his Ph.D.'s footnote - and only there (1988, p. 104) - that already from Greek and the early centuries of Latin literature "criticus" possessed the meanings of the "grammaticus" and of the "art critic". The author does not return to this point, nor is there a discernible association with the three ancient meanings of «κρίσις»,²⁶ whereas Koselleck also subtly notes the establishment of "judicium" as the Latin translation of the [Last] Judgment in John's *Apocalypse* (2006, p. 359).

In all cases, Koselleck's general conclusion from his examination of "crisis" in Antiquity is characteristically Schmittian, since the author maintains that all three meanings refer to decisions of life and death with a "double meaning" which combines both the description of a (rather objective) condition on the basis of diagnostic criteria and the (rather subjective) conception of a healthy condition urging to action for its attainment (p. 361).

Koselleck's treatment of the subsequent centuries in the history of the concept of crisis takes place on the basis of the three aforementioned meanings. In this context, after a short reference to the persistence of occasional uses of the Latin "crisis" and "judicium" in the medical meaning in titles of 17th century works (p. 361, see also 1988, p. 104), Koselleck focuses on the adoption of "crisis" in the Western-European national languages, using particular authors and the registrations of "crisis" in a wide range of dictionaries and encyclopedias of the time as his basic primary sources (pp. 361-367). In the succession of the cases under examination, Koselleck identifies a gradual move of the medical meaning towards political uses, concerning the "body politic" or its constituent parts (England) (p. 362) – a move he did not see in the Greek instance – , as well as the use of "crisis" under an economic meaning (France) (pp. 362-363). In this chronological period, which serves in Koselleck's mind as the Enlightenment's direct threshold, Koselleck maintains that the new uses of "crisis" are mostly combinations of the prevalent medical meaning and, in part, of the theological meaning, and further adds that they begin to bear a historical dimension in their referents (p. 363). In addition, the relevant remarks on "critique" in Koselleck's doctoral footnote seem to be again quite revealing in terms of their author's intentions, since Koselleck initially cites rather in the affirmative (as a corroboration of his view of "critique" as having strayed away from "crisis") the judgmental estimation of 18th century authors on the appearance of what they perceived as recent confusing shifts on the meanings of "critique" in their times (1988, p. 104), right before referring himself in the subsequent pages of his main text to the earlier philological and artistic uses of "critique" by the humanists as well as its expansion to biblical critique already from the 17th century and to the secular authors of the time, examined in the following chapters of his book (pp. 105ff).

Research on the period that roughly covers mid-18th to mid-19th century, to which the author had referred in other texts using the term *Sattelzeit* (*Time-Saddle*) and which in part overlaps with Koselleck's chronological emphasis of his Ph.D., is quite important for Koselleck, since it is considered to be a privileged point of reference for the formation and the establishment of present-day concepts, which were called by Koselleck at that time "Grundbegriffe" ("major concepts").²⁷ Koselleck's relevant analyses of the period in his

²⁶ Aside from Koselleck's relevant acceptance, perhaps, (1988, p. 103) that Plato's adjective «κριτικός» referred to the art of judging or decision-making (probably seen as fitting to the legal-political meaning), which is finally acknowledged to include "more generally" the intellectual "weighing of pro and con" and "the 'critical' activity of judgment".

²⁷ The classic invocations of the *Sattelzeit* by Koselleck are found in his 1967 editorial address (actually written in 1963) and his "Introduction" ("Einleitung") to the first volume of the *GG* in 1972, whereas Koselleck

article initially note a first set of authors (pp. 368-370), which quite interestingly includes only German citations (ranging from Friedrich II [1740] to Clausewitz [1819/1823]) and further advances the pro-Schmitt expansion of the meanings of “crisis” to external politics and subsequently to its degeneration in internal politics.²⁸ Right afterwards (pp. 370-381), the author’s attention is turned to the disapproved use of “crisis” by the Enlighteners, who are presented as recovering the theological connotations of “crisis” and constructing a partisan-political philosophy of history out of it. Koselleck maintains that this meaning fully occurs for the first time in the writings of a German Aufklärer, i.e. Friedrich Schiller [1783/1784] (p. 371), adding in a footnote an earlier use by Justus Möser [1778] (p. 371), before he starts making references to earlier similar uses by “Western precursors” (pp. 372-377), such as Rousseau [1762] and Diderot [1771/1778] - leaving an even earlier use of “crisis” by Montesquieu [1721] for an extensive footnote (pp. 372-374), and Paine [1776/1791], who is accompanied with a reference to earlier English journalists that remain anonymous (pp. 374-375). Koselleck later returns to the German Enlightenment (pp. 377-381), whereas Burke and the German conservatives who challenge the Enlightenment are presented as being forced to succumb to the use of “crisis” brought forward by the latter (pp. 375-376, 379-381),²⁹ proving thus Koselleck’s illustration of crisis as the “structural signature of modernity” (pp. 372, 374). Koselleck’s examination of the *Sattelzeit* ends up with an extensive research in 19th century, this time explicitly restricted in the German-speaking lands (pp. 381-397). At this point, Koselleck distinguishes in turn: i) an everyday use of “crisis” across the different sides of the political spectrum of the time, which affirms the polysemy the concept obtained during the 18th century (pp. 381-384), ii) the persistence of “crisis” in theories of history, such as the Neo-Hegelian philosophies of history (pp. 384-389), iii) the emergence of economic meanings for “crisis” (pp. 389-393), and finally, iv) the voluntarily ambivalent combination of the last two meanings of “crisis” in the writings of Engels and Marx (pp. 393-397). Judging from our analysis of Koselleck’s previous chapters, it is not hard to tell that this four-part division latently suggests that the authors who distanced themselves from the 19th century everyday

later maintained that the term was not quite precise and was actually used as a catch-word in order to draw public attention to the dictionary. In all cases, GG’s intended emphasis, at least in the early volumes of the dictionary, was supposed to rest solely on the *Sattelzeit* period and the emergence of “Grundbegriffe” in use by the whole set of the differentiating social groups of the time, although Koselleck himself stepped aside this rule of his own even in this article through the substantial dependence of his overall argument from the demarcation of the three ancient meanings (Tribe, 1985, p. xiv, Olsen, 2012, pp. 169-178). Following criticism, Koselleck later revised his views on the *Sattelzeit*, accepting not only more flexible limits for the period, but equally important shifts in the histories of concepts across other periods of time as well (Palonen, 1997, pp. 39-40, 43-46 and 2006, pp. 164-169). For suggestions that Koselleck inspired the term through similar emphases in the work of other scholars, such as Schmitt, Brunner, and the sociologist Hans Freyer see den Boer (1998, p. 14), Olsen (p. 178).

²⁸ It should be noted that, even though this “privileging” of German (vis-à-vis French and British) citations at this point, as well as in the next two parts of his 18th century analysis can be simply attributed to the GG’s instructions for a focus on the German-speaking world and to Koselleck’s wider access to German sources, the positioning of German authors in cases of transnational comparisons seems to suggest a questionable tendency to associate German authors with intellectual achievements either lacking (as in this case) or usually primarily associated with France and Britain (the Enlightenment’s case). In these respects, we might be able to detect a function of “rewriting the nation’s role in the course of World’s History” in Koselleck’s narrative, possibly suggesting a distant association of Koselleck’s work with that of the 19th century Berlin “state intellectuals” earlier discussed.

²⁹ In particular, it is worth pointing out that, in an almost straightforward inversion of the well-known exchange of replies in the British debate of the years 1790-1791 on the French Revolution, right after presenting Paine’s reply to Burke, Koselleck states: “Burke himself used the same term [‘crisis’] to describe analytically the phenomena which Paine had conjured up”. (p. 375).

polysemic usage of “crisis” are as problematic for Koselleck as the 18th century Enlighteners, who were supposed to have broken the older combination of objective “crisis” and subjective “critique”.

Koselleck’s reference to the 20th century, to which the author turns in the last pages of his article (pp. 397-400), suggests a limited interest for the period. Koselleck initially acknowledges a wide expansion of meanings for “crisis” with “few corresponding gains in either clarity or precision” (p. 397). This state of affairs is also presented as being supported by the rejection of “crisis” in academics, for which Koselleck’s sole citation is the economist Joseph A. Schumpeter (p. 397). Subsequently (pp. 397-399), Koselleck accepts as already present from the first decades of the 20th century a proliferation of cultural critics (citations mainly consist in conservative authors, such as Valéry, Huizinga, Husserl and Ortega y Gasset) focusing on “crisis”. However, the author claims that these voices are simply a continuation of 19th century philosophies of history, whereas this part of Koselleck’s work ends up with the rather paradoxical claim that “crisis” has become a key-concept in human and social sciences (pp. 399-400), raising perhaps doubts upon his own introductory reference in this sub-chapter on Schumpeter.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of Koselleck’s views allows us to proceed to a few conclusions concerning not only his particular work on crisis, but a few dominant practices within the history of concepts as well, since the latter is still strongly influenced by Koselleck’s workings.³⁰

On a methodological level, Koselleck’s work on crisis, as well as his work in general, is characterized by important innovations, such as the multiplicity of used methods (e.g. the parallel study of canonized philosophers, intellectuals and authors of diverse fields, the study of the established meanings of concepts as registered in dictionaries, as well as the active use of findings derived from social history) and the turn towards new research objects (the thematization of concepts as an analytical starting point instead of an analysis thematizing e.g. particular authors).³¹ However, it seems that following the steps of the German traditions out of which Koselleck was intellectually raised made the author susceptible to what Foucault has called “historico-transcendentalism” (1998, 1984b),³² which, for our present purposes, has to do with the projection of a particular feature or state of affairs as if it characterized the whole of the subject-matter under examination.³³ This is obvious, for example, in Koselleck’s downplaying of the 20th century vis-à-vis the *Sattelzeit* or the rather forced distinctions of the three ancient meanings of “crisis” in order to make “crisis” fit Schmitt’s scheme, as well as

³⁰ Overviews of the impact of Koselleck’s and GG’s history of concepts within Germany and abroad can be found in Olsen (2012, pp. 194-196) and Hampsher-Monk, Tilmans, & van Vree (1998).

³¹ In spite of subsequent reworkings and corrections, Koselleck’s classical theoretical defense of these issues is still Koselleck (1985).

³² Furthermore, Foucault’s (1984a) reading of Nietzsche’s ironic uses of “Ursprung” [“origin”] seems to suggest a similar point of reference.

³³ Seen from this point of view, Quentin Skinner’s (1969, pp. 7-43) less refined, but still quite precise, classical critiques of “mythologies” and other “crucial problems” in the study of philosophical authors basically meet the same point.

the presentation of the Enlighteners as a divergence from one of Schmitt's probable sources of historical inspiration, i.e. the absolutist state.³⁴

On a more disciplinary level, we may say that the history of concepts is a new and quite challenging suggestion to combine established disciplines, such as philosophy and history, and from a later point in time linguistics, which is also the case with other relevant academic fields of study, such as the history of political thought and intellectual history. Nonetheless, we may claim again that the emphases of Koselleck and other influential authors in these fields seem to set aside the contributions of other disciplines which attempted similar associations earlier on or even synchronically, such as the social sciences, archaeology and genealogy, which are still used rather marginally in relevant studies.

Finally, the consequences of this state of affairs seem to bear an impact in the consideration of the socio-political weight of this sort of research as well, as one can tell from Koselleck's relatively subtle concern to present "critique" as a hypocrisy depending on the "crisis"/"judgment" of the salutary state, which should be the one to "decide" itself for its cure. Foucault again (1996, particularly pp. 26-32), in his 1978 investigation on "critique" calls us to question such taken-for-granted assumptions as those found in Koselleck's work, since the former identifies the discourse on "critique" as getting more common already from the 16th century, i.e. long before the absolutist state and its crisis. Foucault identifies "critique" not as a hypocritical negation (as Koselleck's dissertation would suggest), but as an experimental inflation of "government" and "governmentality" – two more sober and palpable terms when compared to Koselleck's specific uses of "state" and "crisis" – having as its ultimate end the voluntary search of possibilities requiring less government (1996, pp. 27-29).³⁵ Following this thread, we may claim that "critique" does not exactly oppose "government" or "crisis" in their various "subjective" and "objective" connotations, but actually uses them positively in order to try to produce new multiple forms of conduct, possibly lacking faults and "supposed necessities" of the past as a consequence of their diverging abundance. Consequently, it might be better if "critique" and "crisis", with which Koselleck once started his Ph.D., are no longer treated in research and politics as a set of a dependent and an independent variable, but rather in a more combinatory fashion. Perhaps, this way of thinking is also important for the overcoming of the crisis of our days.

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³⁴ As far as the ultimate dependence of the Enlighteners to the absolutist state is concerned, Koselleck (1988, p. 15) characteristically states: "The following period [the 18th century], though marked by the same State form, bore another name: the 'Enlightenment'. It was from Absolutism that the Enlightenment evolved – initially as its inner consequence, later as its dialectical counterpart and protagonist, destined to lead the Absolutist State to its demise."

³⁵ For Foucault's wider understanding of "government" and "governmentality" and their relations with the state see Foucault (2007, particularly pp. 126-208).

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