



SAMI SYRJÄMÄKI

Sins of a Historian

Perspectives on the problem
of anachronism



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Anachronism is one of the central themes of the discipline of history. This study discusses the problem anachronism from various perspectives. The main aim of the work is to develop ways of identifying anachronisms.

In the first part I discuss Quentin Skinner's methodological writings' relevance to the problem of anachronism. Skinner's methodological ideas offer both important views and a ground for further research on the topic. In this work I highlight some, partly unnoticed, original insights of Skinner and partly develop his ideas further by pointing out problems and offering a solution to them. The most important section is a re-reading of Skinner's article (1969) "Meaning and Understanding In the History of Ideas" in which Skinner presents a typology of anachronisms which is much richer than has so far been noticed. I demarcate thirteen types of anachronisms instead of the four that commentators usually notice and add four more from Skinner's other works. I also highlight the fact that Skinner already in this article maintains that it is impossible to get totally rid of one's contemporary perspective when studying the past. I conclude that even though we are tied to the contemporary view it does not follow that it is impossible to avoid all kinds of anachronism.

In the second part this is done by marking potential points of discontinuity in history of concepts. For this I develop a framework which I call conceptual prism. Its backbone is Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance of concepts and I use W. B. Gallie's and Quentin Skinner's ideas to fill in the details. Conceptual prism offers a way to analyse concepts both on semantic and pragmatic levels which enables the historian to notice conceptual changes on different levels. The advantages of the conceptual prism are demonstrated by a case study on the concept of liberty. In general I regard that such questions —sometimes addressed by historians and philosophers— as how much changes a concept can go through and still remain the same concept and how this can be determined are not informative. The main point is to describe similarities and differences, and concluding whether the concept remains the same or not, does not add any information.

However, I consider that the main tool for a historian who wishes to avoid anachronisms is his or her imagination and that there is no universal method to avoid anachronisms. Every model has to be reconsidered and challenged.

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The most usual ideological abuse of history is based on anachronism rather than lies.

– Eric Hobsbawm, “Outside and Inside History” (1997)

1. INTRODUCTION¹

1.1. AIMS

This work is written both to historians who share an interest in theoretical and philosophical issues of their discipline and to philosophers who are interested in history of their discipline or some other kind of history. The topic of this thesis, anachronism, is a central topic in the philosophy or theory of history. Some would say that it is the question of historical studies since an anachronistic interpretation is considered to be unhistorical. Anachronism is, indeed, mainly regarded as a problem, a sign of failure in historical studies; but in some views anachronisms are not, at least not necessarily, bad things. I will not take a stance on this matter, except to suggest that anachronisms may be highly problematic, and that there is more in question than pure, pedantic historical sanitation. The main aim of this work is to contribute to the theoretical understanding and practices of people interested in understanding and doing the history of philosophy, conceptual history and intellectual history in general. My thesis is probably most useful to a scholar who wishes to find ways of avoiding anachronisms. In this thesis, I suggest that even though it is obvious that we are bound to our present there are still ways to avoid many kinds of anachronisms. It is a matter of recognising the cases in which we pose the past in a form that would have been alien to the period we are describing. To become better at this entails improving one’s awareness of potential points of historical discontinuities. This is one way of learning to avoid anachronism and it is the way that I develop in this thesis. The dissertation also includes a short chapter on the question of how we are bound to the present, and the implications of this for the historian’s efforts at trying to avoid anachronism. This is an interesting and important question and deserves a longer, separate study. In what follows below I argue that while it may be impossible to know for certain if an interpretation is free of anachronism, it does not follow that it could not be, in some plausible sense of the term, unanachronistic. At the least, it is possible to formulate short descriptive sentences about the past which past actors could easily accept as correct descriptions of their eras and thoughts. It does not follow from this that those

¹ An earlier version of the chapter “A Case Study: Danto on Nietzsche” was published in *Rivista di Estetica* (1/2009) under title “Philosophical Exercise. Arthur Danto on Nietzsche”. It is republished here with kind permission of Roseberg & Sellier. Parts of the chapter Quentin Skinner’s Philosophy of Meaning and Basic Concepts are included in my article “Mark Bevir on Skinner and the ‘Myth of Coherence’” in *Intellectual History Review* 21(1) 2011: 15-26. They are published here with kind permission of Routledge.

descriptions would be objective in the sense that they were not formulated from the perspective of someone. But to admit this does not mean that they are anachronistic. “Unanachronistic” and “objective”, I argue, are two different categories.

In what follows, I do not offer a grand systematic theory of anachronisms. Instead I discuss the problem of anachronism from different perspectives. I suggest that there are heuristic tools that can help historians avoid anachronisms, although there is no strict method that would guarantee this result. I am highly suspicious of the notion that there is a single correct method for historians; Rather, the best way to employ any suggested method is to understand it only as an analytical heuristic, a starting point and source of ideas and suggestions. In the end the most important tools for a historian are her/his imagination and the ability to make fine distinctions in order to become better aware of potential points of historical discontinuities.

When assembling heuristic tools for historians I will rely primarily on Quentin Skinner. Ludwig Wittgenstein and W.B. Gallie also will have a strong presence, especially in the final part of my work. In this work I lean strongly on so called ordinary language philosophy. This is, of course, not the only possible alternative. Hans-Georg Gadamer and hermeneutical philosophy in general could provide a fruitful point of departure.² One might also try to combine these alternatives, but the philosophical gap between them might be too wide.³ In the first half, I will draw solely from Skinner and explain how his ideas can help us trace anachronisms or improve our understanding of them. I suggest that Skinner’s methodological ideas offer some important clarifications for our understanding of anachronisms at the theoretical level, as well as some more practical advice on how to avoid anachronisms. Perhaps Skinner’s main theoretical insight is that he notices that anachronism is unavoidable, and even necessary, to any understanding of the past when approached from a modern perspective. But this does not create a total barrier between us and the past: we do enjoy an ability to mark many differences between the past and the present. I have denominated this insight in terms of anachronism as “sin,” and anachronism as “original sin”. These demarcations are related to the notions mentioned above that some forms of anachronisms may be avoidable. To some extent, we always speak from our present point of view, which means that our view of the past is anachronistic. These distinctions remind us that sins are something that we are able to avoid by our choices, but that original sin is our unavoidable existential condition. Another point that can be made by using Skinner may be obvious, but is

² For example, Simo Knuuttila has taken this road. See e.g. Knuuttila 2006.

³ I thus agree with Martin J. Burke's hesitation on the possibility to build a bridge between these two perspectives. See Burke, M. J. 2010, 151. Simo Knuuttila also points to possible difficulties of combining different perspectives when discussing Jaakko Hintikka's approach to history of philosophy and hermeneutic philosophy: "the difference is not merely a matter degree—it is associated with differing views of language as a whole and of the conditions of understanding." Knuuttila 2006, 98.

still often missed. This is that historians' own interests determine the kind of meaning that is recovered. Accordingly, different types of meaning are liable to different kinds of anachronisms. For example, if one's concern is not to recover actors' intentions it is not be anachronistic to forget about them, as long as it is clear that what is being described are not the intentions of past agents. Thus it becomes very important to recognize different types of anachronism and the relevant context for each type. The first part of this work interprets other methodological views of Skinner and seeks to relate them to the issue of anachronism. However, it should be emphasised that when I am describing, using and developing Skinner's thought, I am not considering such matters as how appropriate, or accurate, his interpretations of the work of such philosophers as J.L. Austin and others might be.

The second part of this thesis concentrates on conceptual history. I devote a relatively large space to conceptual history because an awareness of the historical nature of concepts is necessary to any kind of intellectual history if one wishes to avoid anachronistic interpretations. At the same time it has to be kept in mind that conceptual history is itself always on the verge to become anachronistic. I offer a complimentary approach to conceptual history. This approach could help a (conceptual) historian avoid certain kinds of anachronisms. Concepts or their meanings can be analysed into smaller units in an infinite number of ways. The popular idea that a concept's meaning is simply its definition (more or less according to a dictionary) is not sufficiently sensitive to important historical changes in a concept's meaning which may take place, e.g. on a level of the concept's application to the world, its normative load, or how different features of a definition are emphasized. In the second section of this work I rely less on Skinner and more on Wittgenstein and W. B. Gallie. Here I attempt to develop a framework, or point of view, that can be used to track discontinuities (and continuities) in the different levels of meanings of concepts. I also demonstrate the power of these approaches, by applying them in two case studies. In regard to the three major thinkers mentioned, my contribution to Skinner studies is more important than my contribution to Wittgenstein and Gallie studies. In the case of Skinner, I take a strong stance on certain debates over his work. However, contribution to discussions of Gallie's work is more modest. In the case of Wittgenstein, I simply allude to some of his work without entering into any deeper discussion. The more thorough analyses of Skinner and Gallie reflect the fact that their work has already been discussed, and to some extent also applied, in terms of the general subject of this work. Discussions about them are part of the general, everyday debates among intellectual and conceptual historians. Within those arenas, however, Wittgenstein is more seldomly discussed.

In brief, although I am fully conscious that it is impossible to avoid anachronisms totally, I do try to discover what can be done to avoid anachronistic interpretations of the past, and also offer heuristic tools that can help to achieve this end.

1.2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE WORK

In the first chapter I will give reasons why the issue of anachronism is a significant question (not only to historical purists) and lay out the general framework of debates on this matter. In so doing I first refer to Eric Hobsbawm's ideas, which I find crucial. I also rely on Hans-Johan Glock's *What is Analytic Philosophy?* (2008) in which he considers some basic demarcations regarding anachronism. Although he does so in the context of analytic philosophy, I believe that his discussion also has a more general relevance in identifying certain basic issues at hand.

Concerning my first aim, demonstrating that the question of anachronism is relevant beyond historicist purism, I argue, following Hobsbawm, that anachronistic interpretations can and have been used consciously and unconsciously towards political ends, i.e. they are not merely academic errors in the writing of history. While Hobsbawm demonstrates how, for example, nationalistic movements have been eager to do this, it could also be argued that political uses of anachronism have been adopted within politics of science e.g. when one presents his own discipline in glorious historical light in order to gain more prestige. From this it follows that recognising and criticising anachronistic uses of the past is of relevance beyond narrow academic discussions.

In the following section, on discussions of the philosophical context of questions concerning history and anachronisms--a debate which is often addressed in terms of historicism versus anti-historicism or presentism, or antiquarianism versus anachronism--I aim to present certain basic issues and the various positions that have been taken within that debate.

This section is followed by a short survey on recent work on anachronism, to which Glock's work discussed in the previous section can also be included). Here I concentrate on very recent contributions. I refer to older ones in the main text when I have found them to be useful. I am also selective concerning recent literature, and have chosen only those that relate my project. Thus, for example, I accept David L. Hull's idea that historical knowledge can only be partly justified, a notion that expresses the core of the idea of anachronism as original sin. Conal Condren's typology of different types of anachronisms could be also seen as complementary to points raised in Skinner's article "Meaning and Understanding in the History of

Ideas”. Moreover, I find Steffen Ducheyne’s suggestions about making more precise or detailed distinctions when comparing concepts, and tabulating these features in order to make the similarities and dissimilarities visible, to be very promising. The framework which I suggest in the latter part of the work could, perhaps, be seen as an attempt to carry Ducheyne’s ideas forward.

Next, before taking a close look at what Quentin Skinner says explicitly about anachronisms in his article “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas” (1969)--still one of the basic point of departures whenever anachronisms are discussed--I present a sort of “Skinner dictionary.” This covers a selection of methodological and philosophical issues that he has written about which I consider to have relevance to the main topic. This section includes a number of subsections whose titles remind the reader that to study anachronism as an interpretative problem means involving oneself in a set of philosophical issues or questions. Among these are: what is rationality; what is a concept and what is its relation to the world; what is meaning, etc. In this section, I refer mainly to the latest revised versions of Skinner’s articles. Since my aim is to develop an interpretation of his work which is useful in understanding and avoiding anachronism, I only occasionally spend time with such historical questions as what are the ways, and to what extent, Skinner may have changed his mind on these and related matters over the years.⁴ Some of the themes that I discuss help to clarify the concept of anachronism on the theoretical level; some are useful in avoiding certain kinds of anachronisms; and some of the themes serve to legitimate certain kinds of historical studies, e.g. conceptual history. After the more general section on Skinner’s philosophical views, I provide a close reading of “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”.⁵ As one of the most cited texts in discussions regarding anachronisms, it deserves special attention. I find it strange, that some of the important distinctions and ideas it presents have gone without notice in the forty years since its publication. Thus it deserves a careful re-reading.⁶ The text, which Skinner himself has described as a “terrorist attack”⁷ is composed in a deliberately polemical style and offers some wonderful slogans for readers to seize

⁴ Two interesting attempts to track changes in Skinner’s revised versions of his earlier articles in *Vision of Politics vol. 1* have been recently written by Robert Lamb. See Lamb 2009a and 2009b. Although I do not totally agree with Lamb, these are indeed valuable articles and are so far the most convincing pieces on the issue.

⁵ In this chapter, I am reading Skinner’s article in its original form, not the revised version published in *Visions of Politics* (2002). This is the piece that still continues to be in the centre of discussions when scholars discuss Skinner’s views on anachronisms. Skinner has rather recently stated that he still agrees with the views he stated in “Meaning and Understanding” concerning the idea of projecting our own questions onto past times (Skinner 2001, 49–50) and also it is the original version, and not the revised one, that is standardly referred to.

⁶ I do not pay equal attention to all parts of the article, but I read certain parts of it more carefully than has been done before.

⁷ Skinner 2002a, 39.

upon. Remarks like “We must learn to do our own thinking ourselves”⁸ or “[N]o agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done”⁹ have been repeated time after time in numerous commentaries. Among philosophers, the most widely read article that includes them appears to be Richard Rorty’s “The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres.”¹⁰ Here Rorty contrasts “Skinner’s constraint” with the so called methodology of rational reconstruction. Unfortunately, philosophers have a tendency not to go back to Skinner’s original piece, and some have made rather dubious conclusions about Skinner’s conception of anachronisms by relying only on Rorty. These formulations have taken on a life of their own and, when taken out of context, have probably caused misconceptions rather than familiarised researchers with the original text. In my analysis of Skinner’s article, I attempt to go beyond these slogans and to focus carefully on what was said about anachronistic interpretations. I try to provide a reading of the original text that will be helpful in regard to the question what does Skinner have to say about anachronism, one which, hopefully, may help historians in their quest. I present a kind of reconstruction, perhaps a ‘rational reconstruction’, of Skinner’s typology of anachronisms. This typology could be used as a checklist, or as thought-provoking material to ponder, when discussing anachronism.

The second part of this chapter handles the type of anachronism that I denominate as “original sin”. By this term I refer to the fact, which Skinner emphasizes, that it is not possible to escape one’s modern perspective totally, and that in order to understand any past text, one must approach it from the point of view of a “preconvinced paradigm”. This is a point that has gone almost completely unnoticed in the scholarly literature, partly because Skinner does not develop this idea much further. Despite this, I will try to answer the question that follows from the fact that we are inescapably tied to the present: in what respect are our interpretations of the past always anachronistic? My answer is again a (re)construction from Skinner’s text.

Following the chapter on Skinner, I present a case study in which I try to employ some of his ideas. The aim is to demonstrate the usefulness of the methodological views described in the previous discussion. The case study is examined from the point of view of the Skinnerian typology of types of anachronisms, and the subject is chosen to provide illumination on the general theme of this work. The case study includes three different, interrelated issues. The first is an analysis of Arthur Danto’s interpretation of Nietzsche in his *Nietzsche as Philosopher*.¹¹ Please note that my aim

⁸ Skinner 1969, 66.

⁹ Skinner 1969, 48.

¹⁰ Rorty 1984.

¹¹ Danto 1980.

is not to give an historical interpretation of Nietzsche, but of Danto. The second issue is Victorino Tejera's interpretation of Danto and his historicist criticism of Danto. I shall evaluate Tejera's argument in the light of his own interpretative demands. When comparing my interpretation of Danto to that of Tejera's, I conclude that the latter's historicist programme is at odds with his criticism of Danto since it misses the historical context of Danto's work. This serves to remind us that avoiding anachronistic interpretations is a demanding job, and that a self-proclaimed anachronism-avoiding historicist can be constantly on the verge of slipping onto the other side. The third section of the case study is a preliminary piece of conceptual history. It includes a short history of the concept of 'rational reconstruction,' and how it shifted from the context of the philosophy of science into discussions concerning the historiography of philosophy. When writing this history I refer to the concepts of 'rational' and 'historical reconstructions' as methods of historiography which I also mention briefly in the next section. I suggest that the way Richard Rorty and a few others use the concept of rational reconstruction as a method of historical interpretation causes confusion rather than helps us understand the nature of historiography. I end this section by considering how the Skinnerian typology of anachronisms relates to Tejera's and my interpretation of Danto. Thus I hope to demonstrate that the methodology used can help to avoid, or at least criticize, anachronistic interpretations. This can offer valuable insights into history and provide critical perspectives for subsequent debates.

After the case study I move into the field of conceptual history. The point of the second part of this work is to build up a model that is of practical use when trying to track down historical discontinuities in conceptual history, and thus avoid anachronisms. My argument is that in order to avoid anachronisms in conceptual history, the more versatile the analysis of the meanings of concept studied is, the more likely it is to be able to avoid anachronisms. My analytic heuristic is an effort to add more dimensions to conceptual analysis within conceptual history. It should be noted that my aim is not to make ontological claims about concepts, nor is it to offer a general definition of the concept of 'concept'. I believe that the concept of concept is itself an essentially contested concept and we can offer more or less fruitful treatments of the matter. In this work I suggest that a framework, which I call a conceptual prism, offers a new way of looking at concepts in history, and that this point of view can be useful. This framework is a combination of three different theories, which I am adapting and applying rather freely. I draw insights from W. B. Gallie's construal of essentially contested concepts, Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance, and Quentin Skinner's analysis of three different levels of conceptual disagreements. At certain points, I take a positive position with regard to the question of whether these theses hold true as general theses, but at base I argue that regardless of the general truth value of the essentially contested concepts or the family

resemblance theses, they do offer an analytic insight into the structure of concepts. This insight is especially fruitful when analysing conceptual continuities and discontinuities. Despite my somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the general truth value of the three theses that I discuss, I regard the truth value of two contesting alternatives--so-called restrictivism and the concept/conception distinction--have relevance to my thesis since they have problematic implications on conceptual history. Thus I shall discuss them and give reasons why the conceptual historian should discard them.

In the following chapters all three theses (Gallie's, Wittgenstein's and Skinner's) are described, their assumed rationality or justification is explicated, and some recent applications are presented, although single applications which would take into account all levels in Skinner's scheme do not seem to exist. In this section I discuss Skinner in less detail than Gallie and Wittgenstein, since the former's relevant views have already been discussed in the first part of this work. In my discussion of Gallie, I agree with him that there are essentially contested concepts. I argue against interpretations of Gallie's thesis which claim that a contested concept is contested all the time without moments of decontestation, or that maintain that concepts are contested due to their abstract nature, regardless of alterations within historical situations. Yet in the final analysis, when one judges the usefulness of Gallie's thesis for the historical analysis of concepts, the question of whether there are or are not such concepts which are being contested all the time does not matter. It is the structural analysis of why a concept is, or at least can be, contested that is the relevant feature of his thesis.

For the reasons explained above, I spend some time discussing critically so-called restrictivism and the 'concept/conception' distinction which are rival theories to Gallie's. Both of these theories (I regard the latter as a bastard child of the former) are quite influential among philosophers, and some conceptual historians pay heed to them as well. I argue that these approaches go in the wrong direction when they demand that rational discussion about a given concept, e.g. "liberty", presupposes a common conceptual core. The mistake is made worse if one starts supposing that historical lines of discussion on for example the concept of liberty have to be represented in this way. Alternatively, if taken seriously, restrictivism or the concept/conception distinction would force the historian to dwell on so high a degree of abstraction that losing touch with historical reality and agents would become not only a risk but also a necessity. I also deal with Terence Ball's critique of Gallie, since Ball is a professed practitioner of conceptual history; I conclude that his critique is also a misstatement based on false assumptions about communication and rationality. I argue that Ball's approach to the relations of concepts, communication and rationality should be disregarded.

After explicating the assumptions behind each theoretical component of a conceptual prism, in the following chapter I perform a synthesis and produce a tool: a multidimensional meaning structure. I then try to demonstrate its applicability with a case study. Since the case study's main aim is to demonstrate the utility of the conceptual prism, the aim of producing new historical information is only a secondary aim, I have not paid great attention to the historical sources. I view three articulations of the concept of liberty through the conceptual prism, namely Thomas Hobbes's, Thomas Hill Green's and Quentin Skinner's articulations of different concepts of liberty. A thorough historical study would need more sources and fuller coverage, but here I rely, in all the cases, very much on the historical studies of Quentin Skinner. So, the case study may be regarded as more of a study of Skinner's interpretations of the first two than a detailed historical account of them. I suggest that the analysis demonstrates that these three concepts of liberty do not share a single shared feature, which would deserve to be titled 'common core', unless one moves to a very abstract level, e.g. maintaining only that each articulation is also a political act. This, however, could hardly be called a core, since it would not demarcate the concept of liberty from any other politically used concept (when the political speech act dimensions of each concept are analysed in more detail, they do not even share a common core, though the informative value of this feature grows significantly). I also argue that this lack of a common core does not stop us seeing how these three different concepts of liberty are part of a continuum, a tradition, and how the comments by Green on Hobbes, and by Skinner on both Green and Hobbes are nevertheless rational. It is also obvious that there is some kind of understanding of each other, though of course, Hobbes did not know what the future would be like and was not acquainted to Skinner's or Green's work. Likewise it would not make sense to say that Green knew Skinner. However, because Skinner's concept of republican liberty has its historical origins in ancient Rome, as well as in the exact historical and political context of Hobbes, there is also an interesting relation between Skinner and Hobbes. One could actually maintain that Hobbes did recognize the republican concept of liberty, though there may well have been changes in it before Skinner discusses it over three hundred years later.

1.3. DISCIPLINARY DEMARCATIONS: INTELLECTUAL HISTORY, CONCEPTUAL HISTORY AND THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

As the terms 'intellectual history', 'history of philosophy' and 'conceptual history' appear quite frequently in my work, perhaps some definitions should be given to make distinctions and relations clear, or at least clearer. By intellectual history I understand in the general sense historical studies covering fields from history of philosophy, religion, science, and politics to history of (Lovejoyan) ideas, conceptual

history, etc. Intellectual history consists not only of a wide scope of interests or objects of study, but also a wide range of approaches and methodologies

I regard conceptual history as a subcategory of intellectual history. I would also maintain that if one wishes to do history of philosophy or any other branch of intellectual history and to avoid anachronisms, a certain amount of sensitivity to conceptual history would be necessary. Conceptual history is also characteristically an interdisciplinary field of study. It both gains from and benefits other fields of study, e.g. intellectual history, sociology, philosophy and political studies. Though the field of conceptual history is also quite heterogeneous, conceptual historians tend to share two common ideas. The first is the recognition that in political discussions concepts are used as tools or as weapons. This is characteristic especially for value-laden concepts such as 'democracy', 'terrorism', 'liberty', etc. These concepts are used in various ways to meet the ends of the political actors who use them. Concepts do not have an existence outside the world, they are part of the world and accordingly the world may be changed by the use of concepts, and concepts may change as the world changes. This is a theoretical insight and leads to explanations of conceptual change and its relation to social changes, and serves to dissolve the sharp distinction between theory and practice. Accordingly, to study conceptual history is to study a form of cultural, political and social change. The second widely shared idea is that concepts acquire their meaning from their uses in their respective historical contexts. This methodological point leads to considerations concerning the question how are we to study concepts in order to understand them? To grasp the meaning of a given concept in its context means to understand not only the literal meaning or definition of it, but also how it can be applied to the surrounding world and what is done by it. All these dimensions of the meaning of a concept are deeply rooted in the respective diachronic and synchronic contexts, and that is why a conceptual historian should be radically prepared to change his or her expectations concerning the meaning of any concept under study.

At this point I shall not say much about the history of philosophy, but will discuss it more extensively in the following chapter. I regard the history of philosophy as a subcategory of intellectual history. By this I do not wish to say that the history of philosophy is, or is not, anything unique, that there is nothing in addition to the subject matter that makes it different from other strands of intellectual history. While conceptual history is a more specified form of historical studies (though still a divergent field), the history of philosophy is not a special form of historical studies in the sense that it cannot be characterised not even by a loose set of methodological

strategies. The history of philosophy may take almost any approach to the subject matter, conceptual history being indeed one them.¹²

¹² A paradigmatic example of how the history of philosophy may take the form of conceptual history is J. Ritter, K. Gründer, G. Gabriel (eds.) *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (12 volumes).

2. TO BE OR NOT TO BE ANACHRONISTIC?

The word anachronism comes from the Greek words *ana* (against) and *chronos* (time). The basic modern meaning is an error in chronology, but as I hopefully will be able to demonstrate, in regard to anachronistic interpretations of history this definition is too imprecise because not all errors in chronology should be called anachronisms. Herman L. Ebeling suggests that ‘anachronism’ “acquired its modern currency” in the sixteenth century in Joseph Justus Scaliger’s work *De Emendatione Temporum*. In that text Scaliger corrected a number of chronological errors that had been made in the study of ancient history and used the word “anachronism” to describe certain errors which included a misplacing of persons or events in time.¹³ In general the historian’s sensitivity to or consciousness of the fact that the past is different from the present, and that it might be impossible to close the gap, is often said to have developed during the Renaissance in parallel with philological innovations.¹⁴

Before going into more detailed questions, a few of words should be said on the concept of anachronism on general level. If we take a few basic dictionary definitions such as:

*An error assigning a thing to an earlier or (less strictly) to a later age than it belongs to: anything out of keeping with chronology.*¹⁵

*An error in chronology; especially misplacing of people, events, objects, or customs*¹⁶

we might stop to wonder if everything that is labelled an anachronism is really anachronistic and not some other kind of sin or error.¹⁷ For example let us take a look at two types in Quentin Skinner’s typology of anachronisms presented in “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas” which I shall call “false reference” and “dismissing intentions”. At face value they do not necessarily seem to have much to

¹³ See Ebeling 1937, 120–121.

¹⁴ See e.g. Daston 2006, Burke 1969 and 2006.

¹⁵ “Anachronism” in *The Concise English Dictionary*.

¹⁶ “Anachronism” in the *New Penguin English Dictionary*.

¹⁷ This question applies even to Quentin Skinner’s typology of anachronistic mythologies as it is presented in “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”. In his review of Skinner’s *Visions of Politics* Pocock refers to “Meaning and Understanding” and mentions two different errors Skinner distinguishes: anachronism and prolepsis. When mentioning “anachronism” he probably had in his mind the form of mythology I have labelled “sheer anachronism”. It at least appears that, in his opinion, the mythologies are not all anachronistic. This seems even clearer when in parenthesis, he defines anachronism as “(the attribution to a past author of concepts that could not have been available to him)” For the reasons given below I am not satisfied with his definition of anachronism and disagree with him if he is asserting that the typology is not about anachronism. See Pocock 2004. Lamb operates with the same kind of definition of anachronism as Pocock: “This approach [avoiding paying attention to the text’s historical context] was considered anachronistic in that the scholar attributed concepts to the author that were not in existence at the time in which the text was written.” Lamb 2004, 435.

do with historical periods or chronological order. After all, Skinner defines “dismissing intentions” as falsely attributing something to a thinker that in principle (historically) could have been true but in effect is not, and basically the same goes for “false reference”. Skinner writes that acceptable description of an agent’s behaviour can never be dependent on the use of “criteria of description” and “classification” which was not “available to the agent himself”. This formulation leaves some space for speculation what Skinner might have meant when writing that, but some thirty years later when explaining the lesson of the typology of “anachronistic mythologies,”¹⁸ he wrote that “no agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done”, and this is much clearer. He tells us that his point in 1969 was “that, in all these cases, the question is phrased in terms unavailable to the writers concerned”.¹⁹ My suggestion is that perhaps he should have been more careful and not written about terms which are *unavailable*. Instead he could have utilized the concept of paradigm, something he makes a great use of in other places in the article.²⁰ But this he did not do, and the concept of paradigm seems to have vanished from his vocabulary his later writings. However the concept of paradigm can offer some help in understanding anachronism, and it would suit the purposes of understanding and explaining the categories in Skinner’s typology, even though there are good reasons why the concept is not longer so popular.²¹

In order to develop a working definition of anachronism which would be in harmony with all the different forms of mythologies that Skinner anatomizes, we might try to see if there is something common in all the forms.²² We would also have to acknowledge the consequences of Skinner’s typology, maintaining that it is about anachronisms which include “false reference” and “dismissing intentions”, and granting that attaching terminology unavailable to the past agent in question is not a

¹⁸ Skinner explicitly describes the mythologies as “anachronistic”. See for example page 57 in Skinner 1969: “A knowledge of the social context of a given text seems at least to offer considerable help in avoiding anachronistic mythologies I have tried to anatomize.”

¹⁹ Skinner 1969, 63–64; 2001, 58.

²⁰ In his article “Hobbes and the Nature of the Royal Society” also published in 1969 Skinner also speaks of a paradigm which derived from the 20th century and is “demonstrably inapplicable” to Royal Society’s 17th-century nature. In a footnote he writes that “Meaning and Understanding” includes a “general account of this concept of paradigms and [...] its application to intellectual history.” Skinner 1969b, 233 and note 98.

²¹ One of the reasons is the problem of explaining the continuing change in sciences. I thank Martin J. Burke for this remark.

²² I consider that there is no single formula of anachronism that could capture all its different dimensions. I settle instead for a working definition, which I find fruitful, though I do not claim that my formulation is a neutral and objective definition of ‘anachronism’. It could also be that the concept of anachronism should be seen as a family resemblance concept and one should therefore not look for a common core within all its uses. This is especially the case if we are to track the whole history of the concept of anachronism. Here I am just trying to see if there is anything common in the types Skinner anatomizes in one specific article.

necessary condition for anachronistic interpretation. I shall lay aside the question if it is a sufficient condition.

A passage in which Skinner explains what he is trying to do in “Meaning and Understanding” is helpful:

“This notion of the priority of paradigms has already been very fruitfully explored in the history of arts, where it has caused an essentially historicist story which traced the development of illusionism to yield place to a story which is content to trace changing intentions and conventions. More recently an analogous exploration has been made with some plausibility in the history of science. Here I shall attempt to apply a similar set of concepts to the history of ideas. My procedure will be to uncover the extent to which the current historical study of ethical, political, religious and other such ideas is contaminated by unconscious application of paradigms the familiarity of which, to the historian, disguises an essential inapplicability to the past. [...] I do wish [...] to anatomize the various ways in which the results may in consequence be classified [...] as mythologies.”²³

So, Skinner’s typology is a classification of mythologies that are the results of the historian’s unconscious application of paradigms which are insensitive to historical intentions and conventions. It is the unquestioned application of modern paradigmatic ‘knowledge’ that causes these mythologies. This paradigmatic ‘knowledge’ does not necessarily wear the gown of “unavailable terms”. In the cases of “dismissing intentions” this means that the historian committing this sin is not making his judgements leaning on the available historical evidence, but instead on some modern idea (belonging to paradigmatic ‘knowledge’) what the historical agent ‘must be saying’. In the case of “false reference” the question is also about not focusing on historical evidence. It is about constructing references on grounds of only apparent similarity which cannot be not supported by historical inquiry.

The case could also be that a historian comes up with a historically convincing connection between historical agents from a methodologically unconvincing angle (for example a pure guess). I think Skinner would like to dismiss these kinds of interpretations as mythologies, as indeed I would. Thus, I would like to suggest that when trying figure out what anachronisms are all about, the most important factor is the question on what grounds the description is given. Anachronisms have less to do with “errors in chronological order” or “terms unavailable” to past actors than is usually thought – though I do not wish to say that these are irrelevant factors. I would

²³ Skinner 1969, 31-32.

suggest that they are signs or symptoms of anachronism, but not causes. For I think that it would be somewhat too dramatic to call, for example, a simple slip of mind on dates an anachronism.²⁴ This mistake would become an anachronism only if the historian argued for his or her interpretation on grounds that attach foreign postulates or premises to the period discussed. This kind of definition would also allow a situation in which a description, which at the level of textual description seems plausible, would actually be anachronistic. This would take place when the historian is reasoning on grounds alien to the period discussed and his or her otherwise correct description is correct only by chance.

Usually anachronisms appear when a discontinuity in history is not acknowledged and the usual direction is from the contemporary world to the past. However it could also be the case that a discontinuity is not perceived the other way round: a historian who knows a certain period well does not notice points in which beliefs, behaviour and meanings have changed and consequently builds up an artificial line of continuity from the past towards to the present, to another period. So, if we pay more attention to the reasoning behind the words that are used to describe the event in the past, rather than paying all our attention to the words used in the actual description, it may enable us to identify anachronistic interpretations better. We are then able to see which interpretations only appear to be correct, and we are able to call simple mistakes just mistakes and not anachronisms.

This kind of definition is of course, nothing new. It comes quite close to those definitions that can be found in *Dictionary of Concepts in History* and other encyclopaedias or dictionaries of historical practice. These works emphasize that avoiding anachronisms means to “avoid imposing present categories on the past” and contrast anachronistic interpretation with “the awareness that the past differs in fundamental respects from the present”; anachronisms arise from the “impropriety of depicting past phenomena in terms of present values, assumptions, or interpretative categories”.²⁵ However, I would like to conclude these considerations on the definition of anachronism by stating my conviction that there is no single universal definition available. Each definition can be contested, one can probably always come up with counter examples or demonstrate that the definition allows too much or too little. We will just have to keep this in mind and study different aspects, which may not always cohere, of the topic.

But the issue of anachronism goes beyond the problem of first defining the concept or different types of anachronisms, and then identifying them. Anachronistic uses of the

²⁴ In this I agree with Barnes & Barnes 1989, 253.

²⁵ See e.g. “Anachronism” in Ritter, H., *Dictionary of Concepts in History*.

past have been made to serve serious political aspirations. Eric Hobsbawm's remark that "the most usual ideological abuse of history is based on anachronism rather than lies", quoted at the beginning of this work, has a sinister tone. Anachronism is a serious matter, though Hobsbawm does not straightforwardly accuse anachronistic interpretations of causing human tragedies. Hobsbawm states without any hesitation that the historian's responsibility is to point out anachronisms wherever they occur. Sensitivity in regard to anachronistic interpretations may sound like a dull academic theme, of interest only to academic historians as anachronism-police, if even then, but the truth is far from that. Hobsbawm demonstrates that anachronistic interpretations may be the fuel of intolerance and thus cause civil suffering. According to him, history is the "raw material for nationalist or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, as poppies are the raw material for heroin addicts. The past is essential, perhaps *the* essential element, in these ideologies. If there is no suitable past, it can always be invented."²⁶ The final sentence is of course a direct reference to anachronistic interpretations of the past. A glorious past can be presented as legitimating source of contemporary actions and aspirations. Within nationalistic movements the "glorious past" is often reconstructed in a straightforwardly anachronistic way. Hobsbawm mentions coming across a book entitled *Five Thousand Years of Pakistan* and says that it is of course more sublime to talk about five thousand years of history than of little over sixty (the time that Pakistan has actually existed or of little over seventy years of Pakistan which would be the time that somebody actually had some kind of thought of Pakistan).²⁷ He mentions other occasions in which anachronistic interpretations have been employed to justify current actions or stands. One well known example is the battle of Kosovo in 1389 when the Serbs suffered at the hands of Turks, but this does not justify the either oppression of the Albanians living in the area, or claims that the land belongs essentially to the Serbs. These kinds of efforts to justify modern actions are simply anachronistic, just as would efforts by Danes to claim the villages of eastern England, because there was a time when they ruled the area. A similar anachronistic misuse of history can be found in current Greek nationalists' denial of Macedonia's right to its name by claiming that all Macedonia is part of the state of Greece dating back to the time of king of Macedonia, Alexander the Great. These nationalists do not consider it in anyway problematic that there was nothing like a Greece (or any other) nation-state in the fourth century B.C. Their claim is simply anachronistic. Hobsbawm also mentions religious fundamentalists' tendency to reach to the past, and reminds us that Ayatollah Khomeini's version of Islamic state dates only from the 1970s and thus is only some forty years old. Efforts to legitimize it by referring to its long history are simply anachronistic. In general, these interpretations are very much about identity politics: how different groups

²⁶ Hobsbawm 2005a, 6.

²⁷ The name Pakistan was invented around 1932–1933 by student militants. See Hobsbawm 2005a, 6-7.

define “themselves by ethnicity, religion or the past or present borders of states”.²⁸ Hobsbawm presents more examples, but these are sufficient to show that the question of anachronism is far from purely an academic debate over professional hygiene; indeed, historical studies “can turn into bomb factories”.²⁹ This is why Hobsbawm says that historians “have responsibility to historical facts in general and, and for criticising the politico-ideological abuse of history in particular”.³⁰

On the other hand, it could be said that Hobsbawm’s examples are not typical. They present grandiose, somewhat pompous or overly dramatic cases, as he is trying to push the point that the question of anachronism is “far from purely academic matter”.³¹ These kinds of cases are not typical if one takes a look at the discussions that take place within research seminars. But we should note a number of facts. First, those mythologies, which Hobsbawm calls anachronisms, are often formulated by well educated people with advanced degrees. Secondly, the political uses of the past play a significant role in university confrontations within individual disciplines and between different disciplines. Lines of past scholarly achievements are constructed and then used to highlight the direction of one’s own professional academic efforts. It is very tempting to situate oneself in terms of the recognised great minds of a discipline and, no matter how revolutionary one might claim to be, to use the status that a favourably constructed history provides to diminish or even to condemn rival intellectual trends. An example can be found in the histories of universities. Is it not the case that universities are quite willing to locate their roots as early in history as possible? Moreover, even though universities may have been centres of revolution, they are also known to be centres of conservatism. The case of A. J. Ayer is instructive. Ayer was a representative of a philosophical movement, logical empiricism, whose members considered that the movement was rather revolutionary within the tradition of philosophy. They thought that after they had completed their job there would not be need for new philosophies. They assumed that they finally had found the means to solve philosophical problems which had occupied philosophers for over two thousand years. Their method was to solve problems through logical analyses and not be concerned with the history of philosophy. But it is telling that in the introductory text of this new philosophy, *Language, Logic and Truth*, Ayer sought to demonstrate that “most of those who are commonly thought to have been great philosophers were philosophers in our sense, rather than metaphysicians”. Among those whose work “work is predominantly analytic”,³² who committed themselves to philosophy in the analytic sense, rather than to metaphysics were Locke, Berkeley,

²⁸ Hobsbawm 2005a, 9.

²⁹ Hobsbawm 2005a, 7.

³⁰ Hobsbawm 2005a, 8.

³¹ Hobsbawm 2005a, 9.

³² Ayer 1956, 56.

Hume, Hobbes, Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Plato, Aristotle and Kant.³³ Indeed, this was a fine tradition to be attached to!

It is a common academic practice that specialists in different disciplines who are not professional historians often write histories of their respective disciplines. At least national histories of given disciplines are more likely to be written by professors or researchers in biology, sociology, political science, etc. than by practising historians. Philosophy is no exception to this rule. In cases when history is written from the perspective of the most (institutionally) successful representatives of the respective field who are not trained in history, the obvious danger is that history becomes a one sided, one track anachronistic story of how everything inevitably led to the modern-day institutional winners.³⁴ However, this is just a danger to be aware of, not an injunction. I do not wish to suggest that histories should be written only by persons who have a degree in historical studies. I do not have an academic education in history, and yet I am nevertheless journeying into the field of historical studies; nor do I consider myself a failure because I have not taken a degree in history. Conversely I also think that many historians may have a say in the realm of professional philosophy. This thesis is partly about philosophers talking about historical studies, but it is also about historical studies and historians, primarily Quentin Skinner, and their serious works on philosophy and philosophical matters.

It is also true that even educated professional historians are not immune to anachronisms or to hegemonic aspirations. The voices that are most eager to accuse others of anachronistic interpretations may sometimes be quite insensitive to the demands they are themselves calling for. The case study, presented later in this thesis of Danto on Nietzsche and Tejera's criticism of Danto, is a demonstration of this *par excellence*. It is not so difficult for a historian or historicist to become insensitive about anachronisms, especially when academic prestige is at stake. What is one of the most common failures that historians accuse each other of committing? It is, of course, failing to avoid anachronisms. This suggests that the business of avoiding anachronisms cannot be taken care of merely by having a degree in historical studies. Hobsbawm declares that what we need "in conjunction with information", in order to avoid "the greatest danger of historian", anachronism, is imagination. Hobsbawm illustrates this by taking up one of his favourite examples: the category of sexuality. His example is a perceptive one. This is a category that has been used to explain the behaviour of human actors throughout history and even into prehistory. It always seems to be considered a timeless, unchanging, universal category, but Hobsbawm questions this. He refers to the popular historical treatments of Victorian sexuality.

³³ See Ayer 1956, 27, 51–56

³⁴ For a recent study which includes a discussion on the histories of philosophy in Finland, see Leinonen 2008.

The authors of these treatments commit a mistake, according to Hobsbawm, when they suppose that Victorians shared the same sexual attitudes as people today, save that they concealed or suppressed it.³⁵ According to Hobsbawm there have been major changes in the history of sexuality, though not everything counts as a new discovery: even though “S/M in motorcycle gear could not be a part of” sexuality in the times of Queen Victoria, it would not be credible if a historian was to claim that the sexual explorers of the 20th century had found “an absolutely new way of enjoying sex, a so called ‘G-spot’ which was unknown to humanity before”.³⁶ The claim of finding absolute novelty would be unconvincing “given the finite number of things that can be done between sexual partners of whatever kind, the length of time and the number of people who have been doing it all over the globe, and the persistent interest of human beings in exploring the subject”.³⁷ It should be added, however that sexual pleasure could not have been based on the idea of that women have a “G-spot” before a certain place in a woman’s body was named the G-spot and the anatomical structure that is nowadays described as the G-spot was understood.

The question of anachronisms has a special status within studies of the history of philosophy because there it is not immediately regarded as a sin. In fact some historians of philosophy openly advocate anachronistic interpretations and claim that avoiding anachronisms will lead to interpretations of no other value whatsoever than pedantic historical academism. For example, Frederick P. Van De Pitte goes so far as to claim that to discuss Descartes’s answer to the problem of empiricism is mainly a philosophical question, and attempts at contextualization, which would set it in an unanachronistic environment, would be likely to lead to the loss of a proper understanding of the question.³⁸ Since Richard Rorty’s article “The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres” (1984) this dichotomy has often been addressed in terms of rational and historical reconstruction of past philosophies, or in terms of philosophical and historical interests.³⁹ Generally it is thought that historical reconstruction or historical interest is based on the idea of avoiding anachronisms, while the whole idea of rational reconstruction is to treat the past anachronistically. I will suggest below in the chapter on Danto’s Nietzsche that this terminology suffers from shortcomings, and in many cases it would be better to use the term ‘presentism’ instead of ‘rational reconstruction’, but since this is the rather generally accepted terminology, I shall use it. Proponents of historical reconstruction charge rational reconstructionists with

³⁵ Hobsbawm 2005b, 278.

³⁶ Hobsbawm 2005c, 39.

³⁷ Hobsbawm 2005c, 39.

³⁸ See Van De Pitte 1984, 175-176. However, in conflict with his programmatic statements, his method seems to be a project of historical reconstruction, an effort to find out what Descartes was really trying to say. See e.g. Richard Watson’s comments in Watson 1984.

³⁹ Rorty was not the first to use the terminology, even in the context of historiography. See the chapter on Danto below. Rorty’s article appears to have made the terminology popular.

moving into the area of mythology; in their responses rational reconstructionists replied with counter charges of antiquarianism, pointing to the “pedantic academicism” of “historical asceticism which rules out all but scholarly uses of the writings of the past”.⁴⁰ Within this confrontation the main question is not ‘how to avoid anachronism’. Rather, it is ‘should one avoid anachronisms when writing history of philosophy’? Or, ‘can anachronistic interpretation be valuable’? As Rorty states, the claim of rational reconstructionists is that “such enterprises in commensuration are, of course, anachronistic. But if they are conducted in full knowledge of their anachronism, they are unobjectionable”.⁴¹ In his article “History of Philosophy: Historical and Rational Reconstruction” Anthony Kenny defines the difference in terms of philosophical and historical reasons for studying the history of philosophy. According to Kenny, the history of philosophy can be studied for both reasons, with philosophical reason manifesting itself in the form of rational reconstruction. Rorty, who positions himself on neither side of the controversy, lists a few reasons to treat dead “philosophers as contemporaries, as colleagues with whom [we] can exchange views”⁴² and some other reasons to treat them as strangers from another time. He concludes that we should elaborate both approaches, because both have philosophical value: historical reconstructions may serve to remind us of intellectual forms of life that are very different from those we are used to and may thus help to recognize contingencies where we would otherwise not notice them; and rational reconstruction may help us to understand current problems better by bringing great minds into our discussions. Rorty thinks that both of these approaches have philosophical value and are thus examples of doing philosophy historically. This leads us to the question concerning the point or pointlessness of historical studies when doing philosophy. Peter H. Hare, borrowing more or less from Jonathan Bennett, has distinguished three kinds of ways of doing philosophy historically:⁴³

1. Some consider philosophical illumination valuable primarily as a means to historical accuracy.
2. Some consider historical accuracy valuable primarily as a means to philosophical illumination.

⁴⁰ Leslie 1974, 433, 436.

⁴¹ Rorty 1984, 53. Given the examples offered by Hobsbawm, I find Rorty’s conclusion to be too sweeping if we think of the possible aims that even consciously anachronistic interpretations may have. Yet I would not argue that there could not be acceptable defences of conscious anachronisms, even though it might be that there is no general principle according to which we could determine if a given anachronism was legitimate.

⁴² Rorty 1984, 49.

⁴³ See Hare 1988, 14.

3. Some consider both historical accuracy and philosophical illumination to have much of both intrinsic and instrumental value.

Hare himself adds two more forms to this list: analytic and historicist purism. The first neglects history as such, and the second neglects philosophical illumination.⁴⁴ In this thesis I discuss these matters from the point of view of historical accuracy, to help those who wish to achieve historical accuracy in terms by avoiding anachronisms. Regarding the value of philosophical illumination, I would argue that achieving historical accuracy is also dependent on philosophical imagination or philosophical reflection, and is not just matter of historical knowledge. Discussions of this sort have been rather extensive among analytical philosophers who are deeply involved in, or have had a brief contact with, the history of philosophy. Recently Tom Sorell has written that “philosophy written in English is overwhelmingly analytic philosophy, and the techniques and predilections of analytic philosophy are not only unhistorical but anti-historical, and hostile to textual commentary”.⁴⁵ But Sorell’s comments are exaggerated. There are of course different types of historicists within analytic philosophy, and some of them are clearly doing their best to avoid anachronisms.

Hans-Johan Glock has made a valuable contribution on the topics that shape debates about anachronism in his *What is Analytic Philosophy?* Though Glock’s study is about analytic philosophy its relevance goes beyond this context and can be used as an introduction to certain basic questions and positions. Glock uses term ‘historicism’ for “any position that promotes historical thinking in philosophy and warns against ignoring or distorting the past”. This last sentence is a direct plea to philosophers not to be anachronistic. Glock distinguishes three different forms of historicism that inform the work of analytic philosophers:⁴⁶

1. *Intrinsic* historicism. Proper philosophy is *ipso facto* historical since philosophical insights are historical in nature and the division between philosophy and the history of philosophy is superficial (e.g., Lorenz Krüger or Simon Critchley).

2. *Instrumental* historicism. Studying the past is necessary, but only as a means to achieve ends which are not historical in nature. To do systematic philosophy requires one to do the history of philosophy (e.g., Charles Taylor).

⁴⁴ We could perhaps add one more category: the history of philosophy as pedagogically valuable. Even Moritz Schlick noticed this when he defined philosophy not as a science, nor as a collection of propositions which are answers to some specific philosophical questions, but as an activity of finding meaning. Philosophy was the “Queen of Sciences” although not itself a science, and it continued to take an affirmative stance on Schopenhauer’s observation that philosophy should not be taught at all, only logic and the history of philosophy. See Schlick 1932, 20-21.

⁴⁵ Sorell 2005, 1. For other rather similar accusations see e.g. Ayers 1978, 55; Hacking 1984, 103.

⁴⁶ Glock 2008, 89–90.

3. *Weak* historicism. The study of history of philosophy is useful to systematic philosophy, but not indispensable, i.e. doing philosophy historically is possible but nothing more (e.g., Kenny, Hare).

Glock also distinguishes two forms of historicist criticisms of analytic philosophy:

1. The accusation of *historiophobia*: analytic philosophers ignore history.
2. The accusation of *anachronism*: analytic philosophers distort history by anachronism, by reading the present into the past.

Although in this short list Glock appears to be too keen to demarcate the analytic philosopher and the historicist by suddenly forgetting the possibility that one could actually be an analytic historicist through his or her philosophical stance, nevertheless his typology is useful and illuminates historicist thinking from one perspective rather well.⁴⁷ From my point of view, the most important features in this discussion are the appreciation of historical accuracy and the accusation of anachronism. It seems that Glock does not notice that all forms of historicism in his first typology can be practised with an appreciation of historical accuracy, by trying to avoid anachronism, or they can be practised with less historical accuracy, by taking advantage of the past in anachronistic ways. Only the second typology has something to do with anachronisms. The questions of whether the history of philosophy is or is not of any use to philosophers engaged in current debates, and how it should be approached in order to make the best of it, are closely related questions, but still of secondary importance in my work. My arguments on these questions are only preliminary. In general I would say that one should choose the methods of interpretation to meet the ends. However, I wish to emphasize that the ends are there to be scrutinized very carefully from the moral as well as from the epistemological point of view, and I think that Hobsbawm demonstrated this conclusively. We should not only use our instrumental reason, but also use our reason to criticize the ends, and to ponder over our goals, so to speak. However, most of the time, I am writing for a person who for any reason wishes to avoid anachronisms or to gain a better understanding of the matter in order to make his or her own conclusions.⁴⁸ Bearing this in mind, we need to

⁴⁷ Glock's position when relating these issues to analytic philosophy is somewhat fuzzy. He mentions philosophers who are commonly regarded as analytic philosophers as examples of proponents of different types of historicism. However he keeps writing about the historicist critique of analytic philosophers though changing the names change from Krüger, Critchley and Taylor to Rorty, MacIntyre, Hacking, Hacker etc. critics of analytic philosophy. In my opinion this should be seen as a form of self-criticism of analytic philosophy (or criticism taking place inside it), but Glock does not seem to endorse this.

⁴⁸ Though I am aware that this thesis might offer an implicit defence for a historicist, non-anachronistic approach.

make one more demarcation. This consists of two (complementary) forms of historicism concerning the demand of taking historical contexts into consideration when interpreting utterances of past philosophers. These are related to the second of the accusations mentioned above. Both forms endorse the anti-anachronistic approach, but the form of anachronism is different; usually those who endorse (2) endorse also (1) and are thus more adamant about anachronistic interpretations.

1. *Historicism of meanings.* This approach emphasizes the importance of historical context for understanding what was said. The claim is that in order to understand utterances or meanings of words, it is necessary to study them in the light of their respective historical contexts.

2. *Historicism of judgments.* According to this approach, one should use past philosophers' respective historical contexts as criteria when evaluating their rationality, excellence etc. Or conversely: one should not judge a past thinker in the light of current standards of rationality, etc.

Though Glock does not explicitly delineate these two forms of historicism he discusses both. He discusses the first very briefly. Glock argues that when a philosopher doing the history of philosophy is trying to pass judgment on whether a given past thinker was right or wrong, it is obvious that first he has to find out what that thinker was thinking. This is a historical task. Most philosophers do accept this point, although some have discussed past philosopher's argument "as it has struck" them.⁴⁹ The second form, which could also include moral judgments, suggests that in order to determine the past agent's rationality (or morality) one should first have an idea what were the standards of rational belief of the time.⁵⁰ This will be discussed below, and also in the chapter on Skinner's typology of anachronisms.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Glock 2008, 104.

⁵⁰ From Glock's position, analytic philosophy, we could state that at least in the first sense of historicism we could label as historicist such philosophers as Alasdair MacIntyre (see for example the chapters "The Philosophical Point of History of Ethics" and "The Prephilosophical History of 'Good' and the Transition to Philosophy" in MacIntyre 1995), Michael Frede and Ian Hacking. In "Two New Kinds of Historicism" Hacking confesses to an even stronger historicism: "But what's historicism? Something like this: the theory that social and cultural phenomena are historically determined, and that each period in history has its own values that are not directly applicable to other epochs. In philosophy that implies that philosophical issues find their place, importance, and definition in a specific cultural milieu. That is certainly Rorty's opinion, and, aside from some qualifications stated below, it is mine too." (Hacking 2002) Richard Rorty can indeed be considered a historicist (see for example his discussion on Greek Philosophy and the distinction between states of consciousness and events belonging to the external world in Rorty 1980). All these philosophers have their roots in the analytic tradition. 'Contextualism' is nowadays a widely accepted approach to the history of philosophy, and has also gained wide popularity within analytic philosophy. Even Gilbert Harman, the analytic philosopher who was famous for pinning a sign on his office door in Princeton saying "Just say no to the history of philosophy", has confessed to be a historicist in this sense. In an e-mail to Tom Sorell Harman writes, that "the history of philosophy is not easy. It is very important to consider the historical context of a text and not just try to read it all by itself. One should be careful not to read one's own

Glock's discussion on the other theme, of passing judgements on past thinkers, is lengthier and is done under the title of "Hermeneutic Equity". According to Glock "to abstain from judgment may even mean to conceal" the past. Thus the question what kind of criteria one should apply is most important.⁵² Glock assigns to historicists the view that that one should have a "detached" attitude toward history, and goes on to claim that most of the past philosophers who are being studied would find this attitude to be strange, since they would expect that their philosophies would be evaluated.⁵³ But this does not hold true in all cases: as we shall see, this so-called 'detached' attitude fits rather badly in the case of Quentin Skinner. He does not object to evaluating past actors. The salient question is not 'whether we should evaluate our predecessors', but 'on which grounds such an evaluation should be performed'. In any case, Glock calls into question the so-called 'principle of equity' associated with the hermeneutic tradition, according to which "a good interpretation of a text presumes that its author is rational, unless the opposite has been demonstrated" and the 'principle of charity', associated with the analytic tradition, "according to which we should not translate utterances of an entirely alien language as being obviously false".⁵⁴ According to Glock, these principles advise or even command the interpreter to assume that the past philosopher being examined is rational and has got things right. The idea behind this claim is that we could not understand, or make sense, so to speak, of totally irrational or false beliefs; we would not know what they are about. Here Glock is referring to Gadamer, Quine and Davidson and announces that the principles of equity and charity though it may have some initial power, are misguided. Glock derives two lessons from this discussion. First, agreement should not be maximized "since it would be blatantly anachronistic to credit ancient text with (actual or presumed) insights which became available only later" and secondly, "the

views [...] into a historical text. It is unwise to treat historical texts as sacred documents that contain important wisdom. In particular it is important to avoid [...] reading one's views into a sacred text so one can read them back out endowed with authority. For the most part the problems that historical writers were concerned with are different from the problems that current philosophers face. There are no perennial philosophical problems." (Harman in Sorell 2005b, 43–44).

It is striking how close these lines are Quentin Skinner views. It is almost as if Harman is making a summary of Quentin Skinner's "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" (1969). It would appear their opinions only differ when they start to speak about the benefits of historical studies for philosophers and students of philosophy. It is also remarkable that Harman considers his views on the matter to be "mostly orthodox nowadays" (Harman in Sorell 2005b, 43) and does not think that he is some kind of exception among his colleagues.

⁵¹ This is an important point and Joseph Femia seems to confuse one with the other in his critique of Quentin Skinner. See Femia 1981 the section on mythology in this work, especially the part on "Criticism for failing to form a doctrine". There the solution is to pay attention to the possible intentions that an agent may have had, though Skinner is not explicitly speaking of moral intentions in this case.

⁵² Glock 2008, 109.

⁵³ Glock 2008, 109.

⁵⁴ Glock 2008, 109.

need to comprehend background does not entail an obligation to adumbrate it”.⁵⁵ I would accept these lessons without question, but I am puzzled by Glock’s use of the term ‘historicism’ in this connection. It is somewhat confusing. Though he is not directly identifying Quine and Davidson as leading historicists, he is posing their arguments as historicist arguments against analytic philosophers who do the history of philosophy. As we will see Quentin Skinner has criticised Quine and Davidson in a manner quite similar to Glock’s. Whether these are distinctively ‘historicist’ arguments at all becomes even more confusing if we consider Joseph Femia’s critique of Skinner entitled “An Historicist Critique of ‘Revisionists’ Methods For Studying the History of Ideas” (1978). There Femia accuses Skinner of not allowing moral judgments about past actors because he concentrates on their intentions.⁵⁶ Glock, when pointing his finger at the historicists, also states that contradictions are not out of the question when interpreting old texts. I am not sure whom of the historicists he is referring to, but as we shall see Skinner points out that paradoxical or contradictory beliefs may even be acknowledged and consciously held. Thus Skinner shows more sensitivity to the possibility of “explicit contradictions” than does Glock, whose idea is just that “beliefs may *turn out* to be contradictory”⁵⁷ and should not be excluded on an *a priori* basis.⁵⁸

With the first part of this chapter on Hobsbawm and ideological uses of anachronisms, I hope to have demonstrated that concerns about anachronism are not merely pedantic academic pinpointing stemming from antiquarian interests in history. The typologies of different kinds of historicism have served to open up the field to general questions relating to issues and demarcations on and of different types of anachronisms, and one’s relation to anachronistic interpretations. The discussion that follows seeks to remind the reader that there are different ways to be a historicist, different levels of being aware of anachronisms, and various forms of anachronisms. The next chapter will deal with recent work on anachronism. My aim is to position this thesis within the range of the most recent, relevant studies on the subject.

⁵⁵ Glock 2008, 111.

⁵⁶ See below A.2. Criticism for failing to form a doctrine.

⁵⁷ Glock 2008, 112.

⁵⁸ See the chapter on the *myth of rationality* below.

3. RECENT WORK ON 'ANACHRONISM'

Since anachronism is such a central issue within historiography, it is surprising that there does not seem to be a single monograph on the topic. Discussions are, however, to be found in scholarly articles, although there are not many of them. In the twenty-first century, the most comprehensive treatment has been published in two issues of *Scientia Poetica – Yearbook for the History of Literature, Humanities and Sciences* (bands 8 and 10). The first includes a comprehensive review of the literature published before 2004 by Carlos Spoerhase, “Zwischen den Zeiten: anachronismus und Presentismus in der Methodologie der historischen Wissenschaften”. In the following I shall concentrate on the literature published after 2004.

William T. Lynch states that the anti-Whiggish project of “avoiding anachronisms [is] the modern profession of history’s founding myth. In graduate school, budding historians internalize the dogma that they must seek to recover the past ‘in its own terms’ rather than by references to present beliefs or values.”⁵⁹ Following Dominick La Capra, Lynch suggests that instead of treating the past as a separate and independent era from the present, it should be understood in connection to “moments in time that precede or succeed it.”⁶⁰ Lynch makes a strong distinction between historians and scientists and philosophers who are discussing the past. According to Lynch, historians are sensitive to contingency and to the idea that past action, which may now seem irrational, may have been rational within the historical context “given the evidence available and the canons of reasoning at the time”.⁶¹ Lynch also states that our understanding of the past is as tied to our modern understanding of the natural world as it is tied to our modern understanding of the social world. For example, in order to claim that the modern category of ‘oxygen’ and ‘dephlogisticated air’ in phlogiston theory are “referring to same entities with different theories”,⁶² and accordingly to claim the contextual rationality of the phlogiston theory, one has to make use of modern chemical knowledge. Otherwise it could not be understood that they are referring to the same entity. This, however, is not as much an apology for semantic realism as a method of historical studies as it is an example to show how we are tied to a present understanding of the ‘natural world’.

But Lynch’s main question is how much modern knowledge should inform our reconstructions of the past. Lynch positions himself in between those he calls “sceptical anti-anachronists” or “presentists” and those whom he calls “defenders of the purity of historical knowledge”. It always seems to be possible for the presentists

⁵⁹ Lynch 2004 241.

⁶⁰ Lynch 2004, 242.

⁶¹ Lynch 2004, 242.

⁶² Lynch 2004, 243.

to point out anachronisms in the works of anti-anachronists, and the anti-anachronists seem to find “important mistakes made by those who let presentism cloud their vision”.⁶³ The strength of historical reconstruction depends on “how well it makes sense of the history we want to explain, not how independently warranted the natural scientific knowledge may be”.⁶⁴ He distinguishes historical explanations of scientific change from questions concerning the nature of science. According to Lynch, the historian’s interest is in explaining how and why scientific changes took place, and not why modern science has the beliefs that it has at the present. In this task our contemporary knowledge may well help us determine what happened in the past, and we may better understand what past scientists were up to if we know how it all eventually turned out. Lynch also considers how counterfactual reasoning may help the historian to consider the significance of different factors that may have been the cause of historical changes.

It seems that Lynch puts more emphasis on historical continuities than discontinuities. In my opinion it is worth reminding contemporary historians of continuities as it has become more common to emphasize the importance of discontinuities. Thus I welcome Lynch’s reminder. Lynch suffers, however, from a vagueness which is in fact a rather common among contributions to the issue of anachronism. He speaks of recovering the past in its “own terms”, without making explicit what this actually means. This commonly used expression raises a series of questions. Does it mean that one should explain everything using an earlier language, perhaps by directly citing parts of important texts? Would paraphrases be allowed if no modern terms were used? Could certain modern terms be used to illuminate the issue and, if yes, then which ones and on what conditions?⁶⁵ In the following I hope to shed some light on these questions, since they are central to issues concerning anachronism, although I would not agree if someone were to define anachronism as the use of ascribing foreign terms to past actors. One could in fact look at the typology of anachronisms that follows as presenting some misleading and unwarranted ways of applying foreign terms to past actors. But one should also bear in mind that not all types are of this

⁶³ Lynch 2004, 244.

⁶⁴ Lynch 2004, 244.

⁶⁵ It is unclear what the expression ‘to understand someone by one’s own terms’ means, and it is not very wise to construe this expression as, for example, Jonathan Bennett and Richard Rorty have done. Bennett writes against this idea “Ayers has criticized me for trying to understand people in my terms and not theirs, and I was pleased to see that Rorty in a recent paper came down on him hard for this, saying rightly that it doesn’t make sense. To understand someone’s thought you must get it into your own terms, terms that you understand. The only alternative is to parrot his words” Bennett 1988, 67. The reference to Rorty is obviously to his “The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres” from 1984. I can see no reason why one could not learn someone else’s language or at least the meaning of terms foreign to oneself, and so learn to understand someone else’s terms and not force the articulation of a text to fit one’s own already defined vocabulary. To share this understanding with others speaking the same language or using the same concepts is of course a challenging task and could perhaps be, metaphorically speaking, a task rather like that of teaching a foreign language.

kind. I also agree with Lynch that knowledge as to how things turned out to be may in some cases help us recognize what originally went on--the contingency of events may indeed be exaggerated--but this does include the obvious danger of committing anachronistic rationalizations or constructions of false teleological narratives.

In his article “In Defence of Anti-Presentism” David L. Hull presents a moderate defence of anti-presentism. His main thesis is that it is not, of course, possible in all cases to test how concepts fit into certain periods, and it seems that knowledge is usually – or perhaps always – only partially justified. But this it does not mean that we should abandon the anti-presentist path, even though we will probably never reach its end. Hull does not believe that there are any general solutions, though he suggests that it is possible to tackle the problems case by case. There are local solutions, though success cannot be guaranteed.

Hull’s short article is a statement of the two positions that I subscribe to. The first is that there is no escape from a modern perspective. Yet even if we are unable to verify if the concepts we decide to use to describe the past are absolutely suitable, it does not follow that we may not have been correct, and certainly this should not stop us from trying to get things right (see the chapter on *Anachronism as Original Sin* below). Second, that there is no general solution. To tackle anachronisms means mainly to involve oneself in casuistry. Any typology of anachronisms will not be perfect, and each application needs to be locally considered.

Stephen G. Brush states that new, narrow definitions of anachronism as describing “past deeds and past works in terms that were not available to the agents themselves” or ascribing “to past thinkers’ concepts they had no linguistic means to express” have set the bar too high.⁶⁶ He acknowledges that one should not, for example, use one’s own experiences of travelling in an aeroplane to illuminate the thinking of Copernicus. Brush does argue, however, that for pedagogical reasons this could prove to be a good way of explaining how Copernicus thought about relative motion and used it to justify his heliocentric model, since it serves the task of explaining elementary facts, concepts and laws. In other words, anachronisms are legitimate when they “help organize the subject-matter in a way that will make it intellectually easier to grasp” and when they “make the subject matter more interesting by introducing a dramatic ‘human dimension’.”⁶⁷ However, Brush does not see that this would be suitable for advanced studies, and he also makes a list of problems related to “contextualist” efforts to avoid anachronisms:⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See Brush 2004, 256.

⁶⁷ Brush 2004, 261.

⁶⁸ See Brush 2004, 259-260.

1. Any historical interpretation of a document or event has to be made by a person who is unavoidably influenced by presentist assumptions.
2. The significance of a document or event – which determines whether it is worth studying at all – depends at least partly on how it affects and is perceived by later generations.
3. Whiggish questions are perfectly legitimate ones for the historian to consider (e.g., how did we arrive at the condition we are now in?).
4. As contextualism has to, by definition, focus on science at particular time and place, it is thus ill suited to address what historians of science call “The Big Picture”.

Despite these problems, historians should “insist that past events be described accurately in relation to their own context, so that we will at least have a basis for judging whether a specific statement is or is not anachronistic”. The challenge is to “translate our best scholarship into a language that will be effective in teaching students [...]”.⁶⁹

I agree with Brush on the first and third points. As to the second and fourth, I am not so certain. Point one is roughly the same as Quentin Skinner’s, which I address when discussing anachronism as original sin. Concerning point two, I am sure that the value of a document as an object of study may grow because it has effects on later generations, but this does not hold true universally. A document may be very valuable exactly because it has been forgotten, because it is an example of a mode of thought that we no longer remember, because its public value has diminished. It would be silly to think that all valuable contributions to all topics have been recognised as valuable contributions. Is it not in fact a classical part of the historian’s charge to try to demonstrate how something that has been regarded of minor importance is actually of major importance when explaining or describing a particular event? As to the third point, I agree that it is perfectly legitimate to ask how did we arrive at the condition we are now in. But I am not sure whether it is as Whiggish a matter as Brush claims. Point four I regard as a false conclusion. There is no principle within contextualism according to which one should not relate different periods and try to see continuities as well as discontinuities. I would like to think that “The Big Picture” might also prove to be more fragmentary than a single unity. But I am not sure if this is what Brush means by “The Big Picture”, so here I do hesitate a little. Brush is correct in suggesting that the criteria of describing past deeds and past works in terms not available to the agents themselves, and ascribing to past thinkers concepts they had no

⁶⁹ Brush 2004, 264.

linguistic means to express may not be adequate. But a better conclusion would be to do a more detailed analysis of the problems involved in anachronism.

In “Anachronism and the Individuation of Concepts” Adrian Haddock makes a distinction between a ‘concept’ and a ‘concept possessed’. The first is timeless and the second is tied to a certain time. It would be anachronistic to claim that a concept was possessed at a period when it was not. Hence it is not anachronistic (or if it is anachronistic it would not be a bad anachronism) to claim that there were electrons in the fourteenth century--he ignores the claim that all entities are conceptually constituted--but it would be anachronistic to say that someone possessed a concept of the electron at that time. A concept and its instantiation must also be kept apart. The instantiation of, for example, an automobile occurred when someone actually built one, and so something fell under the concept of automobile. Other examples that Haddock mentions are human beings, television and DVD.⁷⁰

Haddock goes on to explain that some concepts are conceptually constituted and with them one has to be more careful. One set of these kinds of concepts is intentional human action: if person X intends to go swimming, X must possess the concept of swimming. So, this (intentional) action is, at least partly, conceptually constituted. Thus it would be anachronistic to claim that X intended to go swimming if, at the time, there was no concept of ‘swimming’. This would be a bad anachronism. But the case would be different if speaking about unintended actions. If one happens to do something else besides the intended action, then it would not be anachronistic to say, for example, that X moved some electrons while swimming.

Haddock goes on to contemplate whether the term ‘homosexual’ could actually be used to mean different things. Can people living before the nineteenth century, when the conceptual category of homosexual entered the vocabulary, be described as homosexuals? Haddock refers to Ian Hacking, who argues that there could not be homosexuals before that time. Then Haddock notices that Hacking’s concept of homosexual includes the idea that homosexuality is constituted conceptually by classificatory vocabulary. But he argues that this is not necessary in all the meanings of homosexual. If homosexuality is defined only in terms of having sex with people of the same sex, and it is not required that this action should be understood as ‘homosexual’ behaviour, then in this sense it would not be anachronistic to describe certain eighteenth-century individuals as homosexual.⁷¹ The question is what concept of homosexuality they are said to instantiate.

⁷⁰ See Haddock 2004, 265-266.

⁷¹ I am not sure whether same sex-sexual activity is a necessary condition, since I believe that both hetero- and homosexuals can live their lives without having sex, but this, of course, is slightly beside Haddock’s point.

Haddock thus approaches anachronisms by trying to clarify the concept of ‘concept’ by making distinctions between a concept, its possession and its instantiation. Haddock’s distinctions are partly useful. However, I would not accept them if the ontological implication were that a concept could have timeless existence outside its possession and instantiations. Nor do I see what would be the utility of such a claim. To say that there were electrons before anyone had the concept of electrons does make perfect sense without supposing that the *concept* of electron is timeless. We now use the concept to point to certain phenomena in nature in the present or in the distant past. One may apply concepts to the past without supposing that they are timeless; and it is possible, though perhaps unlikely, that forthcoming changes in the science of physics will change our way of thinking about these matters and the concept of ‘electron’ will lose its currency. It is possible that Haddock was not aiming in this direction and that he made these distinctions only in the analytical sense. and as long as they are used as analytical tools or as a viewpoint, I have nothing to complain of. In effect, Haddock could provide an important clarification to the question of what it would or would not mean to ascribe a foreign term to someone, as he is suggesting a more detailed analysis of the concepts applied. He does emphasize that bringing in intentions causes more problems. This is pretty much in line with Quentin Skinner’s view on the issue, since he is indeed considering the matter from the intentionalist’s point of view.

Mark Bevir begins his article “When Can We Apply Our Concepts to the Past?” by mentioning three underlying issues that are closely related to the problem of anachronism. These issues can be put into the form of three questions:⁷²

1. How is conceptual relativism to be dealt with?
2. In what ways are meanings attributed to texts they could not have had at the time they were written?
3. Can we cover past ideas using modern-day concepts?

First, according to Bevir conceptual relativism seems to be more relevant if we are dealing with human actions rather than with physical events. Bevir admits that we can never be sure that our analysis of past people’s actions in terms of our own concepts are correct. But we use own concepts because we think that we use them for good reasons; we think that they are universal. After we have admitted, like Bevir, that we cannot be sure of the truth of our conceptual analysis, we may fruitfully continue our

⁷² See Bevir 2004, 282.

analysis. But we have to give a philosophical analysis of the grammar of concepts used that legitimizes their universal use. The point that we cannot be sure of our conceptual analysis should not lead even a conceptual relativist away from deploying our concepts; it should instead lead to giving as good reasons as possible for our choices. The very idea of conceptual relativism is to tolerate uncertainty.

Second, Bevir states that questions concerning anachronisms do not arise when explaining past actions. They arise when we “use our concepts to denote the content of actions, texts, or intentions”.⁷³ It is important not to treat texts as if *they* had meanings. According to Bevir’s procedural individualism, meanings exist only for someone. A text is basically ink on paper and the meanings that it is related to are meanings for individual persons and these people do not have to be authors of the text in question. The same text can have a meaning for the author and a person who reads it one thousand years later. In order not to be anachronistic a historian has to be explicit which meaning he is talking about. And, according to Bevir, historians should always be able to say about the meaning they are attaching to a text about whom the meaning is for: The original author? A subsequent reader? The danger of anachronistic fallacies becomes evident when we ascribe intentions which could not have been held. Did someone have a certain concept or idea is an empirical question.

Third, according to Bevir we have to describe beliefs and ideas in our own language. Here it could be useful to distinguish two kinds of anachronisms: a) anachronism in the beliefs we ascribe; and b) anachronism in the phrase or language we are using to describe these beliefs. When describing beliefs we have to be extremely clear in what sense we are using concepts: do we, for example, refer by a ‘separation of powers’ as a separation of executive and judicial powers that makes sense in a relatively new set of political arrangements, or are we only referring to the idea that no single person has the final say? Hence, historians need to make very clear which sense(s) they are using terms, and on what level(s) of abstraction.

Bevir’s main message is that historians can have a fairly large area of freedom as long as they are careful and make explicit what they are doing. Bevir’s conclusions on conceptual relativism is that it should not lead us to complete helplessness, but to more careful analysis, and I make the same point in the chapter on anachronism as original sin. Bevir’s procedural individualism also offers a viewpoint which is worth keeping in mind. When we speak about the meaning of a given text it needs to be made explicit who the meaning is for. Skinner also makes similar remarks (see the chapter on concepts of meaning), though in his own work he is interested in meaning that is strongly tied to the author’s intentions. Bevir’s distinction between

⁷³ Bevir 2004, 284.

anachronisms in beliefs we ascribe and anachronism in the language used to describe beliefs is in my opinion worth keeping in mind. Special attention should be paid to the language we are using to describe beliefs, and not only to what and how we think about them.

Conal Condren lists in his article “A Reflection on the Problem of Anachronism in Intellectual History” three conditions for conceptual stability that have to be fulfilled in order not to present an anachronistic interpretation:

1. The concept in question has to cover the same range of phenomena, that is, it must be a classification with much the same content.
2. It must necessarily exist in the same web of delineating conceptual relationships.
3. It must operate within the immediate context of a continuous theoretical enterprise.

One problem is that ideas or concepts tend to be treated as metaphysical entities to which words give access. This often leads to anachronistic displacement of agency and easily violates the conditions mentioned above. According to Condren both Lovejoy’s history of unit ideas and German *Begriffsgeschichte* are guilty of this. Condren states that “the discovery of a concept, as if it were a sort of object, is most likely to be a conjectural abstraction from previous word use and unless recognised for what it is, easily becomes an anachronistic displacement of historiographical agency”.⁷⁴

Condren mentions different types of anachronisms that he has described in an earlier article, “Political Theory and the Problem of Anachronism” (1997). The types are the following:

1. *Judgmental anachronism*. This means the imposition of later values to past worlds. It involves a moral judgment.
2. *Descriptive anachronism*. A later idea (without) moral valuation is described as if belonged to an earlier period.
3. *Traditional anachronism*. When a later tradition is used as a context for works that were written in a period when such a tradition had not yet born (e.g. political theory before the 19th century).

⁷⁴ Condren 2004, 290.

4. *Sequential anachronism*. When series of events or texts are construed more or less teleologically as a path to some fulfilment.

5. *Discursive anachronism*. When “modes of thought” that belong to specified period are replaced or ignored.

6. *Structural anachronism*. When relationships between two modes of thought become mixed with a later one.

7. *Model building*. When explanatory models are elided with the evidence, or read into problematic material.

Our conceptual awareness is the source of terms that we use to describe past intentions. This may lead to anachronistic interpretations and as an example Condren mentions ‘epistemology’. According to him it is anachronistic to talk about epistemology before the distinction between ontology and epistemology was made. Our mind makes this distinction because that is the way we make sense of past texts, but it is a form of anachronism. It is indeed very hard to describe past agent’s intentions without making this distinction.

Condren’s warning on the danger that concepts may easily become treated as metaphysical entities that have existence outside words, which in fact only give access, seems to be a rather common concern among historians, even though not all would agree with Condren that German *Begriffsgeschichte* or even Lovejoy’s programme of studying unit ideas are guilty of this. The warning is an important one, however, and it could be used as a checkpoint when one reflects on one’s own work. Condren’s list of different types of anachronism is interesting. In my opinion it also works rather well and could be used as a complementary checklist to the larger one anatomised by Quentin Skinner (see below the chapter entitled *Typology of Mythologies*), though some of the types do overlap. A distinction between (moral) judgmental anachronism and descriptive anachronism was made above when I discussed different types of historicism demarcated by Glock; Skinner was also mentioned. But Condren can be said to be the only one of these figures who makes this distinction explicitly and clearly. To his category of sequential anachronism, I would like to add that it is not necessarily only later progress that causes danger. There is also the danger that things become interpreted in terms of later decline, and that is equally anachronistic. Condren probably also meant this, but it is worth emphasising that the histories of the vanquished may be as problematic as the histories of the victors. The most obvious form of danger is that histories of the former become filled with imaginary conspiracies leading to the complete defeat of

particular persons or ideologies, etc., and this can only be established by referring to later events.

Lorraine Daston describes anachronism as “the unreflective habit of judging all things from one’s own narrow and accidental position [...] other epochs by our own epoch. [...] It is to insist that one’s own position is privileged”. It is a “provincialism of the mind” and “*péché professionnel*”.⁷⁵ Her short article is a compact and insightful presentation of the history of the sense of, and attitudes towards, anachronism, dealing mostly with the concept of progress and narrative. It serves as a reminder that anachronism is itself a historical concept or category. Daston traces the invention of ‘anachronism’ back to the Renaissance, but she dates the idea that historical understanding requires a perspectival shift, and an awareness of perspective, to Johan Martin Chladius’s *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft* of 1752. In the history of anachronisms Daston distinguishes two basic types. The first is that of imposing one’s own thought on past actors. The second type takes place when historians deny that they are inescapably tied to their own time. What it comes to the first type, Daston explains that, for example, in the history of science the idea of technical progress can be sustained, but one would have to acknowledge that this is progress without a *telos*. It is not heading towards some ultimate truth. The second kind of anachronism appears, according to Daston, in the work of A. Koyré and his followers as they turned the composition upside down when celebrating past science as “science with a human face” by emphasising the reasonableness of past theories, such as Aristotle’s theory of organism, the Ptolemaic theory of planetary motions, and so on. In other words, they ended up describing the past as a “lost paradise”. The longing for this paradise consists, according to Daston, in abandoning the present and projecting the past onto the present.

Daston’s definition is not meant to be definitive, and she formulates a type of anachronism that does not fit very well into the idea of anachronism as the “unreflective habit of judging all things from [...] other epochs by our own epoch”. One could, however, make it fit just by replacing a couple of words “[...] other epochs by epochs from different times”. The perspective does not have to be our own to commit an anachronism; it will just have to be some other epoch than the one under discussion. Her reminder that one cannot escape the present is different from those previously mentioned. She seems to be speaking in some ontological mode. When Daston is saying, with some irony, that it is not possible to achieve the “lost paradise” she is not saying it in the epistemological sense; that we could not know about it. She is saying that this “paradise” is long gone and it is not possible to relive it in our time. This she could be deriving from Renaissance thinkers who also have been said to

⁷⁵ Daston 2006, 231.

have understood, for the first time in history, that though ancient Greece was something to admire, it was gone forever. The first type of anachronism in Daston's short typology is what anachronisms are usually thought to be, but the question about the history of science as progress is not as straightforward as Daston seems to consider it to be. It depends on the kind of concept of progress we have. Surely some concepts allow historians of science to maintain that the narrative is a story of progress, perhaps the kind that Daston seems to support when progress is very much technical progress. However if we discuss this from a more general point of view, what have been the advancements in our lives, it is certain that not all steps represent progress: some can even be at the same time be both blessings and curses depending on the perspective they are perceived from.⁷⁶

In "Time's Arrow", Malcolm Gaskill's argues that we tend to see overly nice patterns and smooth reasoning in the past. Historians tend to "underestimate the role of impulse, accident and folly in shaping the past".⁷⁷ Gaskill sees the history of mentalities as a tool for avoiding these kinds of anachronisms, and writes that "the random element constitutes contexts of words and actions, and that changing mentalities are best exemplified and explained when grounded in tangible experience".⁷⁸ Furthermore, he warns that "aggregation and abstraction increases the danger of generating anachronisms".⁷⁹ In general, Gaskill's article is a warning against seeing too much coherence and continuity in history, and an exhortation to pay attention to discontinuity and chaos. Like Daston, Gaskill mentions that anachronism may also take the form of importing the past into the present. Finally, he concludes that the obvious dangers of anachronisms should be met in an "intrepid and optimistic spirit".⁸⁰

It might indeed be more common for the historian to construct too clear patterns and pursue too smooth reasoning than to describe the past in terms of chance, impulsiveness and folly, but the danger exists both ways. Today the emphasis on the contingent has become so popular that it is useful to remind ourselves that there might every now and then be rational and logical patterns to be uncovered. What it comes to avoiding anachronisms, the history of mentalities may well be an appropriate tool for doing part of the job. In the following chapters, I suggest that a certain amount of

⁷⁶ To take one example, the technological advancements in mobile phones have made it many good things possible (e.g. the ability to call for help from almost anywhere). On the other side, there are occupations that today require you to be reachable virtually twenty-four hours a day just because everybody else has mobile phones. Not everybody would consider this a blessing.

⁷⁷ Gaskill 2006, 237.

⁷⁸ Gaskill 2006, 238.

⁷⁹ Gaskill 2006, 238.

⁸⁰ Gaskill 2006, 252.

good conceptual history is needed in order to avoid anachronism. In that sense my work is in keeping with Gaskill's suggestion.

According to Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, while we should avoid judging the past from our own point of view, we cannot avoid value judgments altogether. However, value judgments are not necessarily ethical or moral. Lloyd maintains that we have to assign preferences. These judgments should be made consciously with an awareness of the criteria that past actors themselves had adopted, and also with full awareness of the criteria that are used in present-day evaluations. The knowledge of these two different criteria must be kept apart, though we, of course, can freely draw lessons from the past as long as our interpretation is not skewed in favour of only certain lessons from the past.

Lloyd warns about a special type of anachronism, which--at least sometimes--informs certain notions in the comparative history of science. He identifies at least three problems: first, past societies are taken to share our goals and the methods of modern science; second, different past societies are treated as they shared the same goals and methods third this kind of history is teleological as it judges past activity in terms of later results.

Most historians understand that when we speak of physics in the ancient world, we do not mean physics in its current sense, but a kind of study of fundamental constituents of the world. However there seems to be more problems when historians speak, for example, of 'anatomy'. In China, interest in the human body was very different from that of modern 'anatomists'. Likewise, our distinction between astrology and astronomy does not hold for every past society. Lloyd also mentions that both the Chinese study of 'numbers' and Greek 'mathematike' included practices that would not suit modern mathematics. He goes on to discuss such concepts as 'science,' 'the scientific' and 'nature.' Though ancient China and Greece had terms for knowledge and learning, they did not have a single term that would have denoted understanding the natural world, nor did they have an adjective by which such an enterprise could have been described. Even the concept of nature has similar problems. Lloyd's suggestion for avoiding these problems is to avoid heavily theory-laden terms: instead of 'astronomy' one should speak about the 'study of the heavens' and so on. Finally, Lloyd reminds us that the historian should never assimilate past societies into the present, and asks us to remember that there are always divergences within each society. To learn from the past requires that we recognize it "as other".⁸¹ Lloyd also reminds us that the institutions in which ancient 'science' was carried out varied greatly: in Mesopotamia the heavens were studied by scribes who reported to their

⁸¹ Lloyd 2006, 273.

kings; China had a kind of state-sponsored bureau; but in Greece it was very much a matter of private interests. These different factors make comparison difficult.

The main idea in Lloyd's short but illuminating article is to remind us of discontinuities in history, and that noticing them may be hard work. He does this by presenting revealing examples. He maintains that modern knowledge cannot harm our interpretation of the past as long as we do our best to keep the past and the present separate. Lloyd also repeats the conclusion that most commentators on the subject make, that though we are unable to recapture the past fully, we should do our best. He even concludes that if it were possible to pretend that we were ancient Greeks or Chinese, it would "defeat the whole purpose of the historical exercise, insofar as its goal is not just to learn *about* the past, but to learn *from* it".⁸² Lloyd mentions interesting dimensions, such as institutions and the aims, which belong to the activity of 'science', which actually mark discontinuities in history and cause problems for comparisons across time. These remarks are in line with my aims, and again my project can be seen to parallel efforts to offer more precise analyses of such concepts (or such an activity) as 'science'.

Steffen Ducheyne discusses the problem of ascribing a modern concept to a past actor. First he discusses two examples, but quickly moves on to construct a more general framework. Ducheyne's aim is to help historians deal with such questions as "did van Helmont have a modern concept of experiment?" According to Ducheyne, we should not settle for saying that van Helmont's concept of experiment is similar to our concept in certain ways. We should be more precise. We should first spell out what the concept means to us and make a concrete list of relevant characteristics. Then we should look for partial identities and become aware of similarities as well as differences. When comparing different concepts of e.g. inertia we can use tables like this to help us:⁸³

⁸² Lloyd 2006, 272-273.

⁸³ See Ducheyne, 2006, 281-282.

Relevant characteristics	General idea of indifference to motion	Rectilinear derirectionality	Causal continuation during uniformation
Newton's concept of inertia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Galileo's concept of inertia	Yes	No (in his treatment of celestial bodies and bodies on the surface of the Earth)	No
Contemporary concept of inertia	Yes	Yes	No

Ducheyne sums up his approach in the following way:

1. We should be clear about the characteristics of the concepts we are about to consider.
2. We should carefully study the characteristics of its putative past precursor.
3. Finally, based on the list of characteristics we have obtained, we can establish the degree (or absence) of similarity.

Ducheyne's project is almost straightforwardly similar to my *conceptual prism*, though he places his analyses of 'concept' on a rather abstract level compared to conceptual prism. Also Ducheyne's use of a table to illustrate similarities and dissimilarities between different concepts of inertia is similar to my table on concepts of liberty in the final chapter, though he does not refer to the possibility that similarity could also be a family-resemblance without a common core as I do. The three points Ducheyne makes are all in line with my work, but I seek to give more detailed justification of these ideas. As my model is more developed, it makes a more detailed analysis possible.

Peter Burke distinguishes different kinds of anachronism: simple from sophisticated; and unconscious from deliberate or strategic. Burke maintains that anachronism may be productive for historians, and mentions Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* as an example of productive strategic anachronism. In this study, Ladurie approaches the past (namely of an eighteenth-century century village) as an anthropologist. His aim is to describe the village in the same way that an anthropologist would describe a twentieth or twenty-first century village; and he views some of the people he studies as ethnographers of the time (by occupation they were scribe, novelist and inquisitor).

Burke also mentions Jacques Le Goff's and George Duby's work as examples. Both historians have made comparisons between the past and the present, and have pointed out similarities as well as differences. When bringing out similarities they have used modern terms and described how something in the past was similar to some present phenomenon, and vice versa. Burke tells that he has been impressed by certain parallels between the past and the present. He mentions that when he wrote about the way in which public appearances were arranged in the times of Ceausescu, Mussolini and Louis XIV, he did hesitate to use the term 'propaganda' and 'media' when describing the times of Louis XIV. Burke points out that he is not happy using the term 'media' but has no quarrels with 'propaganda', even though that term first appeared during the French Revolution. He did, however, want to make a difference between general glorification and the presentation of controversial events (e.g. crossing the Rhine in 1672, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes 1685, etc.). By using two sets of concepts, "the concepts used in the period being studied [...] and the concepts of scholars writing today."⁸⁴ Burke hoped to note both analogies and disanalogies, and that rapid movement back and forth between viewpoints was a strategy designed to draw attention to them. The use of analogies may thus be of service to understandings of the past, but the historian must draw attention to the differences and not just the similarities. Burke concludes by stating that "whatever they think about anachronisms, historians cannot deny their 'situatedness' [...] I am attracted by the idea that the historian is essentially a translator, from the language of the past (especially its key concepts) into the language of the present, in search of what is often described as 'equivalent effect'".⁸⁵

What is most interesting in Burke's article is his idea of historian as translator. This brings to the light a common question concerning anachronisms. Can the historian translate the past into a modern language? This metaphorical question is the same as asking whether the historian may ascribe modern terms to the past. I have to say that I am not very keen on the notion of historian as translator, and I am more attracted by

⁸⁴ Burke 2006, 296.

⁸⁵ Burke 2006, 298.

the idea that the historian is essentially a language teacher whose job is to teach new – or in the historian’s case, an old – languages to his audience. With regard to the danger of anachronism the use of modern terms is not so problematic when teaching older languages as it is when translating them.

It would appear that majority of recent contributors agree on one thing: it is not possible to escape the present. The majority also seem to draw the same conclusion from this: it does not leave the historian paralysed on the face of lurking anachronisms. That we are tied to the present is precisely the reason why historians should become better aware of the dangers of anachronisms and continue to do history as historically as possible. Related to this aim, it can be noticed that there is a general tendency to try to make finer distinctions between different kinds of anachronisms and conceptual distinctions in order to find more precise tools for identifying and thus avoiding anachronisms.

In these general matters, my thesis seems to belong to the mainstream when it comes to contributions on the discussion of anachronisms in historical studies. However, I hope to develop these views further by making finer distinctions, and by conducting a more thorough analysis than has been done so far.

In the next chapter I will present an interpretation of Quentin Skinner’s philosophical theses concerning the methodology of historical studies, and his philosophy of meaning, that I regard as relevant for the general theme of my work. The chapter provides some ideas what one can do if one wishes to avoid anachronisms, and includes some more theoretical considerations, for example. how one should think about rationality, truth and their relation within the context of historical studies in order not to commit anachronisms. The ideas are presented in the form of a “Skinnerian Dictionary”.

4. QUENTIN SKINNER'S PHILOSOPHY OF MEANING

In this chapter, Quentin Skinner's methodological views are discussed under the title "Philosophy of Meaning" because I believe that the label 'philosophy' best describes his thinking in this area. My reading of Skinner is philosophical, although I am not trying to reconstruct a single coherent philosophical system.

4.1. CONCEPT/WORD (TERM)

It is a commonplace to make a distinction between concepts and words. This distinction can be found in Skinner's work, although he sometimes uses the word 'term' instead of 'word' when making the distinction.⁸⁶ Skinner discusses the distinction between concept and word in "The Idea of Cultural Lexicon", which is a critique of Raymond Williams's famous book *Keywords* (1976). Skinner first makes this distinction only implicitly: "if we wish to grasp how someone sees the world – what distinctions he draws, what classifications he accepts – what we need to know is not what words he uses but rather what concepts he possesses".⁸⁷ He then continues to analyse criteria for possessing a concept. Skinner claims that "it cannot be a necessary condition of my possessing a concept that I need to understand the correct application of a term".⁸⁸ To illuminate this, Skinner uses John Milton as an example. In *Paradise Lost* Milton emphasised that he is trying to deal with "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme"⁸⁹, and according to Skinner here Milton is dealing with the concept of originality, even though the word 'originality' only entered the English language more than a century after his death. This means that the history of the word 'originality' is partly different from the history of the concept of originality. This is an important point if one considers the question of anachronisms, since it follows that it is not automatically anachronistic to ascribe to past thinkers concepts for which they had no single word.

Skinner then adds that "it cannot be a sufficient condition of my possessing a concept that I understand the correct application of a corresponding term [...]". Skinner asks us to consider for example the difficulties raised by certain highly general terms such as *being* or *infinity*. According to Skinner, who acknowledges Kant and Wittgenstein, these are words that the "whole community of language users" may apply with perfect consistency. However, although people may believe they are in possession of a

⁸⁶ Though from the point of view of the philosophy of science these are not synonyms, it is clear that Skinner uses them – at least in most cases – as synonyms.

⁸⁷ Skinner 2002i, 159.

⁸⁸ Skinner 2002i, 159.

⁸⁹ Skinner 2002i, 159.

concept “it might be possible to show that there is simply no concept which answers to any of their agreed usages”.⁹⁰

Furthermore, Skinner expresses doubt about the possibility that there could be a single formula which expresses the relation between words or terms and concepts. He goes on to say that “the surest sign that a group or society has entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept is that a corresponding vocabulary will be developed, a vocabulary which can then be used to pick out and discuss the concept with consistency”.⁹¹ But, as explained above, the possession of a concept means only standardly – neither necessarily nor sufficiently – to understand the meaning of the corresponding term. It should be noted that it does not follow from this that concepts have an existence outside language, that they could be ontologically independent from articulations. In the case of Milton there is clearly a linguistic articulation of something that later, according to Skinner, came to be called ‘originality’. However, Skinner does not take up the questions concerning the ontology of concepts, so we shall have to settle for this negative remark.

The distinction between a word and a concept is a very basic one, is nor is it the main point of the article, though Skinner mentions that Raymond Williams did not originally make the distinction, a fact Williams acknowledges in the revised edition of *Keywords* (1983). But it is, of course, an important distinction. With regard to Skinner’s reception and the problem of anachronisms, the observation that the history of a given concept can be longer than the history of the corresponding word is worth keeping in mind.

4.2. WORDS (TERMS), THEIR MEANINGS AND INTENTIONS

In “Meaning and Understanding” Skinner states in an Austinian-Wittgensteinian manner that “we must study all the various situations, which may change in complex ways, in which the given form of words can logically be used – all the functions the words can, all the various things that can be done with them [...] the appropriate [...] formula is [...] that we should study not the meanings of the words, but their use”.⁹² This is a conviction that Skinner has continued to elaborate practically throughout his career. Subsequently, he has paraphrased this many times. In his “Reply To My

⁹⁰ Skinner 2002i, 159-160.

⁹¹ Skinner 2002i, 159-160.

⁹² Skinner 1969, 55. The formula he is referring to is in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, remark 43. It should be noted that Wittgenstein is commenting on the use of the concept of meaning and only claiming that in most cases our employment of the word ‘meaning’ could be defined as a word’s “use in the language”. Wittgenstein does not actually claim that the meaning of a word is always its use.

Critics” he does it in the following way: “to understand a concept, it is necessary to grasp not merely the meanings of terms used to express it, but also the range of things that can be done with it [...] there can be no histories of concepts as such; there can only be histories of their uses in arguments”.⁹³ One might notice that in both of these statements Skinner seems to be making a distinction between the meanings of the word and the use of the word, quite contrary to the somewhat vulgar interpretation of Wittgenstein’s remarks on the matter which equates meaning directly with use. This will be explained more fully below, but it should be noted that Skinner has a special kind of meaning in mind at this point. When on other occasions he connects meaning more closely to what is done by a word or utterance, a different concept of ‘meaning’ is in play.

There is another related distinction underlying these quotations, namely that between meaning and understanding. Though Skinner says that he is following largely Austin’s speech act theory, two remarks should be made about this matter. First, Skinner is moving from speech acts to written texts, which Austin did not do. Second, Skinner also speaks of illocutionary intention and not only about illocutionary force and acts, while Austin does not speak of illocutionary intentions at all. Austin does however mention the concept of intention a few times in his *How To do Things With Words* arguing that an utterance may express or announce an intention, that there is a difference between intention and promising, though to keep a promise it may be necessary to have an intention of promising, and that intention is a requisite to perform certain kinds of actions, i.e. certain actions meant to carry out corresponding intentions.⁹⁴ Thus Skinner builds his own application of Austin’s speech act theory, and does not follow Austin faithfully. In the following I discuss Skinner’s application as such, without concentrating on how this application of Austin’s ideas corresponds to Austin’s original theory. My interest is also on what kind of historical description this application produces, and not on what kind of explanation of (social) action it provides, or what kind of (general) theory of action or social action it is based upon, or what kind of general theory it might imply. Accordingly, I do not discuss for example the question how intentions explain action, which seems to be one of the main points of Skinner’s critics of his theories of intentionality. In fact, Skinner could have done without so many references to Austin and avoided getting involved in discussions on social explanations, etc. It would have been quite sufficient to state that he is interested in the question ‘what the author was doing’ or ‘what the authorial intention in a given piece of text was’, or ‘what the author meant to do in the text’. In the following I shall discuss the issue from this viewpoint, and not engage the 1971 article “On Performing and Explaining Linguistic Acts”, since it drifts from historical

⁹³ Skinner 1988a, 283.

⁹⁴ See Austin 1972, 11, 16, 43, 44, 69, 77, 98, 99, 101, 112, 128, 152, 158 and 163.

studies to another territory of explaining actions. But there is a further issue, which does pose a problem for my reading of Skinner, namely that he is not totally coherent in his writings about where his interest lies: in illocutionary intentions, force or acts. He states, for example that “I ought first to say that my emphasis on illocutionary acts is not primarily due to any belief in their special significance [...] I have placed my emphasis on this dimension chiefly because it continues to be so readily and so frequently overlooked”.⁹⁵ In an early article he seems to consider that it is illocutionary force which is important in understanding utterances, and states that “one of the most important of these issues is the question of what conditions must sufficiently or at least necessarily be fulfilled for any such claims to count as genuine cases of understanding given utterances – understanding the uttering of them, their meanings and their illocutionary force”,⁹⁶ and regrets that historians have not spent time thinking about this. On other occasions Skinner has stated that he is interested specifically in illocutionary intentions. For example, the essay “Motives, Intentions and Interpretation” is written to defend the recovery of intentions; and there he indeed uses the term “illocutionary intention” when explaining his methodological commitments. Skinner states that we need to focus not merely on the particular text in which we are interested in but on prevailing conventions governing the treatment of the issues or themes with which the text is concerned⁹⁷ in order to recover “illocutionary intentions”.⁹⁸

A further problem arises when Skinner seems to equate illocutionary acts with intention: “an understanding of the illocutionary act being performed by an agent in issuing a given utterance will be equivalent to an understanding of that agent’s primary *intentions* in issuing that particular utterance”⁹⁹ and “to perform an illocutionary act will always be equivalent to speaking (or writing) with a certain intended illocutionary force”.¹⁰⁰ This seems only to muddle things. First, if the act is equal to the intention then there is no need to have two different terms. Second, as explained below, we need to acknowledge that while it is possible to fail in performing an illocutionary action, it is not possible to fail to have illocutionary intentions.¹⁰¹ As Adrian Akmajian et alia explain, “most illocutionary acts used to

⁹⁵ Skinner 1988a, 284.

⁹⁶ Skinner 1970, 138.

⁹⁷ Skinner 2002a, 102.

⁹⁸ Skinner 2002a, 101.

⁹⁹ Skinner 1988b, 74.

¹⁰⁰ Skinner 1988a, 262.

¹⁰¹ A rather strange or even dubious replacement of terms takes place when Skinner tries to answer Keith Graham’s critique which is rather similar to mine, in “A Reply to My Critics”. Graham’s accusation is, as Skinner himself recognizes, that Skinner “fail to recognize that illocutionary *intentions* may be present in the absence of the corresponding illocutionary *act*”. Skinner ends his counter argument by trying to demonstrate that it makes no sense to suggest “that someone might succeed in speaking with intended illocutionary *force* [...] and yet fail to perform the corresponding illocutionary *act* [...]” Skinner 1988a, 265, 265 (italics mine). See also Graham 1988.

communicate have the feature that one performs them successfully by getting one's illocutionary intentions recognized."¹⁰² Indeed if one fails to get one's illocutionary intention recognised, one still (successfully) has had the illocutionary intention, and was unsuccessful only in performing the illocutionary action, i.e. to make others recognize one's intention. It is noteworthy that Austin also states that a successful performance of an illocutionary act must have some effects or consequences. The required effect of, for example, the act of warning other people is not that the people would actually start to take heed of the warning but that they understand the act as a warning. As Austin put it: "the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution" which must be distinguished from producing other kinds of consequences.¹⁰³ To make this clear an additional example can be given: with the intention of having you understand that I wish you to close the door, I may say to you "close the door". My illocutionary act is successful if you understand that I am asking you to close the door even though you would probably tell me to do it myself because I stand closer to the door. But if I was speaking metaphorically, and intending to tell you that you should stop listening to all the complaints you receive at the work, then I would have obviously failed in my illocutionary act. I would assume that when interpreting my utterance Skinner would, in particular, be interested in understanding what my illocutionary intention was, and not what my illocutionary action was. In a case where I might fail in my illocutionary act, to start speaking of what the act would successfully have been, or what it was meant to be, would be to speak about the illocutionary intentions that determined it. In general, this is a good idea since, if we bracketed the illocutionary intention or equated it with illocutionary action, then we would not notice what the past agent was intending to do should the agent fail to perform the action with a corresponding effect.

In the following I assume it that Skinner has mainly intentions in mind and not acts (at least not in the direct Austinian sense), though this demarcation is an analytic one and may be hard to apply to some practical situations. For the sake of clarity, I shall be writing about recovering illocutionary intentions. This might in some cases override Skinner's own terminology, but in order to apply Skinner's views this must be done to maintain conceptual clarity. Moreover, I think this corresponds well with Skinner's overall line of argument as he criticizes interpretations for failing to understand the author's intentions and not really the author's act (including the required effects.) It is also necessary to speak about "illocutionary intentions" and not only about "intentions", since as I shall explain below there are different kinds of intentions.

¹⁰² Akmajia *et al* 2001, 395

¹⁰³ Austin 1972, 116-117.

Skinner insists that to understand an utterance and the words which are used to express it one has to have a grasp of the meaning of the words and also a grasp of the illocutionary intention in them. In other words, the understanding of words consists of understanding their meanings plus the illocutionary intentions that the uttering agent attaches to them. This illocutionary intention is in Skinner's mind when he speaks of recovering intentions.¹⁰⁴ It is important to keep in mind the distinction between understanding and meaning in order to notice here that Skinner is not reducing meaning to agency through intentions. At this point agency is only attached to an understanding of a specific utterance. But, as already indicated, subsequently Skinner also distinguishes different kinds of meanings, and on that occasion he more closely connects agency, illocutionary intention and a particular type of meaning. Things may now seem confusing and some clarification will follow, but in any case, when reading Skinner one has to be aware that he is using these terms with different meanings (which might be sometimes difficult).

After these preliminary remarks we shall take a closer look at Skinner's distinctions. The connection here with anachronisms is that they are usually, if not always, about attaching foreign meanings to concepts, events, acts, etc. To analyse these meanings more precisely, and thus put oneself in a better position to recognise anachronisms, one has to acknowledge that sometimes there are different concepts of meaning and also different concepts of intention related to meaning. From this it follows that to be precise, to make oneself correctly understood, one will have to spell out what kind meaning and what kind of intention one is speaking of.¹⁰⁵ So we need to be clear what kind of concepts of meaning and intention Skinner has in his mind when he is speaking about recovering them. Probably the best way to start making sense of Skinner's distinctions is to consult his article "Motives, Intentions and Interpretations" (1972, revised 1976 and re-revised 2001).¹⁰⁶ In this article Skinner makes some fundamental distinctions between different concepts of intention and meaning, and tries to answer the question "whether it is possible to lay down any general rules about how to interpret a literary text".¹⁰⁷ In the following I shall mainly concentrate on Skinner's conceptual distinctions.

¹⁰⁴ See e.g. Skinner 1969, 61; Skinner 2002e, 98.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Bevir also emphasizes this point in Bevir 2004.

¹⁰⁶ The article was originally published as a discussion article in 1976 in *New Literary History* vol. 3, no. 2. I primarily use a revised article, which was published 1988, and occasionally refer to the 2001 version (in which Skinner has combined two articles, one being "From Hume's Intentions to Deconstruction and Back").

¹⁰⁷ Skinner 1988b, 68.

4.2.1. Concepts of Meaning

Skinner begins “Motives, Intentions and Interpretations” by stating that he does not have in mind the vulgar idea of “‘the correct reading’ of a text”, which would overrule all other interpretations.¹⁰⁸ He is speaking about a particular interest in historical texts and is willing to accept other interests too, though in this article, he also speaks about literary criticism and suggests that the approach he is propagating for historical studies could indeed be useful to literary critics. To clarify his position Skinner distinguishes between three different concepts of ‘meaning’.

The first one could be called “semantics through syntax” to use Wimsatt and Beardsley’s expression in their seminal essay “The Intentional Fallacy”, but I shall just refer to it as M1. M1 is an answer to the question: What do words mean, what do certain specific words or sentences mean in a given work? This is obviously the meaning which Skinner is speaking of in e.g. “Meaning and Understanding” when he says that to understand a term or utterance, we have to study its use and not only its meaning. To answer questions concerning the M1 of a given word or utterance, we should look at dictionaries, habitual knowledge of language, grammars etc. The author’s biographical evidence is relevant only, in Wimsatt’s and Beardsley’s words, if it “provides evidence of the meaning of the words”.¹⁰⁹ Meaning in this sense is fixed by tradition or culture which has produced the grammars and dictionaries or vocabularies that we need if we wish to sort out the M1 of a given work. In the re-revised version of the article Skinner associates Derrida’s thesis on the irrecoverability of meaning and Derrida’s critique of logocentrism with M1.¹¹⁰ According to Skinner, Derrida’s critique is based on the idea that words, which are used to refer to things, lack fixed meanings, and meanings are just pure intertextuality, and from this Derrida concludes that there would be no way to determine the M1 of any given word.

The second type of meaning that Skinner describes could be called the ‘reader’s meaning’, but I shall refer to it as M2. This type of meaning is an answer to the question: What does this work mean to me or, perhaps, to us? This is what, according to Skinner, the so-called “New Criticism” and phenomenology were mostly concerned with when speaking about meaning. Skinner mentions Paul Ricoeur as an

¹⁰⁸ Skinner 1988b, 68.

¹⁰⁹ Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, “The Intentional Fallacy”, quotation from Skinner 1988b, 70.

¹¹⁰ See Skinner 2002e, 91-92.

example of someone who holds this view. According to Skinner, Ricoeur does not deny that texts may have a meaning that the author intended, but he emphasizes that sooner or later, and because of the polysemic and metaphorical nature of language, all texts will achieve an autonomous meaning which is independent of the author's intention.¹¹¹ M2 is based on the idea of the reading process as a realization of the text. Meaning is a play between the text (its structures and effects) and the reader; a reading is an accomplishment of the reader(s), and thus meaning is fixed by the reader(s). The surrounding culture is part of the process in that it participates in the building of the interpreter's mental world, but no special attention should be paid to it when trying to recover the M2 of a given word or utterance.

The third type of meaning could be called "authorial meaning", which I shall refer to as M3. This time the question is: What does the writer mean by what he says in this work? What may the writer have meant by making such a use of a particular phrase? The primary concern is what the work may have meant to the author, but in the sense that the proper question is: What was the author doing *in* the text. We could say that M3 is fixed by the act of the author, and to recover this meaning of a given text the interpreter will have to recover the author's intention in the illocutionary sense of intention. M3 is the concept of meaning that Skinner himself is mostly interested in, and mostly writes about. At this point he does seem to make a connection between meaning and agency, but as we see, the meaning of 'meaning' is strictly specified (as is the meaning of 'intention' to which we shall return below). Skinner mentions Derrida also at this point. He considers that Derrida was talking about the general impossibility of recovering M3 when in *Eperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche* he took up the example from Nietzsche's papers; a note on which was written "I have forgotten my umbrella".¹¹² According to Skinner, Derrida accepts that the M1 of this is recoverable, but concludes that M3 is irrecoverable. In this particular case Skinner agrees with Derrida, but says that it does not follow, that M3 is irrecoverable in every case. In the case mentioned by Derrida there is simply not enough information available to recover M3, but it is not universal condition. Often there is enough information available to make fairly certain, reasonable conclusions about the author's intentions.

Skinner tells us that he is mainly interested in 'meaning' in the M3 sense. However, his terminology is again somewhat shaky. Later on e.g. in *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* Skinner makes a distinction between what he takes "to be two distinguishable dimensions of language"¹¹³ and he even calls this distinction a strong one. The first of the two dimensions "has conventionally been described as the

¹¹¹ This is also an addition to the latest version. See Skinner 2002e, 92.

¹¹² Again he does not mention this in the earlier version. See Skinner 2002e, 93.

¹¹³ Skinner 1996, 7.

dimension of meaning, the study of the sense and reference allegedly attaching to words and sentences” and the other “described as the dimension of linguistic action, the study of the range of things that speakers are capable of doing in (and by) their use of words and sentences”.¹¹⁴ The difference is the same as above between M1 (only ‘reference’ added) and M3. At this point Skinner does not talk about “linguistic action” as the ‘meaning’ of words or sentences. However this terminological zigzag does not pose a persistent problem. Skinner’s readers will just have to keep these connections and distinctions in mind and not let them be the cause of confusion. Accordingly, the historian’s job in Skinner’s project could be described as the effort to recover the meaning of some linguistic act, but this does not seem to be Skinner’s view. Instead he has more recently continued to emphasize the difference between speech acts in a text, and the meanings of a text: e.g. in a 2007 interview he states that “I would say that what we should be looking for, in textual interpretation, is not so much the meanings of a text as the nature of the speech acts embodied in them” and “I am basically interested in what people mean by what they say – in speech acts, not meanings”.¹¹⁵ I do not see the point of addressing the question in this format. It is more useful and theoretically interesting to distinguish between different kinds of meanings of a given text than to operate with a harsh distinction between meaning and separate linguistic action, and in my opinion the first type of distinction enables us to present Skinner’s view in a more helpful way.

The relevance of the above considerations to anachronisms is to note that continuities of discontinuities of meaning can take place, at least, on these three levels. It is very possible that the M1 of a given concept remains the same while M2 and M3 change with changes in time and the place where it is used. The second consideration, already mentioned above, is that when judging if a given meaning attributed to a given historical event, text, etc. is anachronistic, we will have to be conscious of what type of meaning we are talking about and make this clear to our readers.

4.2.2. Arguments Against Recovering Intentions

After the initial move of describing different meanings of ‘meaning’ and expressing his interest in meaning (M3), which requires recovering the intention(s) of the author of a text, Skinner anatomizes some arguments that have been used to undermine the need or even possibility of concentrating on the intentions of a historical agent. Although he is speaking to literary critics, the analogy to historians is evident. He

¹¹⁴ Skinner 1996, 7–8.

¹¹⁵ Skinner 2007b.

describes three general forms of criticism of which the second form takes various sub-forms.¹¹⁶

1st argument: Even though it may be possible to recover authorial intentions one should not pay attention to them.

According to Skinner this is a kind of argument on behalf of the purity of critical procedures: nothing else than the work in itself should be taken to consideration in the critic's response to the work. Otherwise the critic commits the "romantic fallacy". Skinner answers this challenge in the following way: even if intentions or motives did not play any role in determining 'the meaning' of a given work, it does not follow that the critic ought to or could ensure that his knowledge of authorial intentions or motives, for example noticing if the author was being serious or ironic and why he was doing that, will not help him to determine his response to the work in question. Skinner seems to suggest that it is quite unquestionable that once a critic has discovered that the author of the work the critic is evaluating was seeking revenge or perhaps simply trying to amuse, this knowledge does make its way, to some extent, into the critic's interpretation of the work.

2nd argument: Intentions are outside the text

The second argument could be formulated in the following way: because intentions stand outside the text, they play no role in the structure of the work and thus they should not be taken into account in the work's meaning. This argument takes three different subforms.

2.1. The Cartesian argument: Intentions, as well as motives, are simply impossible to recover. They are more or less private entities to which it is not possible to gain access. The inevitable uncertainty about mental processes makes it unworthy to try to recover intentions.

Skinner's answers to this are that the claim is straightforwardly false and this is obvious. In this article Skinner takes this as a self-evident fact. This may seem a somewhat strange, but it has to be noted that by this move Skinner makes no stronger claim than that it is evident that it is not always impossible to recover intentions or motives. There are obvious cases which show that it is possible to understand an agent's motives or intentions, and that this does not require direct access to the agent's mental world or anything similar. In everyday life we do constantly

¹¹⁶ In the following I am only going through Skinner's discussion on intentions and interpretation. A more detailed and many-sided picture is presented in collection of articles edited by Gary Iseminger, *Intention & Interpretation* (1992).

understand if our friends or the author of texts are only joking, if a passer-by intends to warn us with her gestures, or is flirting with us, and so on. That is we do understand their intentions, even though we may never be one hundred percent sure in the Cartesian sense that we have understood them correctly.

2.2. While it may be possible to recover intentions and motives, they will provide an undesirable criteria for measuring the value of what the author writes. Intentions are not really relevant to a critic's *judgment* of a given work. According to Skinner this is just a misstatement, or an irrelevant argument. It is indeed clear that, for example, the writer's intention to produce a masterpiece would not serve as a measure to judge the work's value.

2.3. While it may be possible to recover intentions and motives, "it will never be *relevant* to pay attention to this type of information if the aim is simply to establish the meaning of a text."¹¹⁷ Intentions are only antecedents which are no more relevant to the work under criticism than after-effects. Skinner's admits that there is some truth in this. He agrees that it might be in the case of motives that they stand outside the text "in such a way that their recovery will be irrelevant"¹¹⁸ to recover some of the types of meaning(s) that have been described above. It is important to keep in mind that Skinner distinguishes motives from intentions. The motives are answers to the question: Why did the author intend to do what he did in the text? Therefore to talk about the writer's motives is to talk about conditions which are antecedent to the text. It means asking what happened before the text was written, and that is only more or less contingently connected "with the appearance" of the text and is not actually "in the text". So, if we speak of motives and not (illocutionary) intentions, then Skinner would agree, at least partly, with the criticism.

The conclusion of arguments 1 and 2 is that Skinner claims that intentions can in many cases be recoverable and they exist inside the text (which means that they are not contingent factors in determining its meaning).

3rd argument: Intentions inside the text

The third argument proceeds as such: there is no need to pay any special attention to motives or intentions because they lie inside the text and therefore will manifest themselves in the text anyway. Normally a writer achieves what he intends. I think, however, that Skinner's answer is not totally satisfactory. Nevertheless I consider that there is a better answer, which stands in line with Skinner's writings. Skinner says

¹¹⁷ Skinner 1988b, 72.

¹¹⁸ Skinner 1988b, 73.

that this argument is based on the false assumption that when we ask about intentions we have perlocutionary performatives in our mind, which will manifest themselves, at least in the case of success, more or less automatically. But if we are interested in illocutionary intentions, we are not paying attention to the question what the author achieved.¹¹⁹ Skinner is of course right as he is speaking of illocutionary intentions, but still one could insist that if illocutionary intentions are really inside the text, they will also manifest themselves anyway. There is a very simple answer to this: to draw attention to all the cases in which there have been misunderstandings. Misunderstandings are familiar from everyday life: we get into situations when we joke by using irony and are taken at face value. We may not mind this at all, but it may be very clear that our illocutionary intention was not understood, and because of this obvious possibility of misunderstanding illocutionary intention calls for special attention.

In my opinion, Skinner successfully tackles the abovementioned arguments against the need or possibility of recovering authorial intentions, though if we are more interested in the reception history of a given work, then it might be that authorial intentions do not play a large role, or play no role whatsoever. But then again, when we study the reception history of a given work, it usually means interpreting secondary sources: commentaries, etc. which draw us again back to authorial intentions connected with these texts. Regarding anachronisms, perhaps the most important counter argument is the Cartesian one, not because it is false, but because its core holds true. However the demand for Cartesian certainty is obscure. Our actions do normally seem to work out in a satisfactory way though they are mainly, if not totally, based on uncertain information that we simply regard as certain enough to act upon. The same remark also goes for the possibility of achieving an un-anachronistic interpretation in a certain important sense of the term un-anachronistic: even if we are not certain, we might get things right.

4.2.3. The Concept of Intention

The distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary intentions is probably clear by now on the basis of my previous references to the distinction, though there is still room for further elaboration.

¹¹⁹ Though Austin considered that there should be some signs of success, at least in the sense that the audience of a given illocutionary *action* understood what was being done.

In order to explain his interest in intentions Skinner turns to the speech act theory developed by J. L. Austin. By referring to speech act theory, as already noted, we may distinguish between different concepts of authorial intentions, and this is what I suggest we do. Austin did not speak about illocutionary intentions, and Skinner, while speaking about the concept of illocutionary intention, does not speak about perlocutionary intentions. But I suggest that here we make this distinction because it allows us to keep Skinner's ideas clear from terminological fuzziness. This distinction can be explained in the following way. First, there are perlocutionary intentions, which tell us what kind of perlocutionary force the agent wishes his act to have. Perlocutionary intentions are our concern when we ask what effect or response the author intended to achieve with the work; what the author wanted to do *by* writing the text. We could say that the author wanted the readers to become sad, amused or convinced on some point. In other words, perlocutionary intention tells what the author will achieve by a successful act of communication. We may ask whether the author succeeded in carrying out these intentions by his perlocutionary act, because there is always some kind of result in it, and the result might be what the author intended or it might be something else. Second, we may pay attention to the illocutionary intentions, and this is the kind of intention that Skinner has in his mind when he emphasizes the importance of intentions in understanding a given work or utterance. They are our concern when we ask what the author was intending to do *in* writing what he wrote: how the act would be understood if the reader or listener understood this kind of authorial intention correctly. He might have been ridiculing, joking, convincing or giving orders, and in this he cannot fail, because the results about whether he managed to achieve the goals are irrelevant if we ask what the author was doing in the text. An author may be joking (his illocutionary intention) even though her audience takes her utterance completely seriously (his illocutionary force) and may get scared and run away (his perlocutionary force), i.e. he might be incompetent to express or to realize his illocutionary intentions, or he just may not care how others react. We generally try to carry out illocutionary intentions by acting in a certain way in order to achieve some effect, or perlocutionary force, but the case could however be that the acts are performed without any efforts to produce perlocutionary force, although the act then could hardly be described as a communicative act.¹²⁰ To make this distinction more clear we can say that perlocutionary force is normally what the agent achieves *by* using illocutionary force,

¹²⁰ The third kind of speech act that Austin describes is the so-called locutionary act. This simply means saying something, and the study of these acts often goes in the direction of discussing references and semantics: what is the agent saying and what does his words refer to.

but only normally and not necessarily since illocutionary intentions do not have to be accompanied by the aim of a corresponding perlocutionary force.¹²¹

Illocutionary intention, illocutionary force, perlocutionary intention, and perlocutionary force can, of course, sometimes be very hard to distinguish. For example if I invite somebody to stay for lunch I am performing an act intended to be understood as an invitation, but if by my act I manage to make the person understand that I am inviting him to stay for a lunch, this effect would be the illocutionary force of the act. Then if the person decides to accept my invitation, this effect of the illocutionary force of the act would be called the perlocutionary force of the act. It has to be noticed that I may or may not have hoped that the person I invited for a lunch would accept my invitation. I just may have invited the person because it is customary in certain situations to do so, and I do not really care about his company. I may just intend, because of some motive, that my act would be recognised as an invitation. If it is recognised as such, this recognition is the illocutionary force of my speech act and I have then carried out my illocutionary intention successfully. But if the person that I hoped to pose an invitation thought that I was only kidding and did not understand that I am really inviting him to stay for a lunch, then I would have failed to carry out my illocutionary intention. The illocutionary force of my act would then be that it made him think that I was joking. If the person decided to join me for a lunch this would be the perlocutionary force of my act, or if he started to laugh at what he thought was a joke then his amusement would be the perlocutionary force, even though I may not have had a corresponding perlocutionary intention. For example, my perlocutionary intention could have been that I intended to get a superior to appreciate the invitation and did not care whether he would or would not accept my invitation.

From another point of view it could be said that it makes sense to ask whether I succeed in persuading someone to appreciate my invitation to stay for a lunch (my perlocutionary intention), or even whether I did make someone understand that I am inviting him to stay for a lunch (the illocutionary force). But it does not make sense to ask if I succeeded in intending (illocutionary) to invite someone to stay for a lunch, or to ask if I did manage to have this illocutionary intention of inviting in my speech act if, according to my best understanding, I did invite the person to stay for a lunch. If I failed to carry out my illocutionary intention of making someone to understand that I

¹²¹ Iain Hampsher-Monk has marked the difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in an illustrative way by referring to dialogue in Shakespeare's play Henry IV:

Glendower: I can call spirits from the vasty deep
Hotspur: Why, so can I, or so can any man;
But will they come when you do call for them?

(pt 1, act III, 1, ll. 53-5.) See Hampsher-Monk 1998c, 43.

am inviting him to stay for a cup of tea, then the illocutionary force of my act would be something like confusion of his mind--if he did not understand me at all--or that he thinks that I am joking. In this case it can be said that I failed to carry out my illocutionary intention as my act failed to be recognised as an invitation, which was meant to be its illocutionary force.¹²²

In the form of questions and answers the differences can be put in the following way. Illocutionary intention is my honest answer if I was asked what I was doing in the piece I wrote. Illocutionary force would be the reader's answer if he was asked what was done in the piece. Perlocutionary intention is my answer to the question how I would like the reader to react to my piece and perlocutionary force is the answer how he reacted to the piece. From the point of view of historiography, to write history of force is to engage oneself somehow in the reception history and to write solely about intentions is more or less to forget about the reception history, though, of course, it may provide instrumental help.

As it should be clear at this point, it is the illocutionary intention that Skinner is interested in when he speaks about intentions, though he is not totally coherent on the matter as above was explained. He actually states that the M3 is equivalent to this concept of intention, which in turn is more or less equivalent to the illocutionary act of the author. To know the M3 of a given piece of work is to know what the writer "may have *meant by* writing it in that particular way".¹²³ Here Skinner writes "*by* writing" instead of "*in* writing" and this may have been a source for some confusion. One has to notice here that "by" is connected in a "particular way" of the writer's writing and not to writing as such. The writing is *in* the text, and is done in a particular way as a means to ridicule or to defend etc. something: the writer is writing in a particular way in a particular piece of text. A writer develops his style or strategy to meet the illocutionary intention he has, and this might tell us about his illocutionary intentions, even if he did not succeed in carrying out her intended perlocutionary act. Finally, we could summarize the relation of intentions and M3 in the following way: to recover the M3 of a given work it is not only necessary to recover the author's illocutionary intentions in writing the text, but it is the same as to recover the M3.

We have now established why Skinner considers that intentions are connected to the meaning of a work, but we have not said what it means to give special attention to intentions. Before developing that argument Skinner makes two preliminary remarks to avoid potential misunderstandings. The first is that he is not claiming that a

¹²² The original example of inviting someone to stay for a lunch is taken from G. H. von Wright's *Logik, filosofi och språk*. See von Wright, G. H. 1971, 220. But here I have developed it further.

¹²³ Skinner 1988b, 76.

historian's whole enterprise is to recover the author's intention(s). It is just one task among others. Furthermore, he states that he has no difficulties of speaking of "a work having a meaning for me which the writer could not have intended".¹²⁴ He is merely saying that this is one of the relevant meanings the work has. Second, Skinner wants to make it clear that he does not think that any explicit statement by the author of a text should be accepted as a final statement of what he was doing. It may well be that these statements should be discounted. The author may be, for example, deceiving him/herself.

After these short remarks, Skinner suggests two general rules for the mission of recovering the M3 of a given work. We have already seen that the connection between (illocutionary) intentions and the M3 is the "closest possible" because they are actually the same. Skinner says then that if the historian hopes to recover these intentions, he has to focus not only on the text, but also on the prevailing conventions because all the texts are (usually) acts of communication, and acts of communication always take place in a certain historical situation. To see what is being done in the act of communication one has to have an idea what (and how) things can conventionally be done in that particular historical situation. This does not mean that it is impossible to overcome the prevailing conventions, to do things nobody has done before. It means that to recognize a move as an innovative move is to recognize that the author is using language innovatively e.g. to recognize that it differs from prevailing conventions. It also seems that in any case, even in innovative cases, authors must to some degree use the prevailing conventions if they care about becoming understood by their contemporaries. Thus, in order to understand textual strategies, and accordingly the illocutionary acts of a given text, a historian has to know about the prevailing conventions of the time and the place the text was written in. Intentions do not manifest themselves automatically simply by reading only a given text, and some special attention is needed to recover intentions: a text must be studied in the framework of prevailing conventions.¹²⁵ It should also be emphasised that illocutionary acts are not necessarily fully determined by the words used in the act. Kent Bach gives an example: imagine a bartender saying that "The bar will be closed in five minutes".¹²⁶ In this utterance the illocutionary act is that the bartender is informing people that the bar *where this is said* (evident in the words) will be closed soon, and there might be another illocutionary act (not evident in the words) that the bartender is urging customers to buy a last round. To notice this, one would have to

¹²⁴ Skinner 1988b, 76.

¹²⁵ This is not only when reading texts from the past. We also recognize the intentions in contemporary texts because we are familiar with the prevailing conventions. This is not to say that we could not make mistakes, but when we get it right, it is largely due to our knowledge of contemporary conventions, though of course, we need to exercise our imagination as well.

¹²⁶ Bach, K. 2007. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry "Speech Acts". Taken from <http://online.sfsu.edu/~kbach/spchacts.html>.

know if this utterance is conventionally used by this particular bartender in this sense or is it just used to indirectly urge the customers to leave the bar as soon as possible. The second rule Skinner suggests is that besides the text and prevailing conventions, the historian should also concentrate on the writer's mental world. By mental world Skinner refers to the belief system that the author could possibly have. It is necessary to get acquainted with the possible empirical beliefs of the author to set some limits of the world to his or her possible intentions. There are some underlying conditions for every intention. One does not intend to do something one believes to be impossible (in principle), for example, intend to act on premises he himself considers to be false. I have emphasised above the critical function of excluding some options of Skinner's programme of recovering possible worlds of intentions by recovering conventions, and of recovering the author's mental world. But it has to be noticed that the function is not only critical, but also heuristic. Even though we are not epistemologically in a position to recognise with absolute certainty anybody's intentions, neither of past actors nor of our contemporaries, because there is no straight access to them, in many cases we are able to get reasonably reliable evidence, although perhaps not decisive in the strict sense of the term, for some interpretation of authorial intentions.

To conclude: when reading Skinner it is important to keep in mind that when he does equate or even reduce 'meaning' to intention or to agency, it is always a specific concept of meaning. Skinner puts this very clearly in the introduction to volume one of *Visions of Politics*: "I mark a strong distinction between what I take to be two separable dimensions of language. One has conventionally been described as the dimension of meaning, the study of sense and reference allegedly attaching to words and sentences. The other is perhaps best described in Austin's terms as the dimension of linguistic action, the study of the range of things that speakers are capable of doing in (and by) the use of words and sentences".¹²⁷ This is the clearest statement on the matter by Skinner, and though on this occasion he does not seem to be using the concept of meaning accordingly to his typology of different meanings (M1, M2 and M3 above), seeming paradoxes can be explained by applying this distinction and keeping in mind that M3 refers to the linguistic action dimension of language.

To avoid misunderstandings at this point, it should be emphasised that Skinner does not think that this special sense of meaning, the M3, is the only legitimate or interesting object of historical studies, and that according to Skinner this is not the only meaning that past events or works have. It is for instance evident that 'conventional meaning', M1, is also always of importance, even though the main interest is on M3. In *Liberty Before Liberalism* Skinner states, that "there are as many kinds of history as there are serious reasons for being interested in the past, and as

¹²⁷ Skinner, 2002a, 3. This is, of course, almost exactly the same what he wrote in Skinner 1996, 7–8.

many different techniques of historical enquiry as there are rational methods of pursuing those interests. Nor do I see any justification for invoking images of core and periphery and privileging some kinds of historical study over others. So I cannot see that there is anything of general interest to be said about what historians should be doing".¹²⁸ So, in this regard, we could call Skinner's attitude methodological pluralism, even though he is himself in his work interested in a particular methodology and meanings.

In relation to anachronisms the relation of meaning and intention is important. First of all, the different senses of 'meaning' must not be confused if we are to judge if a given interpretation is anachronistic. The project of recovering intentions is attached to certain type(s) of meaning(s) and when interested in this meaning in a given work one can make use of practical suggestions by getting acquainted with conventions and mental world of past agents in order to avoid anachronisms. Everything that is said about intentions above is also relevant to most of the anachronistic mythologies in Skinner's typology discussed below, since quite a few of the different mythologies, though not all, are criticisms of interpretations which do not pay attention to authorial intention or intentions.

4.3. CONCEPT AND WORLD RELATION

In *Visions of Politics Vol. 1* Skinner considers the relation between concepts and the world in the article "Interpretation, Rationality and Truth", based on "A Reply to My Critics" from 1988. Skinner makes a cautious remark that "our concepts are not forced upon us by the world" and continues, somewhat more daringly, "but [they] represent what we bring to the world in order to understand it".¹²⁹ After that he makes it clear that he does not have in mind such an idealistic stance that there is no mind-independent world. He means only, in a Putnamian phrase, that observational evidence is always, to some degree, shaped by our conceptual arsenal, by "vocabularies that are used to express concepts"¹³⁰ and that when we come up with concepts they are also part of the world that we are using these concepts to describe that world.

Skinner arrives at these conclusions by discussing the 'concept' of rain and the concept that in Latin is expressed by the word '*imber*', which according to Skinner is the only term in classic Latin that can be used to express a fall, rain or shower.¹³¹ The

¹²⁸ Skinner 1998, 108-109. For a more extensive account of Skinner's position, see Skinner, 2002b.

¹²⁹ Skinner, 2002c, 46.

¹³⁰ Skinner, 2002c, 46.

¹³¹ See Skinner, 2002c, 45.

situation could be that while a Latin-speaking observer might describe what he observes as *'imber'*, the Briton, who takes this as a reference to rain or a shower, in the face of the same evidence, would deny this judgment and claim that it is only a faintest drizzle they are experiencing. The lesson to notice is to acknowledge how employing concepts is always to “appraise and classify our experience from a particular point of view”,¹³² from the point of view of particular distinctions that we make. According to Skinner this means that “what we experience and report will accordingly be what is brought to our attention by the range of concepts we possess and the nature of the discriminations they enable us to make”.¹³³ Here, I think, Skinner too easily abandons his usual exercise of caution; his comment seems to be a little too determinist. I would say that if we are to take this statement at its face value, it is in contradiction with Skinner’s ideas in the same essay on how we are able to understand unfamiliar modes of rationality and his ideas on understanding or learning foreign languages or language games, presented later in the same essay and also discussed in “Meaning and Understanding”. First, if he followed his earlier statements, he would conclude that this is only our initial condition. Of course, after some reflection, we could come up with new ways of reporting, and also most likely new conscious ways of experiencing the same observational evidence. We are by no means nailed to our present concepts and present ability to perform certain kinds of discriminations. Second, I feel that it is not totally unusual to have experiences which are so strange that we feel that none of our concepts or discriminations can do justice to them, and we simply wonder what they are all about. These remarks stand, even though Skinner is actually only trying to make the correct point that there is no route from “observational evidence to one determinate judgment”.¹³⁴ And, I suspect, that Skinner would accept my points, and that the over-determinism mentioned above is only a temporary lapse of concentration.

Skinner has written more extensively on this matter from a particular angle of perspective of conceptual and social change. In “Idea of Cultural Lexicon” Skinner poses the following general question: “what kinds of knowledge and awareness we can hope to acquire about our social world through studying the vocabulary we use to describe and appraise it”,¹³⁵ and a particular sub-question which deals even more closely with the relation between a concept and the world: “in what sense are [...] linguistic disagreements also disagreements about the social world itself?”¹³⁶

¹³² Skinner, 2002c, 44.

¹³³ Skinner, 2002c, 44.

¹³⁴ Skinner, 2002c, 44.

¹³⁵ Skinner 2002i, 171. At the beginning of the essay however, he poses a different question: “What can we hope to learn about the processes of social innovation and legitimation by studying the key words we use to construct and appraise the social world itself.” These are clearly different questions though Skinner seems to suggest that they are the same. Nevertheless he does try to answer both in the essay.

¹³⁶ Skinner, 2002c, 163.

Skinner's views are easier to understand if we keep in mind that he is a proponent of holism, in the style of Quine, Davidson and the late Wittgenstein.¹³⁷ It is regrettable that Skinner does not explicate his holism in detail, but only makes some remarks on the topic. A preliminary, cautious general formulation of this holism would probably go like this: particular words stand in relation to the whole vocabulary and to a broader network of beliefs which relates back to words. In other words, changes in the meanings of words are made in relation to the whole net of other words, i.e. changes in parts of the vocabulary are also apt to cause changes in other parts, especially in their counterparts or antonyms. This also goes for beliefs and between beliefs, which form a part of the social world, and words that are used to describe the social world, to appraise actions or deeds, etc.

Skinner's holism becomes evident when he criticizes Raymond Williams for not noticing the radical nature of disputes over the meaning of a given term. Williams notices only the internal changes in the words that make up the term's definition, while Skinner insists that if a change in the definition of a term like 'art' takes place, then there will be a whole series of other changes. This is because 'art' gains its full meaning from its place in the whole conceptual scheme: in Skinner's words, "traditionally, the concept of art has been connected with an ideal of workmanship, has been opposed to the 'merely useful', has been employed as an antonym for nature, and so on".¹³⁸ If now any, or almost any, object that we find can count as a work of art we simply disconnect links in the chain. Furthermore, as this chain is a constituent part of how we divide or demarcate an area of our cultural experiences, it is a change of greater significance than an internal change of a concept made by replacing some word with others in a definition of a term.

This holism connects individual concepts to a larger conceptual and social field. Moreover, in order to completely understand an individual concept one should be able to relate the given concept to certain other concepts and social phenomena. This means that in practice a totally perfect understanding of a given concept is impossible, because to understand a given concept, one would also have to understand the related concepts and to understand them, one should understand concepts related to them and so on, not mention the social role(s) all these concepts play in the social world.

The relevance of all this to anachronisms is twofold. First, to mark changes or discontinuities within conceptual history is not just to mark changes in definitions but also to clarify how the concepts relate to world and other concepts, especially antonyms and counterparts. Skinner's three-level model of conceptual disagreements,

¹³⁷ For an explicit statement on his holism see Skinner 2002a, 4. See also 2002c, 43-44 (beliefs); 2002g, 142 (action); 2002c, 165 (Williams's lack of holism).

¹³⁸ Skinner, 2002a, 164.

discussed below, will throw some additional light on this. The second relevant feature is that already at this stage one should notice the importance of studying conceptual history. To study conceptual history is to explore how the agents of a given time classified the world, what kind of demarcations they used to describe their experiences, and so on. In the following two sections this feature will become more evident.

4.4. CONCEPT AND SOCIAL WORLD –RELATION

The essay in which Skinner first discusses the relation of concepts and the social world at length is the article “The Idea of a Cultural Lexicon”. This article was originally published in 1979, which Skinner has revised at twice. The first revised version was published as “Language and Social Change” in 1980 and was re-revised in 1988. In the following I shall explore the most recent version, published in 2002, with the original title. This is also the article that Skinner himself has described as by far the best of his philosophical essays.¹³⁹

Skinner distinguishes three different levels at which conceptual disagreements over “‘persuasive’ terms” have taken place:¹⁴⁰ He is mainly speaking of adjectives, but I see no reason why this would not go at least for certain nouns, such as ‘art’ or ‘science’. These disagreements could take place individually, but probably more often go together.

1. Disagreement about the meaning (sense).
2. Disagreement about the criteria for applying the word (reference).
3. Disagreement about what range of speech acts the word can be used to perform (normative load).

The first level is disagreement about what a certain term means more or less literally speaking, how it should be defined in dictionaries and so on, the “nature and range of the criteria in virtue of which the word [...] is standardly applied”, e.g. to know how to mark this term “off from similar and contrasting adjectives”.¹⁴¹ This is very much about the M1 I described above. It is the level in which people are most likely to agree, even though it might need some negotiation. An interesting example of a change of this kind, which Skinner borrows from Raymond Williams, is when changes in theory (or theoretical changes) may cause a change in the meaning of a

¹³⁹ See Skinner, 2002l, 61.

¹⁴⁰ See Skinner, 2002a, 162.

¹⁴¹ Skinner, 2002a, 161.

term. Williams' example is 'the unconsciousness' of which meaning has changed during the course when new theories of 'unconsciousness' have been formulated.¹⁴²

The second type of disagreement is about relating a defined term to the world. To use Skinner's example, we might agree on a dictionary definition of the term 'courageous', but we might disagree if a certain act fulfils criteria of the definition. Somebody might think that it would be courageous to attack a man pointing a gun at you with bare hands, while others might think that it would be simply stupid. Some might think that it shows courage to keep smiling while suffering great pain, though others might think that there is nothing courageous in pretending. All of these parties could, at the same time, agree on the first level of potential disagreements (meaning as dictionary definition) over the word 'courage', for example, in the following way: an act can be described as courageous when the actor is doing something that involves some kind of danger or possibility of losing something valuable, and he is aware of this possibility, is performing the act voluntarily, is facing dangers heedfully, and is aware of the nature of the situation, and so on. In this case different parties might disagree on the reference of a term. We could also take 'democracy' as an example. The term 'democracy' has a strong positive evaluative power. Nowadays probably most leaders of different states wish to describe his or her state as a democracy. Even when such differently managed states are called democracies, the question is not, at least always, about trying to give a new definition to the term 'democracy'. In many cases they might argue about the application of the term, and its reference, and it seems that discussions of this sort are relatively new. The reference was more or less clear, or uncontested, for a very long time. Only the recent success of democracy has given rise to discussion about how to relate the term to the world, and to disagreements on which existing states it can refer to.¹⁴³

Perhaps it should be noted that Skinner does literally say that to be able to apply the term in question "correctly", to grasp its "correct use",¹⁴⁴ one has to be aware of the standard dimension of the term. It would be more in line with his thought to use the terms 'conventionally' and 'conventional use', but it is enough for us to remember that Skinner does not think that there could be *the* correct way of applying a term, especially not any appraisive terms, and that these "correct uses" are what the disagreements are concerned with.

The first two levels are disagreements on the term's sense and reference in the classic sense. The third level of disagreements is characteristic especially of evaluative terms and is very closely connected with the meaning type M3. Basically, to use a term one

¹⁴² Skinner, 2002a, 163.

¹⁴³ See e.g. Hanson 1989.

¹⁴⁴ Skinner 2002a, 161.

has to know if the term, for example ‘courageous’, can be used to mock people, approve their actions, or perhaps even to praise them. But we do have to remember that changes may take also place on this level, which is about how the concept is evaluated: what can be done with it. Again ‘democracy’ presents us with a good example. As just mentioned, today ‘democracy’ is a term that everybody seems to appreciate and almost all the leaders of the world say that they are in favour of it. But it has not always been so. A look at the classical Greek philosophers tells another story. One could say that there was a contest over the range of speech acts that could be covered with the concept of democracy. Plato, for example, was using ‘democracy’ as a term as an abuse; In fact one does not have to go two thousand years back to illuminate this point: democracy “was regarded as a dangerous and unstable form of politics” until the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁵ Or we could take Skinner’s own example of this kind of change: the term ‘patriot’ underwent a threefold change from a word of appraisal to abuse and back to appraisal again. It was first a term of appraisal, but as enemies of England’s rulers in the eighteenth century insisted that their actions were true to the constitution and therefore ‘patriotic’, the result was a short confusion of meaning after which ‘patriot’ came to mean “a factious disturber of the government”. But subsequently, by gradual adoption in party politics, it became a term of praise again.¹⁴⁶ One further note needs to be made: we should remember that the same concept can also have a different evaluative content during the same period of time, depending on the context in which it is used. ‘Liberal’ and ‘leftist’ or ‘right-winger’ are good examples of concepts which during the same period have been used both to praise and to mock people depending on the context. If a left-winger describes Mr. Smith as ‘leftist’ it is very likely to be taken as a compliment, but if a right-wing politician tells us that “Mr. Smith is a leftist” he is very unlikely to be praising Mr. Smith.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that the form of change Skinner is most interested in belongs to the second and third level. His concept of innovative ideologist refers to a political actor that skilfully uses ‘rhetorical re-description’ to pursue his or her own ends. An innovative ideologist may for example use a normative term in contexts that in which it would not conventionally be used, aiming to persuade the audience that the term can actually or properly be used in such circumstances. As an example Skinner mentions the special rhetorical trope called *paradiastole*. *Paradiastole* means to describe a certain act using evaluative terms that suit the ends of the person describing the act: a murder can thus be described as a courageous or a brutal act. It is the *moral nature* of the act that is described differently by different groups, and not the act itself. This can also be an act intended to overcome the prevailing conventions,

¹⁴⁵ See Hanson 1989, 68.

¹⁴⁶ See Skinner 2002a 167-168. See also Skinner Q. 2002c and for a longer-term history of the concept of patriotism see Dietz, M. 1989.

though at the same time it takes advantage of them (and certainly does not intend to abandon all conventions).

In “Moral Principles and Social Change” (2002) Skinner reflects on the linguistic or rhetorical techniques that innovative ideologists can use to pursue after their own ends. The case here is that the innovative ideologist tries to legitimize social actions that are considered questionable by applying or inventing favourable vocabulary when describing them. He tries to get opponents to accept this vocabulary as a correct description of the actions. Skinner suggests that what the innovative ideologist is after here are (linguistic) illocutionary effects. So, according to Skinner, to achieve “effects such as evincing, expressing or soliciting approval or disapproval of the actions they describe” is a linguistic matter, while the question whether they succeeded in persuading “their hearers or readers to adopt some novel point of the view” is a historical question concerning perlocutionary effects.¹⁴⁷ This could be summarised in the following phrase: the innovative ideologist uses linguistic means to achieve political/social ends.¹⁴⁸

Skinner mentions two different *strategies*. The first of the two different strategies can be carried out by four different *tactics* which take several sub-forms:

1 *Strategy*: manipulating the speech act potential of certain evaluative terms

1.1. *Tactic*: introduce and place new favourable terms

1.1.1. Crude version (coin new terms as descriptions of allegedly new principles and then apply them)

1.1.2. Sophisticated version (transforming a neutral term into a favourable term, usually by metaphorical extension, and applying it)

1.2. *Tactic*: varying speech act potential from an unfavourable to a favourable

1.2.1. Usual version (using an unfavourable term in a neutralising way)

1.2.2. Dramatic version (reversing the speech potential of an unfavourable term)

1.3. *Tactic*: mirror of 1.1.

1.4. *Tactic*: mirror of 1.2.

2. *Strategy*: manipulating the criteria for applying an existing set of commendatory terms to the social world.

¹⁴⁷ Skinner 2002h, 149.

¹⁴⁸ Here Skinner speaks of perlocutionary and illocutionary effects (not of intentions, force or act) which are again something new for his theory of speech acts. In my opinion he would have done better to speak of illocutionary and perlocutionary action in which innovative ideologist hopes to be successful.

The first strategy consists of using vocabulary that is normally used to express disapproval, in a neutral or even in an approving manner. The aim is to manipulate the speech act potential and to “challenge your opponent to reconsider the feelings of disapproval they normally express when they use the terms concerned”.¹⁴⁹ The second strategy is simpler and according to Skinner more significant. It “consists of manipulating the criteria for *applying* an existing set of commendatory terms”,¹⁵⁰ i.e. to preserve the term as it is and to make a change in what it can be used to refer to. The aim is to get your opponent to admit that a number of appraisive terms can actually be applied to the behaviour that they consider questionable. The aim is to make the opponent admit or see that the criteria for applying these appraisive terms or description are present in this apparently questionable behaviour or actions. Skinner’s example of this strategy is the attempt, in early modern commercial life, to show that commercial activities represent providence and that the commitment needed to carry out these activities is religious in nature (rigorous and severe) in the way that these concepts are understood in Protestant Christianity. The first strategy can be carried out by four different tactics of which each consists of two versions.

The first of the different tactics of the first strategy is to try to introduce new and favourable terms into discussion. It can be divided into two versions. The first version is a “crude” effort just to come up with new favourable terms and then “coin new terms as the description of allegedly new principles, and then apply them as descriptions of whatever questionable actions you wish to commend”.¹⁵¹ Skinner takes an example from Max Weber: the word ‘frugality’. It acquired widespread use at the end of the sixteenth century precisely at the moment when approval for this kind of behaviour became widely sought. The second version of the first tactic is based on the idea of extending a meaning of a neutral term into a favourable term and then applying it to the questioned action or behaviour. Skinner’s example is again from early-modern commercial life when metaphorical uses of the words ‘discerning’ and ‘penetrating’ made their way into a description of a group of talents that many actors had a reason to defend and wished to be generally commended.

The second tactic consists of efforts “to vary the range of speech acts usually performed with existing unfavourable terms”.¹⁵² There are two alternative ways to perform it. The first and more usual version of the second tactic is to try to neutralize the meaning of a term that is conventionally used to express disapproval. Skinner’s example is the change in the use of the word ‘ambition’ in the early modern period. It changed from a negative word that expressed disapproval to a neutral word. The

¹⁴⁹ Skinner 2002h, 151.

¹⁵⁰ Skinner 2002h, 153.

¹⁵¹ Skinner 2002h, 151.

¹⁵² Skinner 2002h, 151.

second alternative of the second tactic is to aim to “reverse the speech act potential of an existing unfavourable term”.¹⁵³ Skinner’s example is the history of the words ‘shrew’ and ‘shrewdness’. Both terms were basically terms of disapproval in the seventeenth century but in the course of time they came to be used as terms of approbation, especially in commercial discourse good sense. As the third and fourth types of tactics for carrying out the first strategy Skinner mentions mirroring the first and second types of tactics: changing the neutral or positive terms into terms of disapproval or coming up with new terms of disapproval. As already stated, the second strategy is about manipulating the criteria of applying a commendatory term. Skinner does not make any further distinctions within the second strategy.

The three-level model of conceptual disagreements will be applied in the final chapters of this thesis. It provides a model which can be used to analyse conceptual continuities and discontinuities (or similarities and dissimilarities). The next section will provide more evidence on the close connection between linguistic and social changes, and thus demonstrates the role of conceptual history in avoiding anachronisms.

4.5. SOCIAL AND CONCEPTUAL CHANGE

We may ask now if the changes that these conceptual disagreements cause are only linguistic changes or if they are, to a greater or lesser degree, also changes in the social world? We have three different types of conceptual changes to consider.

The first is the disagreement about meaning (M1), i.e. about the criteria for applying a word. Skinner uses the term ‘art’ and Duchamp as his example. As is well known, Duchamp took ordinary objects and presented them as works of arts, which were then exhibited in art galleries. This caused a discussion about the concept of art. Critics either accepted them as works of art or denied them this status on the grounds of their definition of art. Those who accepted these works as art relied on a definition according to which objects that “help us to sharpen our awareness and extend our appreciation of everyday things” do count as works of art. Others insisted that we cannot just call something art: a work of art is something that has to be created on purpose. The linguistic level is easy to spot, but is this at the same time a social dispute? What if one side wins? Will the prospective linguistic change be a social change as well? Skinner’s answer is “yes”. This is because depending on the outcome of this dispute, a range of objects may or may not be elevated onto a new higher class called ‘art’ and be treated accordingly. This marks a potential change in social beliefs

¹⁵³ Skinner 2002h, 152.

and behaviour. It is also worth remembering that what was said about theories and how new theories of, for example, unconsciousness may cause a change in the meaning (M1) of the term ‘unconsciousness’.

The second case of conceptual disagreements was about how to relate the term to the world. Do the given circumstances yield criteria which allow the standard conventional use of a given term? Skinner claims that this type of dispute can also lead both to linguistic change and to social change. If one agrees that the term ‘exploitation’ is a proper description (i.e. circumstances yield criteria by virtue of the case) of middle-class mothers’ condition in the present time, one will perceive this piece of social reality in a different light than if one considers that the condition of these mothers does not meet the criteria of ‘being exploited’. Skinner emphasizes that this potential dispute has a different character than the previous one, and points out that these two have often been mixed up. To illuminate this he takes Stuart Hampshire’s example of a Marxist describing a certain liberal’s actions as “political” to which the liberal himself would not have attached political significance. Hampshire thinks that this dispute is about meaning (M1) of the term ‘political’, but Skinner claims that if this were so, there would be nothing to argue about. It is indeed important for the Marxist to argue that according to the liberal’s own definition his actions are political. So, the Marxist’s mission is to convince the liberal and others that ‘political’ in this exact meaning (M1) can be applied to the action(s) in question; that circumstances open up this possibility, although in the case of failure or only partial success, it is possible that the efforts will instead result in a change of the first kind. The aim is to strive for a new social perception and awareness and not a new definition or criterion of the term ‘political’.¹⁵⁴ Depending on the term in question the social change might that new phenomena will receive respect or meet with criticism, i.e. their social status will change.

The third level of disagreements, which concern the range of speech acts that can be performed using a given term, also has a social dimension. This level is straightforwardly connected to the social world because, in general, action takes place within the social world and actions are apt to have some effects on their environment. It could, perhaps, even be argued that the potential changes are mainly of a social nature and are linguistic to a certain degree. As we have already seen, there are several ways of proceeding in these kinds of disputes. For example, if we disagree with the appraisive use of a given term, we may just stop using it. We may try to make it clear that we are using it only in a descriptive and not in an evaluative sense.¹⁵⁵ We may even try to reverse the evaluative power of a term by making it

¹⁵⁴ See Skinner 2002a, 165-167.

¹⁵⁵ This is a rather challenging effort since the evaluative load people attach to terms does not change on command, and using some terms that have conventionally strong evaluative power carry these

contextually clear that we are performing an opposite action to what is conventionally performed with it (a familiar example of these kinds of disputes is the term 'liberal' and how it is used by different political persuasions on the left and on the right).

At the end of "The Idea of Cultural Lexicon" Skinner sketches out his view on these questions concerning the relation of language and the social reality on the general level. He opposes the metaphor of language as a mirror of social reality and the idea that the relationship of those two is (only) contingent and external. According to Skinner, "it is true that our social practices help to bestow meaning on our social vocabulary. But it is equally true that our social vocabulary helps to constitute the character of those practices" and that at some point our social vocabulary and our social fabric "mutually prop each other up".¹⁵⁶ He even takes under consideration Charles Taylor's suggestion that the distinction between social reality and the language of description of that social reality is artificial. The second general conclusion that Skinner draws is directed against the reduction of social changes to linguistic changes and vice versa. Skinner's conclusion could probably be best called dialectical: if there are any causal ties between social language and social reality, the causal arrows may point in both directions. To grasp a normative vocabulary is to take grasp social constraints on conduct and vice versa.

We have so far summarised what Skinner says about linguistic and social change. Before moving on to the next topic we should, however, make one remark. Skinner's explication suffers from one minor drawback. In this discussion he does not distinguish between illocutionary and perlocutionary performatives. It would, however, be important to note that an illocutionary act may not have any effects in the social world at all, since it is in the text or manifests only in how the listener or the reader will understand what was said or written, and it is not dependent on any further reactions or effects. It is only perlocutionary force that causes change in social values and attitudes, if there is going to be any. Innovative ideologists aim to have some kind of effect, response, etc. and thus for them it is the perlocutionary act and force that are of importance, though for us to understand what they meant to do in their acts we also need to concentrate on their illocutionary intentions.

Especially in this section, but also in the preceding ones, I have hopefully managed to demonstrate that to study conceptual history is not only to investigate simply the 'history of linguistics' but also social and political history. Concerning anachronism,

connotations very persistently. It is also questionable whether terms of any complexity and references to social practices can ever be used without making evaluative choices. However, Skinner agrees with Raymond Williams, who claims that e.g. the terms 'culture' and 'civilisation' have undergone this kind of change which was brought about by social anthropology.

¹⁵⁶ Skinner 2002a, 174.

these sections remind us that when tracking down conceptual discontinuities, and thus possible points of anachronisms, there may be changes on quite a number of levels. The number of different levels, and the social and conceptual connections that may break in the course of time is probably much higher than those pointed in this section. But these remarks do serve as a starting point.

4.6. CONVENTIONS, LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC ACTION

Skinner emphasizes the importance of understanding the prevailing conventions when trying to make sense of utterances and avoiding the danger of anachronism; I have already said a few words about this position when discussing other themes. But let us take one more look at the matter. One of the earliest occasions on which he discusses the role of understanding conventions in studying history is his article “Conventions and the Understanding of Speech Acts” (1970). In this article, as well as elsewhere, Skinner also discusses the matter on the synchronic level of communication. But from the point of view of historical studies the level of non-synchronic communication is more important. Non-synchronic communication means a situation when one is trying to understand an utterance that was not uttered in order to communicate it to oneself; e.g. a historian or perhaps an anthropologist trying to understand an utterance by an agent who did not intend to communicate it to her. It is also worth keeping in mind is, that Skinner, even though occasionally taking steps in other directions, is mainly interested in understanding the illocutionary intentions of agents and the role that conventions play in identifying these intentions.

Skinner asserts that speech acts are essentially conventional and accordingly the understanding of conventions is a necessary condition for an understanding of all types of speech acts.¹⁵⁷ The possibility of understanding an intention is also dependent on the use of existing governing conventions. This means that even linguistic innovations, if they are intended to be understood, have to “take the form of extension or criticism of some existing attitude or project which is already convention governed” because otherwise it would have “no chance of being understood”.¹⁵⁸ One of the dangers of not being acquainted with the conventions surrounding the act of communication is that one is trying to understand, especially in the case of non-synchronic communication, the apparent familiarity of concepts and conventions one recognizes. It is a danger, because this familiarity may well be misleading and thus a possible cause of anachronistic interpretation. This is, of course, the same theme that Skinner pursues in “Meaning and Understanding” when discussing parochialism (see

¹⁵⁷ See e.g. Skinner 1970, 133, 135.

¹⁵⁸ Skinner 1970, 135.

below). In this article he also formulates a warning very similar to the famous one in “Meaning and Understanding”: “The danger that A at t2 will ‘understand’ S at t1 to have intended to communicate something which S at t1 might not or even could not have been in a position at t1 to have had as his intention”.¹⁵⁹ The general idea is that the S’s speech act should make sense at the moment t1 and to judge this A should be aware of the criteria of rationality and the governing linguistic and social conventions¹⁶⁰ that are available to S at t1. Otherwise it is impossible to know if A’s interpretation of S’s speech act would be understandable at t1 in general, and acceptable to S as a description of what he was trying to communicate. The linguistic and social conventions can provide an interpretational framework that tells the historian what speech acts can or could be standardly done by a given set of concepts or terms at the time and place of the speech act.¹⁶¹

Skinner seems to emphasize the limiting nature that conventions have regarding communication, and he has been criticised for not taking into account the fact that someone might come up with new ways of communicating or breaking the “boundaries of established languages”. However, in “Analysis of Political Thought and Action” he made a distinction between being limited by conventions and being limited only to following conventions.¹⁶² Skinner claims that his ‘conventional approach’ offers the only way to notice when and where these changes or appearance of novelties took place.

By emphasising the importance of conventions, Skinner criticizes the interpretational practice of concentrating on just reading a given text over and over again. According to Skinner, in order to arrive at a historical understanding of a text, it is important to see what kind of relations the text “bears to [...] existing conventions”.¹⁶³ If we take this formulation seriously it could help us understand Skinner’s position for here the connection between the text and the prevailing conventions is addressed in terms of a ‘relation’ of which the precise nature is left open. For example, according to Skinner, Machiavelli’s *The Prince* was a deliberate attack on prevailing moral convictions in the “advice-books to princes” genre, and this becomes evident only by relating Machiavelli’s advice to the prince to the social conventions and the conventions of the literary genre. The status of Machiavelli’s book as an attack would not be recognised without the knowledge of these conventions because – as was typical at the time –

¹⁵⁹ Skinner 1970, 136. The famous formula of “Meaning and Understanding”: “No agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done” will be discussed below.

¹⁶⁰ Besides linguistic conventions social conventions also matter, because utterances are treated as (social) action. The close relation of linguistic and the social world is explained above.

¹⁶¹ Skinner 1988c, 107.

¹⁶² See Skinner 1988c, 106.

¹⁶³ Skinner 1988d, 95.

there are no footnotes or other explicit references to the books that Machiavelli discusses.

The importance of understanding conventions perhaps becomes even more evident in the case when the author of a text ignores some convention. Skinner illustrates this by presenting an example from John Locke. In his *Two Treatises of Government* Locke makes no appeal to the “ancient English constitution”. For his contemporaries this was a striking feature because at the time it was conventional to appeal to “the alleged prescriptive force of” the ancient constitution.¹⁶⁴ This then would hint that Locke did not consider this conventional line of argumentation important or even that he considered it bad. For a historian living a few hundred years later it would be impossible to notice this just by reading the book, without knowing the prevailing conventions of Locke’s time.

The importance of prevailing conventions of the time and the place in which a given text is written should now be clear. The growing dangers of anachronisms are evident if the interpretative work is based solely on reading the text over and over again without paying attention to the surrounding conventions.

4.6. TRANSLATION AND TRANSLATABILITY

The translation or translatability of languages is one of the main themes in the philosophy of language, and it is indeed a theme that is directly relevant to historical studies. It is no coincidence that idea of the historian as the translator of old languages is sometimes taken up by historians. In the article “Interpretation, Rationality and Truth” Skinner comments on Martin Hollis’s contention that “if we can not ‘pair’ the terms used by alien peoples with ‘counterparts’ in our own language, then we cannot embark on the task of translating their utterances. But if we cannot be sure how to translate what they say, we can never hope to identify what they believe”.¹⁶⁵ According to Skinner this means that translatability is taken to mark intelligibility and that the possibility of translation thus becomes the main issue of the social sciences. Skinner tackles this argument by first dealing with John Gunnell’s strong argument that we can learn new languages only because we already know a language, and judges this to be false since, if this held true, then we would not be able to learn our mother tongue. Skinner continues by claiming that also the form of the translatability argument that Hollis defends is mistaken. Skinner explains that even if we did not have a counterpart for terms from an alien language, we may still understand their

¹⁶⁴ Skinner, 2000, xiv.

¹⁶⁵ Skinner 2002c, 46.

uses and be able to “find out what discriminations they are employed to make” and by doing this we can usually “hope to understand the applications even of those terms which remain wholly resistant to translation”.¹⁶⁶ This seems to me very plausible, though Skinner could have added that we learn uses and applications of new words all the time without translating them into the vocabulary that we have already mastered. For example, this may happen when, for the first time, we come across a term that has already belonged for some time to our mother tongue, or perhaps for a long time but has vanished from the sight for a period, or when a totally new term is coined. For any student of philosophy, both of these cases are very familiar.

Skinner admits that it may well be the case that we cannot fully explain certain terms of an alien language to others in our mother tongue, and to that extent translations remain indeterminate. However, he agrees with Quine that the conclusion is not to give up our efforts of understanding, but to give up the “quest for ‘meanings’ in such an atomistic sense”.¹⁶⁷ The practical advice for a historian that follows from this is that the historian should never assume that “the task of explicating an alien concept can be reduced to that of finding a counterpart in his or her own language for the term that expresses it”.¹⁶⁸ The historian’s task is about learning different styles of reasoning, and not only about translating them. Skinner gives an example of the problems by referring to Machiavelli’s term ‘*virtù*’. Some commentators have complained that Machiavelli is using the term *virtù* in very many different meanings, that *virtù* has not a one fixed meaning in Machiavelli’s writings: sometimes Machiavelli seems to use it in a traditional Christian sense; but at other times he describes wicked men as *virtuosi*, which the Christian tradition could not accept. According to Skinner, this critical line of commentaries is mistaken because it is supposed that there should be a modern counterpart for *virtù* in modern English. Skinner maintains that Machiavelli is using the term with “perfect consistency”, but Machiavelli’s use does not have a simple counterpart in modern English. Machiavelli is using the term “if and only if he wished to refer to just those qualities, whether moral or otherwise, that he took to be most conducive to military and political success”.¹⁶⁹ This is Skinner’s paraphrase of Machiavelli’s term *virtù*. It is not a simple translation into a corresponding English term, but an effort to track down its meaning “within an extensive network of beliefs, the filiations of which must be fully traced if the place of any one element within the structure is to be properly understood”.¹⁷⁰ This last statement is of course also an expression of Skinner’s semantic holism, which was already touched upon above, but from the perspective of translatability it

¹⁶⁶ Skinner 2002c, 46, 47.

¹⁶⁷ Skinner 2002c, 47.

¹⁶⁸ Skinner 2002c, 47.

¹⁶⁹ Skinner 2002c, 48.

¹⁷⁰ Skinner 2002c, 49.

means that when translating a term the translator has to be sensitive to the relations that the term carries to e.g. a network of beliefs, since the supposed counterpart in the object language could only make sense in a different network of beliefs. In the case of Machiavelli and *virtù* it is, according to Skinner, clear that Machiavelli's use of the term does not make sense within the Christian network of beliefs and it follows that in a Christian network it does not have a counterpart.

Skinner offers another, perhaps more illuminating, example of the problems of translatability. The source is again Machiavelli but the term is '*repubblica*'. There is a seeming confusion in Machiavelli's *Discorsi* when he first states that liberty is possible only in the *repubblica* but then claims that the Romans did live in liberty under the early kings. According to Skinner this problem is due to the expectation that the term *repubblica* has a counterpart in modern English, namely the term *republic*. But Machiavelli does not use the term in the sense of modern English's *republic*. His term denotes "any form of government under which the laws may be said to foster the common good".¹⁷¹ So, if the king maintains laws that serve the common good for Machiavelli, it is an instance of a *repubblica*.

The question of translatability stands in straightforward relation to the question of anachronism. The expectation that modern languages have counterparts for the terms from older languages, and networks of beliefs, can be a source of anachronistic errors. Because it is not always possible to translate old languages directly into modern ones, it might also be a good idea to give up the metaphor of the historian as essentially a translator, and substitute it with the suggestion that the historian's job is more like that of a foreign language teacher.

4.7. RATIONALITY AND TRUTH

Skinner does not have a general theory of rationality or a definition of truth; his views are more like particular perspectives on these grandiose concepts.¹⁷² His questions concerning these concepts come from the historian's point of view: should the historian consider the question of truth of the past beliefs she is investigating, and what kind of role does rationality have when explaining beliefs? How can it be explained that such great minds as Aristotle and Jean Bodin held views that seem very strange. Aristotle believed e.g. that "bodies change quality whenever they change

¹⁷¹ Skinner 2002c, 55.

¹⁷² Skinner also states that "Having gestured at the concept of rationality, I ought to stress that I intend nothing very grand or precise by that much abused term" and "My attempt to construe the concept in an informal way is indebted to Putnam". Skinner 2002e, 31 and fn. 22.

place”,¹⁷³ and Bodin believed in the existence of witches and that they are “in league with the devil”. According to Skinner, we should try to find a sympathetic and non-anachronistic explanation.

Some philosophers have derived from Donald Davidson’s theory of radical interpretation the notion that when interpreting people’s beliefs we should always assume that people hold true beliefs, because otherwise it would be impossible even to describe what we are to explain.¹⁷⁴ According to Skinner, Davidson’s view, that “charity is forced on us; if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters”,¹⁷⁵ has sometimes been taken too literally (even by Davidson himself). Even though this might be a good working hypothesis, during an inquiry we might begin to consider, for example, Bodin’s belief in witchcraft to be a false belief, and yet still understand what he is saying when he writes about demons and witches, even though we might have to “reassure” ourselves “at various points that he is still talking about witches”.¹⁷⁶

Skinner also wishes to keep separate the question of the truth of a belief and the explanation why someone holds a belief, even in cases when a belief is obviously true.¹⁷⁷ When it comes to explaining obviously false beliefs, Skinner rejects the insistence that they should be explained in terms of “social function” or “psychological pressure” or a “lapse of rationality,” in favour of considering if at the time it might have been perfectly rational to hold those beliefs that we now consider to be “manifestly false”.¹⁷⁸

Though Skinner insists on being careful and not trying to come up with one final and universal definition of rationality, he goes on to describe rational beliefs as suitable beliefs to be held true in the circumstances in which the actors holding those beliefs are or were living: “a rational belief will thus be one that an agent has attained by some accredited process of reasoning. Such a process will in turn be one that, according to prevailing norms of epistemic rationality, may be said to give the agent good grounds for supposing [...] that the belief in question is true”.¹⁷⁹ The distinctive feature of rational persons is that they will be concerned “to view their own views

¹⁷³ Skinner 2002e, 28. Bodin’s beliefs are expressed in his *La Demonomanie des Sorciers* (1595) and for Aristotle beliefs see Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). If they really held these beliefs can be disputed, but the question here is a general one: how can great minds hold beliefs that we regard as silly?

¹⁷⁴ Skinner mentions Pettit and Macdonald. See Macdonald & Pettit 1981.

¹⁷⁵ Davidson 2006, 207

¹⁷⁶ Skinner 2002e, 30.

¹⁷⁷ The idea that true beliefs do not need further explanations is propagated e.g. by Pettit and Macdonald. see Macdonald and Pettit 1984

¹⁷⁸ Skinner 2002e, 31, for views Skinner opposes see Macdonald & Pettit 1981, 34 and 42.

¹⁷⁹ Skinner 2002e, 31.

critically”, that is, to have an interest in consistency, and an interest in justifying their beliefs by “considering the degree to which they may be said to fit with each other and with perceptual experience”.¹⁸⁰ However, Skinner concludes cautiously, stating that the relation between the ideal of rationality and “practices embodying it seem too complex and open-ended to be captured in the form of an algorithm”.¹⁸¹ So, again Skinner is sceptical about coming up with a single definition or criterion that would sum up the concept of rationality.

This leads to the idea that to judge if a belief is rational, one will have to take look at the ‘circumstances’ in which the belief is held true, and the truth value and the rationality of a given belief should be kept separate. Skinner takes up the belief in witches to illuminate his point. If one straightforwardly considers that since the belief in witches is false and thus not rational in *any circumstances*, one rules out a kind of explanation that could give a rational explanation for such a belief. Skinner considers the sixteenth century peasants’ belief in the existence of witches, and states that in the sixteenth century it was widely accepted (and manifestly held to be rational) that the Bible was God’s word or was directly inspired by the word of God. Since the Bible affirms the existence of witches and condemns them, a disbelief in witches would have been to discount God’s word. Skinner asks: “What could have been more dangerously irrational than that?”¹⁸² The first moral of this is that one should not consider *a priori* that the beliefs we now hold to be manifestly false and would consider irrational, were held to be irrational at the place and time that we are judging. The second moral is that by taking such a stance in advance it may mean that the historian bypasses “a range of questions about the mental world of the peasants which it may be indispensable to answer if their beliefs and behaviour are to be satisfactorily understood”.¹⁸³ Thus the historian’s job is to “uncover the prevailing norms for the acquisition and justification of beliefs in that particular society” and then examine the beliefs “in the light of those norms themselves”.¹⁸⁴ It is important to notice that

¹⁸⁰ Skinner 2002e, 32. It should be noted that “perceptual experience” is not a reference to the positivist notion of direct observational evidence as basis for justifying beliefs. This Skinner denies explicitly. See *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Skinner 2002e, 32.

¹⁸² Skinner 2002e, 36. For the Bible on witches, see Deuteronomy 18.10–12 (Skinner mentions 13.10–12 but that is probably a mistake); Galatians 5.20; Exodus 22.18. I am not sure if this is actually the best example to be offered. Since one could consider that possibly it was not so rational to hold the belief that witches existed at that point, even though the Bible mentions them, or at least there could have been rational persons who did not believe in witches. However, I would argue that it could have been dangerously irrational to publicly or perhaps even in private confess that one did not believe in witches. This might be what Skinner had in mind when he starts to speak of the “prevailing norms for acquisition” in the particular contexts, but in 2007 he states that the question is truly about believing: “Surely it would have been irrational for the peasants *not* to believe what the Bible says” (Skinner 2007b). Possibly better example would have been the belief in the idea of the earth as the centre of the world in the ancient history.

¹⁸³ Skinner 2002e, 36.

¹⁸⁴ Skinner 2002e, 37.

Skinner is not claiming that it would be the historian's job to take an outside or objectivist position regarding the standards of rationality. Skinner is emphasising the importance of becoming acquainted with the prevailing norms or conventions of rationality of the society under examination: if a past actor has a mistaken belief, even an obviously mistaken belief from our point of view, it does not automatically mean that the belief is irrational. The judge's job is holistic: the rationality of a given belief has to be judged within its connection to other beliefs that the agent holds, and which can or cannot be seen as rational to hold at that given moment. In the end, Skinner leaves it open whether to take an objective stance on standards of rationality is anyone's job but he is obviously very sceptical about that job in general.

The question of norms of rationality is directly related to anachronisms, because in order to avoid anachronisms one will have to demarcate the standards of human rationality between different times and places. I have also described a complementary type of anachronism based on this fact in the later section on Skinner's typology of mythologies. In the next section I will discuss Skinner's concept of 'concept'. It is also of obvious importance when discussing the history of concepts. Since Skinner does not address this matter at any considerable length in any of his articles, the following will be a construction from different pieces, and as such may be a somewhat dubious effort, but it is my intention not to do too much violence to Skinner's views when dealing with his scattered remarks on the matter.

4.8. IDEA, CONCEPT AND CONCEPTION

Skinner has written extensively on the histories of concepts such as liberty and the state. However, Skinner does not identify himself as 'a historian of concepts'. He says that he would rather call these histories "histories of the uses of concepts in argumentation"¹⁸⁵ than histories of concepts, and in an interview with J. F. Sebastián (2007) he regrets having written on the history of the term *paradiastole*, which was used by classical rhetoricians to "express the concept involved". He states that instead he should have written "a history of the concept, and not a history of the vocabulary used to express it"¹⁸⁶. In "Retrospect: Studying Rhetoric and Conceptual Change" (2002) Skinner writes that his "almost paradoxical contention is that the various transformations we can hope to chart will not strictly speaking be changes in concepts at all. They will be transformations in the applications of terms by which our concepts

¹⁸⁵ Skinner 2002, 60.

¹⁸⁶ Skinner 2007, 114. These remarks are made at the point in which Skinner makes a provocative comment about Kosselleck and goes on to state that Kosselleck was a historian of words rather than of concepts.

are expressed.”¹⁸⁷ The concept of ‘concept’ plays a role in Skinner’s writings and it is obviously an important one. However, Skinner does not really discuss it in detail anywhere, though his explicit agreement with Wittgenstein that concepts are tools should not be underestimated in this regard.¹⁸⁸ He does, however, make some remarks on the topic and writes on themes which stand in close relation to it, so we have some material to work on concerning the concept of concept besides what we have already discussed, that is the basic distinction between ‘word’ or ‘term’ and ‘concept’.

One possible source of confusion when we discuss Skinner’s concept of concept, is that everyone who has read anything about Skinner is conscious of his criticism of Lovejoy’s approach to history of ideas, even though he has actually written very little about this (some 4-6 pages in “Meaning and Understanding” plus a couple of later restatements). The danger lies in the fact that ‘ideas’ and ‘concepts’ tend to have a close relation and sometimes they are even used synonymously. For example, Kari Palonen does not seem to make a distinction between ‘concept’ and ‘idea’ in Skinner’s vocabulary and this seems to be backed by Skinner himself when in an interview he tells readers that he has been very interested in the “*concept* of rhetorical redescription” which is, he explains, “the *idea* that it may be possible to redescribe certain vices as virtues”.¹⁸⁹

So, the question is, how does Skinner still hope to write some kind of history of concepts when he has criticised Lovejoy’s history of ideas so harshly? And what is he speaking of when he recognizes that ideas do not have to have a corresponding word or term? Is that not to speak about Lovejovian ideas? Are ‘concept’ and ‘idea’ synonymous in Skinner’s terminology? And what, then, are the ‘ideas’ that Skinner dislikes so much? We can look for the answers from “Meaning and Understanding” in which Skinner’s criticism against Lovejoy is articulated for the first time.¹⁹⁰ But as a starting point we could notice a very little-known short essay¹⁹¹ by Skinner, “What is Intellectual History...?” (1988). In this essay Skinner summarizes his argument in the following way: “This kind of history [...] tends to leave us with a history almost bereft of recognizable agents, a history in which we find Reason itself overcoming Custom, Progress confronting the Chain of Being, and so forth. But the main doubt [...] has been that, in focusing on ideas rather than their uses in argument, it has seemed insensitive to the strongly contrasting ways in which a given concept can be put to work by different writers in different historical periods”.¹⁹² As is clear,

¹⁸⁷ Skinner 2002j, 179.

¹⁸⁸ For an explicit statement, see e.g. Skinner 1988a, 283; Skinner 1988e, 111.

¹⁸⁹ See e.g. Palonen 2003, 35-38. Skinner 2007, 114.

¹⁹⁰ I discuss this below from the perspective of anachronistic “mythologies”.

¹⁹¹ Skinner himself has not included it in his official bibliography:

http://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/academic_staff/further_details/skinner_cv.pdf

¹⁹² Skinner 1988e, 110.

Skinner's critique of Lovejoy¹⁹³ is ontological and methodological. In "Meaning and Understanding" the ontological criticism takes the following form: "the particular danger with this [Lovejoy's] approach is that the doctrine to be investigated so readily becomes hypostatized into an entity [...]. The fact that ideas presuppose agents is very readily discounted, as the ideas get up and do battle on their own behalf". This entitization leads to "the tendency to search for approximations to the ideal type"¹⁹⁴ or to the tendency to look for anticipations of the ideal type and it loses connection with the argumentations or discussion in which human agents use these ideas. Skinner is quite strict here: there is no independent 'essential meaning' of an idea that 'remains the same' or to which individual agents could 'contribute', there are only uses of ideas.

This leads to Skinner's methodological criticism, and even though Skinner seems to keep ontological and methodological issues apart (and considers methodological doubts to be his main doubts regarding the history of ideas), there is a logical connection from an ontological critique to Skinner's methodological critique of the history of ideas. The first logical conclusion is, that since there are no ideas outside of uses, which are tied to agents, we should study the use of ideas. In order to understand ideas we have to study "all the various situations ["contexts" in the revised version of 2002], which may change in complex ways, in which the given form of words can logically be used [...] all the various things that can be done with them [...] the nature of all the occasions and activities – the language games – within which they might appear" and not simply the "forms of words involved".¹⁹⁵ So, in addition to the study of use it is necessary to understand the idea, and to understand the use it is necessary to study the contexts and language games.

The second conclusion is that the same kind of study is also needed in order to learn "what part, trivial or important, the given idea may have played in the thought of any individual thinker who happened to mention it, or what place, characteristic or unusual, it may have taken in the intellectual climate of any given period in which it appears" or to "what questions [in Collingwood's sense] the use of the expression was thought to answer, and so what reasons there were for continuing to employ it".¹⁹⁶ And if we do not learn what 'status' a given idea might have had, then we do not have a historical understanding of its value and importance.

¹⁹³ Even though in this short essay Skinner does not mention Lovejoy by name, the "great chain of being" is of course a direct reference to the book by Lovejoy.

¹⁹⁴ Skinner 1969, 34, 35.

¹⁹⁵ Skinner 1969, 55

¹⁹⁶ Skinner 1969, 55 – 56.

One remark is worth making concerning the formulation the “use of ideas”. It may lead us to think that there must be independent ideas, since how else could one use an idea?¹⁹⁷ From this some might make the conclusion that Skinner would have to admit the existence of ideas outside their use. This is a very tempting line of thought, but I would like to suggest that it is just a linguistic trick or a misconception. According to Skinner, ideas are constituted in their use. Their being is the use, and outside there is nothing. It might make as much sense to speak, at the same time, of the ‘making or creation of an idea’ as it does to speak of the ‘use of an idea’: in the strict sense, an idea is ‘manufactured’ and used at the same time. Ideas are not taken from a shelf and put to use. Possibly a good analogous expressions would be: “Boxers use punches to knock each other down”, etc. The punches are created in the use, they are not taken from somewhere and then put to use. This misconception may rise from the fact that beside conceptual discontinuities there are long conceptual continuities in history. If one tracks down a history of, let us say, the idea that at some point came to be called *paradiastole*, one may see – at least on the general or abstract level – the same idea being used in different arguments. The mind then easily goes on postulating the continuing separate existence of an idea, which is taken into use on various occasions. However, I cannot see what would be the place where an idea exists while it is not used? The existence of an idea outside articulations¹⁹⁸ is an unnecessary postulation; it does not explain anything and it opens up the question where do ideas exist when they are not being used? However, I do not wish to push this ontological question, since as I discuss below, it is not very important in regard to my purposes.

Even though I agree with Skinner on what he says about the concept of idea, supposing that I have understood him correctly, there are, I believe, a few shortcomings which explain why the line of thinking I have just mentioned is so tempting. First, Skinner should have some kind of opinion on the continuities, similarities and relations between different uses of concepts. As long as he does not give an account of the conceptual continuities it is unclear, (or at least not absolutely clear) what the history of the uses of concept/idea of e.g. *paradiastole*, the idea of redescribing certain vices as virtues, is precisely about. I mean that it is unclear in what sense there is a continuing history of separate uses of an idea to be told. And what about the conceptual discontinuities that one will inevitably meet when writing a history of uses of any given idea from antiquity to the Renaissance? Discussions take place on too general a level if one has to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question if the idea or concept used by X at t₁ is the same as the concept or idea used by Y at t₂. But I

¹⁹⁷ See for example Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen’s criticism of Skinner in Kuukkanen 2008. See also section “Theoretical Summary of the Conceptual Prism” below.

¹⁹⁸ By ‘articulation’ I mean any kind of spelling out of an idea; speeches, dictionaries, jokes, discussion, movies, etc., perhaps even personal thinking.

will suggest a more detailed way of approaching these kinds of questions in the final part of thesis.

The second shortcoming is of more philosophical nature. Even though I am sympathetic to the thought and have tried to argue for it, it is not a self-evident fact that, ontologically speaking, concepts exist only in their use.¹⁹⁹ But since Skinner is not being explicit about the ontological nature of concepts (except perhaps in the negative sense), it is not even clear if this is his view on the matter. He is certainly, at least, flirting with the thought, and one does get the impression that this is really his ontological view by reading his essays. I shall suggest, if only for clarity's sake, that it would be clearer and less troubling if Skinner only spoke of his interest in concepts as they appear, manifest or perhaps are constructed in the discussions, arguments and so on, and leave it open if there is or is not anything beyond this. By this move the problems of ontological discussions would not matter that much. This will be my move when, in the final chapters, I present my model of the meaning-dimensions model of concepts).

At this point my conclusion is that we are now able to see that Skinner is not actually criticising 'ideas' or the 'history as ideas' as such. He even asks and answers the question how we are to understand a given idea. He stands in opposition to a particular concept of idea and to particular practice of the history of ideas, which is implicitly or explicitly based on this concept of idea. In the 2002 heavily revised version of "Meaning and Understanding" this is marked by the fact that when speaking of Lovejoy's project he uses a more precise term: the history of "unit ideas". So, there are two different concepts of idea at play: one that is Skinnerian and other which could be called the Lovejoyian concept of idea.²⁰⁰ We have to keep in mind the title "Meaning and Understanding in the *History of Ideas*" and that the essay is not only a critique: it contains positive views on which direction the study of ideas could and partly also should be practised according to Skinner.

After this miniature study of Skinner's use of 'idea' and 'concept', I would like to suggest that he uses them mostly as synonyms, but there are different conceptions of idea and concept at play; and when Skinner contrasts his own 'ideas' or 'concepts' with Lovejoy's, they might not be synonyms. Most of the time readers will have to figure out which concept is at play by themselves, but sometimes Skinner uses the expression "the history of uses of concepts in arguments" instead of "the history of concepts" to mark the difference. It should also be mentioned that, however, recently

¹⁹⁹ For an overview of the discussion, see e.g. Margolis & Laurence 2005. For more specific discussions, see Margolis & Laurence 2007.

²⁰⁰ I am not claiming that this is a correct description of Lovejoy's concept of idea. I am actually rather sceptical towards Skinner's critique of Lovejoy and do not consider it very fair.

(2007) Skinner has described his critique in more radical terms in a way that leaves me somewhat confused. I would argue that what I have said above, suits nicely with Skinner's corpus, but what he himself has recently said is in some kind of conflict as the term 'idea' does belong to his vocabulary and is not always used in the negative sense. Skinner states that "One of my earliest articles was called 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', but I used that phrase ironically, my intention being to deconstruct the claim that there could ever be a history of ideas of that kind".²⁰¹ However, in the article he does not present such terminological judgments and instead criticises what he considers to be Lovejoy's programme. In my opinion the article tells how not to study the history of ideas and what is the value of studying the history of ideas. In both matters Skinner is developing his own view and criticising Lovejoy's, but not condemning the history of ideas as such or performing a conceptual sanitation. He has also accepted the term "ideas, history of" in the subject index of *Visions of Politics*, and the subcategory references to the history of ideas, "e.g. value of studying" are by no means all critical.

Another relevant issue on the matter of the concept of concept is the so-called concept/conception distinction. To agree with this distinction means to maintain that while various *conceptions* of, for example, liberty are likely to carry an evaluative or normative load within them, the *concept* of liberty might be purely descriptive and universal. Some philosophers, such as H. L. A. Hart, Ronald Dworkin, John Rawls²⁰² and more recently Adam Swift,²⁰³ have made use of this distinction between concept and conception.

The most recent of these comments, by Adam Swift, describes the idea in the following way:

The 'concept' is the general structure, or perhaps the grammar, of a term like justice, or liberty, or equality. A 'conception' is the particular specification of that 'concept', obtained by filling out some of the detail.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Skinner 2007.

²⁰² It is no coincidence that Rawls formulates liberty following MacCallum: "Therefore I shall simply assume that liberty can always be explained by reference to three terms: the agents who are free, the restrictions or limitations which they are free from, and what it is that they are free to do or not to do." Rawls 1999, 202.

²⁰³ Dworkin 1978, Adam Swift 2001. The idea can be traced at least to Rawls 1971 and Hart 1961. Hart states that "it is possible to isolate and characterize a central set of elements which form a common part to all the questions when defining the concept of law" (16) even though it is not possible to give a concise definition. Rawls announces that "[...] it seems natural to think of the concept of justice as distinct from the various conceptions of justice as being specified by the roe which these different sets of principles, the different conceptions, have in common" (5) and that "Here I follow H. L. A. Hart" (5, note 1)

²⁰⁴ Swift 2001, 11.

and that

“People disagree not in their views about the *concept* of liberty but in their views about *conceptions* of it. Conceptions differ because there are differences of opinion about what should be regarded as an agent, a constraint, and a goal”.²⁰⁵

These passages catch the idea rather well and as I will return to details of this distinction in later chapters, but at this point I shall simply move to Skinner’s comments on the matter.

Skinner very rarely says anything directly on the concept/conception -distinction or about the debates around it, and it is not fully clear where he stands. He does, however, discuss this topic in his “A Third Concept of Liberty” lecture. This is an essay in which he examines “neo-Roman” liberty which he previously and would subsequently refer to as “republican” liberty). In his answer to the question whether he has managed to come up with a new concept of freedom, he seems to express a lack of interest in the question; but he does state that he is deliberately speaking of a rival theory and not of rival conception. He goes on to explain that “it has become usual to follow John Rawls [...] in distinguishing between different concepts and different conceptions [...] I am not wholly clear, however, what difference this distinction is supposed to mark, and for me it is in any case enough to say that I have isolated a [rival] theory”.²⁰⁶ It should be noted that in this essay Skinner regards neo-Roman liberty as a kind of negative liberty and the question here is whether he has isolated a new concept of negative liberty, and not a universal concept of liberty. But in an earlier note in the same essay he says that “I am no longer arguing simply about the conditions necessary for maximising negative liberty, but about how to construe the concept itself”.²⁰⁷ He also states that he agrees with Isaiah Berlin who, according to Skinner, claims that “if a descriptive term can be coherently used to pick out more than one distinct phenomenon or state of affairs, then the term may be said to express more than one concept”.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, Skinner considers that Berlin did manage to separate two rival concepts of liberty, namely positive and negative liberty) in his famous essay “Two Concepts of Liberty”. Skinner is clear on the matter: “I agree with Berlin that there are two concepts of liberty” and he spends some time in his lecture proving this. He largely discredits the views expressed by Gerald MacCallum Jr. and his followers, whose claim is that all intelligible statements about liberty fall under same basic structure--A’s freedom from B to do or become or not to do or become X-

²⁰⁵ Swift 2001, 54.

²⁰⁶ Skinner, 2002l, 268, f125.

²⁰⁷ Skinner, 2002m, 262, f123.

²⁰⁸ Skinner, 2002m, 261.

-which forms the concept of liberty. On this ground it could be fairly safe to say that Skinner does not consider the discussion on the concept/conception distinction to be very fruitful, or that the distinction does not really add useful information.

In his essay “Rhetoric and Conceptual Change” (1999/2002) Skinner takes ‘child abuse’ as an example of a case which he calls rhetorical redescription. He states that some philosophers have been too hasty to say that when disagreeing over what counts as ‘child abuse’ people must have different concepts of child abuse. Skinner says that he agrees with the view that to argue, people must have the same concept and they disagree only on the circumstances in which the concept can be applied. Moreover, “if the disputants are genuinely arguing, they must have the same concept of what constitutes child abuse. The difference between them will not be about the meaning of the relevant term, but about the range of circumstances in which they are prepared to apply it”.²⁰⁹ This is of course the second level of the levels of conceptual disagreements explained above. But Skinner does not give any explanation why the disagreement should take place on this level in order to be a “genuine argument”, except simply stating that “if disputants are genuinely arguing they must have the *same* concept of what constitutes child abuse”.²¹⁰ This is no argument at all, and probably not even meant to be one.

As far as I can see, there is no compelling reason why an argument over what counts as ‘child abuse’ could not be about, or at least include, the question of how to construe the concept ‘child abuse’ itself, or the related concepts ‘child’ and ‘abuse’, even though this may not necessarily be the case. I think that in “A Third Concept of Liberty” this is also Skinner’s own opinion as explained above. Consider two people arguing if the pulling of a minor’s hair counts as child abuse. They could agree that this is an act that causes real pain to a child, but they could disagree if causing pain (intentionally) is a sufficient (or necessary) element of the concept of abuse (though, the case could of course be that they could be agreeing on the definition of ‘child abuse’ and simply arguing if pulling hair does really cause the amount of pain that the definition requires). I regard both cases genuine arguments, and in my opinion the decision whether to include or exclude “causing pain” in/from necessary or sufficient conditions of ‘child abuse’ is a matter concerning the construction of the concept itself. But perhaps it could be said that Skinner is right to protest against idea that parties in quarrel must have different concepts of child abuse, but he goes too far when he insists that to argue genuinely they must have same concept.

²⁰⁹ See Skinner, 1999, 71 and 2002j (revised version: “Retrospect: Studying Rhetoric and Conceptual change”), 186.

²¹⁰ Skinner 2002j, 186.

What is interesting regarding Skinner's concept of concept is that in the passage quoted Skinner equates the concept with the term's meaning. Skinner indeed denies that the disagreement could be about "the concept" on the grounds that "the difference between them will not be about the meaning of the relevant *term*" but about the circumstances in which the term is applied. If we take this as Skinner's definitive statement on the matter, we will have to conclude that the concept of concept is for Skinner M1; the definition of a term (even though there might be concepts that do not have a single corresponding term). However, then the idea of three different levels of conceptual disagreements, would have to be formulated so that only the first level is properly conceptual and the others just something related. This would coincide rather well with his critique of Lovejoy and the idea that there cannot be histories of concepts. Ontologically he maintains that concepts do not have other forms of existence than their use, whatever is meant by 'use', so perhaps the implicit definition would be that: concepts are their explicit or implicit definitions (M1) which occur only in their uses. This is of course almost the classical definition of concept, only the ontological part has been added. I am not sure if Skinner uses this definition consistently through his work, but I myself prefer a richer concept of concept. Concepts are all about meaning and I will try to sketch an alternative view of concept as a meaning structure in the last part of this work.

The next section of this chapter discusses Skinner's famous article "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" in detail. This is the piece in which Skinner explicitly discusses anachronisms, and which remains one of the basic references when discussing anachronisms. In this section I aim to deal with the issues on a more concrete level and will offer a new, close reading of Skinner's text.

4.9. A TYPOLOGY OF ANACHRONISMS

Skinner has a well-earned reputation of being adamant when it comes to anachronistic interpretations of history. To a great extent this reputation derives from "Meaning and Understanding" published in 1969 (but originally written a few years earlier under the title "The Unimportance of Great Texts"), where he does not hesitate to call anachronisms sins.²¹¹ However, in this very article he explicitly states that the historian cannot rid himself of his contemporary perspective: "it is inescapable [...] for the historian of ideas to approach his material with preconceived paradigms".²¹² He continues "[...] it will never in fact be possible simply to study what any given

²¹¹ See e.g. Skinner 2002a, 57 and 2002e, 38. This is not the first time a historian calls anachronisms sins. I do not know if Skinner picked up the word from somewhere, but i.e. Frank Manuel 1972, 128 for one calls the anachronistic attribution of present attitudes to the past the "historical sin of sins".

²¹² Skinner 1969, 48.

classic writer has said (especially in an alien culture) without bringing to bear some of one's own expectations about what he must be saying".²¹³ Later he argues "It is obviously dangerous, but it is inescapable, that he [the historian] should apply his own familiar criteria of classification and discrimination [...] Otherwise it is hard to see how there can be any understanding at all".²¹⁴ So, Skinner seems to claim that anachronisms are sins, but nevertheless, the historian is bound to give, in some sense of the term, an anachronistic interpretation. What can we make of this? To understand this apparent paradox we need to speak of anachronisms in a more detailed way. We need to distinguish between different kinds of anachronisms, and in this Skinner is able to offer some help. It is widely acknowledged that "Meaning and Understanding" presents a typology of anachronistic interpretations that Skinner calls mythologies. Commentators refer to four different kinds of mythologies Skinner describes: mythologies of doctrines; of coherence; of prolepsis; and of parochialism.²¹⁵ What has gone unnoticed, or at least without reference, is that Skinner's typology of anachronistic mythologies is much more detailed. If we count all subcategories and subcategories of subcategories we will find that Skinner actually describes up to 19 different types of mythologies. The exact number of different types depends on how we interpret a few differences between an upper level category and a subcategory. If we count only the lowest level categories of each of the four main categories, we can safely say that Skinner distinguishes at least 12 different forms of mythologies. But the question concerning the number of different categories is not very important. What is important is to notice that the typology is indeed richer than is usually thought.

Yet Skinner does not give an explicit account of the type of anachronism that seems to be the most important, one which has gone unnoticed among his commentators and critics.²¹⁶ As I mentioned above, Skinner insists that historians are attached to the present in a way that is inescapable: they necessarily approach the history "with

²¹³ Skinner 1969, 31.

²¹⁴ Skinner 1969, 45 and note 105 (p. 297).

²¹⁵ See e.g. Femia 1981, Åsard 1987, Palonen 2003. Many of commentators who criticize Skinner's views on anachronisms pay no attention at all to this typology and build their whole criticism on one or two of the 'slogans.' Those who notice the typology never seem to notice more than the four main categories. See Jardine 2000; Knuutila 2003, 1986; Leslie 1970 and Prudovsky 1997 and see also Palonen 1998. Nick Tosh seems to jump freely from one category to another, namely from the mythology of parochialism (type D.1.) to the mythology of doctrines (type A.1. *converting scattered remarks into a doctrine*). See Tosh 2003, 654-655. Schochet (1974) gives a rather brief and not very detailed description of some of the mythologies. Pocock comes up somewhat randomly with two of the mythologies (Pocock 2004), and Lamb seems to deal with only one form of mythology, namely what in my reconstruction of typology is called criticism for failing to discuss doctrine proper to the subject (A.2.1.) even though he uses plural form (Lamb 2004). Kaukua & Lähteenmäki 2010 maintain that there are only three different mythologies.

²¹⁶ Gordon J. Schochet does notes that "Skinner agrees [...] in some ultimate sense the historian is incapable escaping his own age". But he does not explicate this any further. See Schochet (1974), 269.

preconceived paradigms”.²¹⁷ This form of anachronism is crucial for an understanding of Skinner’s methodological views. I shall call this type of anachronism ‘original sin’, because historians cannot avoid it.

4.9.1. Typology of Mythologies

One more observation needs to be made, before I engage in detailed account of the typology. We should keep in mind that it is basically a *warning* of some dangers that historians are likely to confront: historians are always on the verge of making their judgments on some other grounds than historically justifiable grounds. For example, when anatomising the mythology of coherence, Skinner is not saying that it is impossible that a past thinker could actually be more systematic and coherent than it first appears: an interpretation which describes the thinker more systematic than it first looks like is not necessarily mythological. Skinner’s point is that the interpretation has to be based on convincing historical evidence, not on some pre-convinced *a priori* idea of how the great thinkers must think.²¹⁸ In general the typology is a critical tool for a historian to become aware of in order to avoid some of the dangers that are lurking around the corner.

Secondly, we must see that Skinner’s criticism is in most, but not in all, cases pointed at interpretations which (explicitly or implicitly) make claims concerning intentions of an historical agent. However, Skinner does not suggest that we have some kind of direct access to the intentions of any agent to check if the interpretation is correct, as we have already noted in previous the chapters. His examples are cases in which the historical evidence speaks against mythological interpretations. In the main he gives examples in which we are in a position to say that the authorial intentions could not be those that they were claimed to be. In some cases there is perhaps some important evidence on which we can convincingly base a more accurate interpretation of the intention(s) of the agent in question. This kind of evidence could be, for example, a description of the intentions that the agent himself provided.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ The (un-Kuhnian) use of the plural form of the concept of paradigm is justified because Skinner is writing to all kinds of histories of ideas e.g. history of politics, religion, physics, philosophy and each of these disciplines have their own (Kuhnian) paradigm. The question do they really have a single paradigm within which they are operating is irrelevant here I’m just justifying the use of the plural form of the paradigm within the Kuhnian language game.

²¹⁸ At the present I am unable to give any textual references to articles giving this reading, but experiences in conferences and my private conversations with scholars have shown that it is surprisingly common to read Skinner’s mythologies, not as warnings of particular dangers, but as a strict denial of the possibility of coherence etc.

²¹⁹ Skinner has been accused of putting too much weight on the historical agent’s own testimonies concerning their intentions and Skinner has himself admitted that he used to do that. In the *Meaning and Understanding*, however, he writes that “This special authority of an agent over his intentions does not exclude, of course, the possibility that an observer might be in position to give a fuller or more convincing account of the agent’s behaviour than he could give himself. (Psychoanalysis is indeed

Skinner's detailed topology of anachronistic mythologies can be presented in the following way. The main categories are marked by the letters A, B, C and D, and the subcategories by numbers following the letter:

A. Mythology of doctrines

- A.1. Converting scattered remarks into a doctrine
 - A.1.1. Sheer anachronism
 - A.1.2. Dismissing intentions
 - A.1.3. Ideas as agents (reification of doctrines)
 - A.1.3.1. Approximations of the ideal
 - A.1.3.2. Emergence of doctrine
- A.2. Criticism for failing to form a doctrine
 - A.2.1. Criticism for failing to discuss doctrine proper to the subject
 - A.2.2. Criticism for not being systematic enough

B. Mythology of coherence

- B.1. Higher coherence
- B.2. Inner coherence

C. Prolepsis (mixing meaning and significance)

- C.1. Crude prolepsis
- C.2. Finer prolepsis

D. Parochialism

- D.1. False reference
- D.2. Conceptualising into misleading familiarity

And by reading Skinner's other texts we may construct some more types:

E. Direct translation

F. Mythology of rationality

- F.1. Mythology of irrational beliefs
- F.2. Mythology of false rationality
- F.3. Mythology of charity principle

I will now take a closer look at each of the types mentioned in the list above.

founded on this possibility.)” Skinner 1969, 48. See also Skinner 1988b, 76-77 and note 48: “Here I retract an overstatement which I made in my essay, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of ideas’. Aviezer Tucker has argued that there is an incoherence here. He thinks that Skinner is speaking of psychoanalysis as a historiographical method (see Tucker 2006, 302–303), but Skinner is only using it as an example of a case in which interpreter is--at least supposedly--to understand the person that is under interpretation better than the latter can. Or if we consider what Skinner writes subsequently in “Interpretation, Rationality and Truth”, it is clear that he finds a difference between explaining a belief and describing a belief. When explaining a belief we may legitimately use the best possible explanatory model and the vocabulary following (see Skinner 2002b, 50).

A. Mythology of doctrines

The first of the four main forms of mythologies Skinner anatomizes is the *mythology of doctrines*. Skinner claims that this is the most persistent form of all the mythologies. It follows from the fact that historians are “*set* by the expectation that each classic writer [...] will be found to enunciate some doctrine on each of the topics regarded as constitutive of his subject”.²²⁰ The obvious problem is that the historian is looking so hard for contributions to themes which are nowadays considered ‘mandatory’ for the subject that he will eventually ‘find’ them in any given author. The mythology of doctrines has several subcategories.

A.1. Converting scattered remarks into a doctrine

This form of mythology is generated when the historian starts to convert “some scattered or incidental remarks” into a doctrine of one of *the* themes of his field. This generates three different kinds of subcategories.

A.1.1. Sheer anachronism (logical impossibility)

Skinner presents here yet another effective formulation: “The particular danger with intellectual biography is that of sheer anachronism. A given writer may be ‘discovered’ to have held a view, on to which he cannot *in principle* have to meant contribute”.²²¹ This is a formulation that Kari Palonen calls “Skinner’s anachronism-thesis”.²²² But we should notice that this ‘thesis’ concerns only one kind of anachronism in Skinner’s typology. This in turn reminds us that Skinner’s views on anachronisms cannot be reduced to any kind of simple formulation. Indeed, the so-called ‘anachronism-thesis’ is about one special type of anachronism, which according to Skinner, is typical in intellectual biographies or synoptic kinds of histories, that is, histories which focus on individual thinkers. Furthermore, this kind of anachronism is for Skinner “a prior logical oddity”,²²³ and the particular nature of this mythology becomes clear when we compare the ‘thesis’ with the next form of anachronisms, which is about someone wrongly associating a view to a writer to which he in principle could have contributed but *de facto* did not.

But before moving to the next category, it is worth noting what Skinner means by “logical oddity”. Philosophers are prepared to understand it as it is understood in formal logic (as an incoherence or as bad reasoning). But in this context ‘logical’ does

²²⁰ Skinner 1969, 32. Italics are original.

²²¹ Skinner 1969, 32.

²²² Palonen 1998, 147-8.

²²³ Skinner 1969, 33.

not refer to that meaning. Skinner simply means that it would not be logically possible to contribute to, let us say, theory of quantum mechanics, in an age when there was no idea of quantum. Only the discovery of quantum made it possible. Or, in other words, for Skinner 'logically possible' means here the same as historically possible; that people could have in principle been aware of the debate they are being linked to. "Sheer anachronism" is the only mythology in which Skinner warns that one should not claim that a past actor had debated "the terms of which were unavailable to him".²²⁴ According to Skinner historians are often too ready to "recognize" familiar themes on bases of some weak and contingent similarity of terms.

A.1.2. Dismissing intentions

This form of anachronism also generally occurs in historical monographs dealing with a single philosopher. It appears when a historian constructs a doctrine which the past thinker could (logically) possibly have intended to state, but in fact did not. This occurs when the historian does not care about the intentions of the past thinker and advances only his own, or the current scholarly community's expectations. Skinner mentions a modern commentator who may convert Richard Hooker's scattered remarks into a systematic theory of social contract. Rather, according to Skinner, it would be more plausible to understand Hooker's remarks on the natural sociability of man as intended simply – in the manner of his time – "to discriminate the godly origins of the Church from the more mundane origins of the state".²²⁵

The category of dismissing intentions is also interesting because here Skinner for the very first time²²⁶ gives for the first time an explicit formulation of what he is interested in when he speaks about 'intention'. Skinner's views concerning intentions were discussed above, but it is interesting to see what was his first contribution in the matter. Skinner writes: "We might well feel that Hooker's intention (what he meant to do) was merely [...]"²²⁷ So, to answer the question what is some agent's intention, we would have to understand what he was trying to do. We only have to remember to add "in" to the formulation: what he was doing *in* saying something or *in* writing what

²²⁴ Skinner 1969, 33.

²²⁵ Skinner 1969, 33.

²²⁶ In review article "Hobbes's *Leviathan*" from 1964 Skinner complains that Professor Hood is failing to reconstruct Hobbes's intentions and in the "Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought" (1966) Skinner criticizes current historical study of Hobbes for having "misleading views about the intentions even of [Hobbes's] critics" (287). He argues that "The accepted view of Hobbes's reputation has been based [...] on a mistaken impression of the assumptions, and even on the intentions of Hobbes's critics" (292), "The failure too acknowledge this element of popularity has tended to give a misleading impression of the intentions of Hobbes's contemporary critics" (295). He describes his article as an "interpretation of [Hobbes's] intentions" (313) and he seems to be using the concept of intention in the same meaning as in "Meaning and Understanding", but does not give an explicit formulation of it.

²²⁷ Skinner 1969, 33.

he did. Accordingly, this mythology occurs when the historian forgets to ask what the author was doing in writing what he wrote, or answers this question in an unsatisfactory way.²²⁸ Of course later on things became more complicated as Skinner gave a more detailed analyses of the concept of intention, but at the time of the publishing of “Meaning and Understanding” his view on the matter was this simple.

The problematic character of these two mythologies (A.1.1. and A.1.2.) is revealed when we ask the following question: "if the writer, who in many cases has proved to be both talented and able, meant to articulate a doctrine why is it that he so signally failed to do so, so that the historian has to reconstruct the doctrine from guesses and vague hints?"²²⁹

A.1.3. Ideas as agents (reification of doctrines)

As a third subcategory of the mythology of doctrines Skinner presents an interpretation model which provides ideas with the status of agent. Skinner’s target is the history of ideas in the style of Lovejoy in which the historian traces the transformations of a "unit idea" through history. The particular problem according to Skinner is that some doctrine, becomes treated as an independent agent (usually historians describe it as ‘growing organism’) as it was “out there” for philosophers and historians to discover or even run into. This mythology forgets the fact that ideas presuppose agents and instead handles ideas as if they were capable of defending themselves, or of moving obstacles from their way, managing to emerge and keep doing this through the centuries.²³⁰ Skinner divides this form into two subcategories.

A.1.3.1. Approximations of the ideal

When historians treat ideas as independent agents they often start to search for ‘approximations’ of some ideal doctrine. According to Skinner, it is a historical absurdity to speak about Marsilius anticipating Machiavelli or the latter anticipating Marx on the grounds that the ‘doctrines’ of the formers’ are “remarkable anticipations” or “lay foundations” for the “ideal doctrines” of the latter. This is especially absurd when it leads to simply evaluation of a historical thinker in terms of how far he “may seem to have aspired to the condition of being ourselves”,²³¹ i.e. past actors become appreciated only according their ‘psychic powers’. Obviously this is one of the mythologies that contributes directly to the canon formation of the ‘great

²²⁸ Skinner explicates his views on a satisfactory way of answering the question later on in the essay. See i.e. Skinner 1969, 65.

²²⁹ See Skinner 1969, 34.

²³⁰ See also the chapter on “ideas” above.

²³¹ Skinner 1969,35.

thinkers' because the emphasis is, at least partly,²³² on the personal agent who comes up with an approximation of the ideal doctrine that was perfected by some other personal agent who gets the honour of being *the* great thinker. But we need to keep in mind that this line of argument is only a symptom of the sin, not its cause.²³³ The cause, according to Skinner, is that it is absurd to give the status of agent to an idea. This type of sin should not be confused with the criticism directed at the idea of someone being an anticipator, precursor or predecessor of somebody or to something even though Skinner does venture into discussions framed in this way (Skinner deals with the problems concerning this line of thought in the mythology of prolepsis).

A.1.3.2. Emergence of doctrine

The second subcategory for the mythology of ideas as agents manifests itself in 'purely semantic' discussions if some doctrine has "really emerge" at a given time or if it is "really present" in some author's writings, or maybe it is there, but only as "incompletely developed". Very often, like in the case when the idea or doctrine is said to be "incompletely developed", there is an unargued assumption that the writer is truly trying to develop the very doctrine, i.e. the commentator does not see the difference if one states that there is something missing or if one states that something simply is not there. The use of the former expression leaves impression that the historian is assuming that the missing feature is meant to be there and is somewhere waiting to show up. These discussions are often presented as if they were empirical debates, but as long as the historical human agent, and the question whether he tried to develop the ideal doctrine, are put aside, the whole discussion is purely semantic. In these problematic conversations the emphasis is on the independently "evolving doctrine" and human agents are set aside. Possibly the best way to summarize the mythology of ideas as agents is to say that it is based on the assumption that there are universal ideal forms of (all sorts of) ideas which all the lower or inaccurate forms of ideas are trying to reach.

A.2. Criticism for failing to form a doctrine

This form of mythology is related to sheer anachronism and dismissing intentions mentioned above, but it works in a converse way. A historian may correctly notice that a given past thinker does not "come up with a recognizable doctrine on one of the mandatory themes" and then continue to criticize past thinker "for his failure to do

²³² If we emphasize this side of the mythology in question then perhaps it would not be a pure representative or subcategory of the mythology *ideas as agents*. But I think that this is just a sidetrack.

²³³ It would probably be easy to imagine a conversation that follows the same lines but has germinated from some other source.

so."²³⁴ It should be noted that activity of criticizing the past thinker is included to the description of this mythology. Simple stamen that he did not write on the "mandatory themes" does not fulfil the criteria of this mythology. It is also important to notice that here Skinner speaks of criticising and not of describing, relating or comparing. The idea is simply that it is anachronistic to expect that a past thinker is always trying to form a doctrine on some of the modern main themes of the subject, and when he didn't, then accuse him of failing to come up with one. The cause of this mistake is that the modern paradigm "determines the direction of the whole historical investigation".²³⁵

Furthermore, it is another thing to take a moral position and accuse some past thinker of not paying attention to some piece of information that was available to him. The difference is that in that case the question is not about someone's failure to master the job he was trying to accomplish, it is about setting the wrong goals, making false starts or not being politically aware. In my understanding Skinner would accept criticism directed at a (past) thinker that is formulated in this way. Joseph Femia makes exactly this mistake when he says that according to Skinner "we cannot (logically) denounce the Chilean junta for failing to uphold basic human rights, because they never had any intention of doing so."²³⁶ Of course we can criticize the Chilean junta for not upholding basic human rights (and we should), but it would be-- in Femia's own word--"bizarre" to say that the junta failed in (its efforts) to uphold human rights, or to accuse the junta being incompetent in this matter, because it never made such an effort. We do think that it would have been able and fully competent to uphold human rights had it only wished to do so. In other words, it is a different thing to criticize someone for not being able to reach his or her own goals, and to criticize that person for having questionable goals in the first place (or not having goals that are sufficiently admirable). In this case, it is perfectly in line with Skinner's thought to condemn the junta's ignorance or maliciousness on the matter.

So, to give a historically justified criticism of the objective of an agent, we of course first need to make sure that it would have been historically, (or to use Skinner's term "logically", possible to have an alternative objective. It also seems to me that Femia has not fully understood Skinner's concept of intention.

A.2.1. Criticism for failing to discuss doctrine proper to the subject

The first subcategory of failing to develop a doctrine may take an innocent form that the historian simply concentrates on what a past thinker did not say or mention. It

²³⁴ Skinner 1969, 36.

²³⁵ Skinner 1969, 36.

²³⁶ Femia 1981, 318, n15.

becomes more troublesome when speculation about what he would surely have admitted or surely would not have approved begins. A past thinker then becomes a tool of fixing, entitling or justifying one's own prejudices: "history [...] becomes a pack of tricks we play on the dead."²³⁷ It is again important to notice that Skinner is particularly condemning moral valuations or normative accounts (which are based solely on modern grounds) of the ancestors, and suggests that modern commentators should be more willing to challenge their own criteria of what the object of their study ought to have been doing.

A.2.2 Criticism for not being systematic enough

The second form of failing to form a doctrine is based on an *a priori* idea that every classic writer must have intended to "constitute the most systematic contributions to their subject which they were capable of executing".²³⁸ The mistake has two aspects. First it is assumed that the classic writer was trying to enunciate a doctrine on some 'mandatory' theme and secondly, when the doctrine exhibits defects when compared to some other more coherent theory of the subject, it is accused of failure. All this can be sometimes justified or properly historical, but judgments should never be based on *a priori* grounds. It must first be empirically demonstrated that the classic writer was truly trying to do what he is being accused of failing in.

B. Mythology of coherence

The first mythology of Skinner's topology, the mythology of doctrines, has nine different subcategories. The second, the mythology of coherence, and the following ones, have only two each.²³⁹ The mythology of coherence is close at hand when the historian's task is conceived to consist of finding the missing coherence of a text (or even a corpus). The mythology of coherence is connected with the mythology of doctrines. It becomes easier to look for coherence if one is first convinced that the past thinker must have been trying to come up with the most systematic doctrine on a mandatory theme of some field of enquiry. The difference between the two subcategories of mythology of coherence is that the mythology of higher coherence

²³⁷ Skinner 1969, 37. Recently Steffen Ducheyne presented this formulation as Skinner's general view of anachronisms: "Anachronism occurs when we apply those categories to deeds and works from a period from which those categories were absent. If we anachronistically interpret history, history becomes a 'pack of tricks we play on the dead' [Skinner "Meaning and Understanding", p. 14]. History becomes mythology". (Ducheyne 2006, 276).

²³⁸ Skinner 1969, 38.

²³⁹ Mark Bevir (1997) builds his criticism of Skinner in his article "Mind and Method in the History of Ideas" without making any of these distinctions when he attacks Skinner's mythology of coherence as one single form of mythology. I am not sure if the division is relevant for his arguments, but he certainly reconstructs Skinner's view on a highly abstract level. The same is true of Prudovsky 1997. For a more detailed exposition of this mythology and criticism on Bevir's interpretation of it see Sytjämäki 2011.

pays attention to how the writings stand in line or coincide with the subject matter of the author, and the mythology of inner coherence pays more attention to the argumentation inside the subject matter. These mythologies are typical of textbooks in which the writer must constantly paraphrase historical texts in order to make them more accessible to students, and to extract ‘*the message*’ of a given thinker. In other words, the pedagogical outweighs the historical. This way of writing would not be a terrible sin according to Skinner if the author of a textbook clearly states that his intention is to be a teacher and not a historian, even though we can always ask why does the teacher has to make use of past thinkers if he is not aiming to give a historical description of them. Why not simply speak in the present tense?

Skinner discusses these problems in 1964 in a review article of F. C. Hood’s and S. I. Mints’ books on Hobbes. Hood’s attempt is to make sense of Hobbes “by considering all of his writings on morals and politics ‘as a whole’” which is a “religious whole” and Skinner makes a comment on how the sticking to “higher truth” consists of “textual suppressions.” H. Warrender’s book on Hobbes, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: His Theory of Obligation* (1957), is also mentioned, but as an example of assuming ‘inner coherence’.²⁴⁰ Skinner is not calling these problems mythologies but he places them with C. B. Macpherson’s *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (1962), to “a particular tradition in the study of intellectual history, by which it is taken to consist (both necessarily and sufficiently) of a type of philosophical exercise. The meaning of a writer is said to be elucidated (and elucidated fully) when all of his works are considered together on a level sufficiently abstract for discrepancies to disappear and for a ‘doctrine’ to emerge”.²⁴¹ In this passage you can also see a hint of what was called the mythology of doctrines. This, in my opinion, is a sign of how the mythologies, though presented as separate, often stand in close relation to each other. In the conclusion of the case study on Danto’s *Nietzsche as Philosopher* I will provide another example of these relations and the heuristic nature of the typology.

B.1. Higher coherence

The first of the subcategories is called higher coherence. This becomes a danger when the historian is reading past thinkers through ‘high points’ or ‘wholeness’. A historian may not pay any attention to what the past thinker himself explained he was doing, or even when reading through ‘wholeness’ the historian may disregard whole books

²⁴⁰ Skinner 1964, 321, 323.

²⁴¹ Skinner 1964, 322. It is perhaps interesting to note that Skinner is speaking here of “tradition in the study of intellectual history which is taken to consist of [...] a type of *philosophical exercise*”, because in the case of Danto I am also setting his work in the class of philosophical exercises. The difference between us is that Skinner is primarily considering the mentioned works as contributions to historical studies, while I am suggesting that Danto’s book could be seen primarily as a philosophical exercise.

when those do not fit the so called ‘core message’ of a past writer. The product of this kind of selectiveness is an impoverished picture of a classic writer, which may serve as an ideological tool, but is not a historically accurate description; it also disregards the possibility that authors might change their positions during a lifetime. According to Skinner, the idea that there is some kind of ‘wholeness’ to be extracted by reconstructing a higher coherence of a given corpus is metaphysical in the pejorative sense of the term.

It is worth noting that higher coherence is not a strictly logical term. It refers more to a “unity of vision”, “*the* direction of a writer’s efforts”, “finding *the* central theme in a given corpus of texts”, or perhaps it is best expressed in this way: the historian thinks that everything a given writer writes is a contribution to his ‘major system’ and has to be explained so that it helps us to understand how it contributes to this unity, for example how a given text links the author to liberalism or to some other kind of *ism* (i.e. a set of beliefs which constitute an ideology, which may be transcendent to the historical text in question in a sense that they are not in any apparent way present in them).

B.2. Inner coherence

In the mythology of inner coherence the term ‘coherence’ is to be taken as a logical one. This is based on the practice of repeatedly reading a given book, or a body of books in order to solve (obvious) contradictions in the text(s). In many, or even in most, cases it would be a good idea to take contradictions as contradictions, or at least to consider it possible that the author is being inconsistent and not to ask automatically how are the (apparent) contradiction(s) to be explained so that they would provide a better understanding of the coherent theory?” In the worst cases, historian disregards the possibility that a writer might have changed his way of reasoning or his arguments during a lifetime, while trying to force the whole corpus into one logical system. Skinner characterizes this mythology also ‘metaphysical’.

It is perhaps also worth noticing that one of the historian’s false moves is to take the criteria of coherence (or rationality) from the present without considering the possibility that even though a classic writer may seem to be incoherent (or irrational) from the modern perspective, it could still be that the criteria of coherence (or rationality) of his period are different from our own and from that point of view he is fully coherent.²⁴² This is, of course, a point that Skinner elaborates later in his “A Reply to My Critics” as explained above in the section on “Rationality and Truth”.

²⁴² See Skinner 1988.

C. Prolepsis (mixing meaning and significance)

The mythology of prolepsis concerns historical studies which are more concerned with the retrospective significance of a given work or an author than with what Skinner calls 'historical meaning' (i.e. answer to the question "What the author was doing in the text?"). The problem is that sometimes historians confuse meaning with significance and present the significance as an answer to a question concerning the intentions of an agent.

C.1. Crude prolepsis

It sometimes happens that a historian simply confuses the historical intentional meaning and retrospective significance so that he describes some event as if the agents involved were trying to inaugurate a new historical era, for example the Renaissance. Or, in other words, the historian describes a meaning which would not have made any sense at the moment when the event took place and wrongly connects it to the intentions of the agents involved. In Skinner's terminology the problem is that there is difference between the significance that a (later) observer may legitimately give to an action, and the meaning of that action itself, and this difference sometimes goes unnoticed. The difference between historical meaning and retrospective significance could perhaps be made clear by an example: it would not be a mythological description to say "someone being a precursor of something or for somebody" if it was presented as a description of (later) significance and not as a description of 'historical meaning'.

C.2. Finer prolepsis

According to Skinner, historians are in general well aware of the kind of problems described above, but the mythology of prolepsis occurs in a more vicious form. The teleology of the explanation of action is not always as explicit as in the crude form of prolepsis, but, nevertheless, whenever a given action has to wait for the future to gain its meaning, the explanation/description opens up to general criticism against teleological explanations. The historian may, for example, legitimately call John Locke one of the founders of the modern liberal school of political philosophy. This is his historical significance as later generations of political theorists have been in a position to discover. But the problem arises when a further claim concerning the historical meaning of the contents of Locke's writings is made. To Skinner it would be wrong to say that Locke himself was a liberal political philosopher. This is because he could scarcely have intended to contribute to a political tradition, which he--as a founding father--'made possible'. Or, to give another example, there is indeed something dubious if one characterizes *Romeo and Juliet* as a play full of clichés.

D. Parochialism

The fourth, and last, main form of mythologies in Skinner's typology, the mythology of parochialism, has two rather different kinds of subcategories. In general, Skinner explains, this is a danger which arises "in any kind of attempt to understand an alien culture or on unfamiliar conceptual scheme."²⁴³ Thus a historian might foreshorten his or her historical position resulting a misguided description of the meaning of a given work.

D.1. False reference/influence

First there is a danger of interpreting casual similarities between two authors as references. If an argument in a given text reminds the historian of a similar argument in an earlier work it may be too easily seen as an "influence" between the authors. Historians are often too willing to make conclusions about influences on the grounds of the chronological order of events. Skinner poses three questions which have to be answered before a judgment is made²⁴⁴:

- (a) Is there a genuine similarity between the doctrines of A and B or is it just an apparent similarity?
- (b) Could B have found the relevant doctrine in some other writer than A?
- (c) Is the probability of the similarity being random very low?

According to Skinner these are the necessary conditions for establishing a reference between A and B. It is questionable if these (combined) are necessary conditions especially if we take question (a) literally. As Nick Tosh reminds us, if the influence is that A has caused a backlash or a counterproposal by B then the doctrines do not have to be similar.²⁴⁵

D.2. Conceptualising into misleading familiarity

The second subcategory of the mythology of parochialism takes place when a historian "conceptualize[s] an argument in such a way that its alien elements are

²⁴³ Skinner 1969, 45.

²⁴⁴ Skinner 1969, 46.

²⁴⁵ Tosh 2003, 653-4.

dissolved into an apparent but misleading familiarity”.²⁴⁶ The historian uses (unconsciously) his modern point of view to set the given work into the framework of modern political theory (or some other field of enquiry). For example, according to Skinner it is a commonplace to think, that when Locke in his *Second Treatise* writes about “Government by consent”, he is arguing that it is the ideal form of government. This is only because the modern commentator is used to connecting the ideas to the ideal form of government with government by consent. According to Skinner, Locke is actually using the concept of consent only in connection with the origins of legitimate societies, and not in connection with ideal government.

More types of anachronisms

If we set “Meaning and Understanding” aside for a moment and take a further look at Skinner’s corpus, we discover even more different types of anachronisms. Though subsequently Skinner did not rework the typology, on some occasions he did anatomize ‘mythologies’ that could have been mentioned in the typology of “Meaning and Understanding”. Here are some examples:

E. Direct translation

First one has to deal with the problems of translatability that were already discussed in an earlier section of this study (see “Translation and Translatability” above). The question is more general than just a problem concerning anachronisms, but in certain cases the problem may be a source of anachronism. In a 2001 interview Skinner states this explicitly: “One danger to which this commitment gives rise is that of anachronistically translating into our vocabulary the term in which past thinkers phrased the problems they discussed”.²⁴⁷ The following is basically a repetition of what was said before, but we now may look at it from a different angle.

As we already know, complaints about Machiavelli not using the term *virtù* coherently or indeed failing to give any definition of it, are obviously due to the fact that commentators are thinking of the concept of ‘virtue,’ that is a common translation for the term *virtus*; and On this account they expect some kind of list of cardinal virtues. When Machiavelli does not conform to these expectations he is supposed to be fuzzy. In *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* Skinner examines the term *virtus* in Machiavelli’s writings. According to Skinner Machiavelli redefines the concept. He abandons the common way of connecting it with cardinal and princely virtues and instead connects it with a prince’s ability and willingness to do “whatever is dictated

²⁴⁶ Skinner 1969, 47.

²⁴⁷ Skinner 20021, 57.

by necessity [...] in order to attain his highest ends”²⁴⁸ and to grasp the meaning of *virtus* means to “see it as an element in the very unfamiliar language-games in which it was originally employed, and to trace its relationship with many other terms -- terms such as *fortuna*, *gloria* and *libertas*”.²⁴⁹

The lesson is that “*virtus*, as used by Roman and Renaissance theorists of self-government, has no single-term translation into modern English at all, nor even any manageable paraphrase”²⁵⁰ and to translate it as ‘virtue’ is anachronistic.

F. Mythology of rationality

There are at least two kinds of problems involved when dealing with the supposed rationality or irrationality of (past) actors. They give birth to three kinds of mythologies which are almost the opposites of each other. The first could be called the mythology of irrational beliefs, the second the mythology of false rationality and the third the mythology of charity principle.

F.1. Mythology of irrational beliefs

The mythology of irrational beliefs deals with the question “How are we to explain e.g. such beliefs as the existence of witches or that the earth stays in one spot while other planets and stars run around it?” This is a theme that is very much present in Skinner’s “Reply to My Critics” (1988) and in its revised later versions, especially in “Interpretation, Rationality and Truth” (2002). This theme was discussed more extensively above, so at this point a brief summary is sufficient.

The danger is that historians use their own standards of rationality when they judge and explain the beliefs of the past. This causes a problem as, according to Skinner, the standards of rationality depend on the time and place (context) at least when judging the rationality of true or false beliefs. In an earlier section the problem was illustrated in the example of sixteenth-century peasants believing in witches. Skinner is saying that the ‘paradigmatic’ view of what kind of action or belief counts as rational should not be taken for granted, because “otherwise we are sure to commit the characteristic sin of ‘whig’ intellectual history: that of imputing incoherence or irrationality where we have merely failed to identify some local canon of rational acceptability”.²⁵¹ But, of course, it is possible to practise charity carelessly. Skinner warns us not to be boundless in charity, and the two following types of anachronisms are concern with

²⁴⁸ Skinner 2000b, 44.

²⁴⁹ Skinner 2002l, 58.

²⁵⁰ Skinner 2002l, 58.

²⁵¹ Skinner 2002e, 38.

this danger. Skinner mentions Machiavelli's analysis of certain battles as examples of his fellow men lacking courage. According to Skinner, Machiavelli's sources do not support his conclusions, Machiavelli uses certain battles as examples, but he changes some names and alters evidence to support his conclusions, and Machiavelli's contemporaries complained about this. With some additional charity a historian might support Machiavelli by stating that his belief that the qualities of *virtu* had been lost in his times was on strong ground, but this still would not change the fact that the conclusions he makes on the bases of his evidence were out of order.²⁵²

F.2. Mythology of false rationality

The mythology of irrational beliefs may also have a counterpart: at least in principle it could also be said that some beliefs which in the light of the current web of beliefs we judge to be rational could not survive the demonstration of rationality if they were measured in the light of the standards of their own time. This is one reason why the explanation of why an agent holds a true belief must be kept apart from the question if it is rational to hold that belief.

F.2. Mythology of charity principle

I take the mythology of charity principle from G. E. R. Lloyd, who describes it in an illuminating way in his recent book *Ancient Worlds, Modern Reflections*, but the original source is Skinner. Lloyd reports that it was Skinner who gave him the example in a conference they both attended. The example given is of a story about Hobbes trying to rationalize the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Hobbes suggested that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost were each representations of the same person, which for us sounds quite reasonable suggestion in theology. However, Hobbes got into deep trouble because of this rationalization as theologians insisted that "there are three persons and yet one".²⁵³ The lesson in this case is that the rationality of an actor, or the idea that an agent is aiming to be rational (even by the standards of his own period) should not be taken for granted even though it might be a good working hypotheses as Skinner seems to be suggesting. In this case, it yields the (obvious) warning that the interpreter should try to explain the doctrine of the Trinity as a doctrine that is a result of that kind of a rational thought which would judge the suggestion of being "three persons and yet one" irrational. This is a somewhat obvious case, but it is a reminder that paradoxes, or what seems to us to be a paradox, may sometimes be intentional and "are not be solved".²⁵⁴

²⁵² Skinner 2002e, 38–39.

²⁵³ G. E. R. Lloyd 2006, 5 (and fn. 4).

²⁵⁴ G. E. R. Lloyd 2006, 5.

After all, this attention paid to different types of anachronisms raises these obvious questions: Does Skinner think that it is possible to totally get rid of them? Does Skinner hold that we can strip ourselves of our contemporary perspectives and stand immaculate and naked as Adam and Eve before they ate the forbidden fruit? In the next section I hope to answer these questions.

4.9.2. Anachronism as Original Sin

I have already referred to some of the following quotations, but in these passages from “Meaning and Understanding” Skinner explicitly states that the historian cannot get rid of his modern perspective:

(1) [...] [I]t will never in fact be possible simply to study what any given classic writer has said (especially in an alien culture) without bringing to bear some of one’s own expectations about what he must be saying.²⁵⁵

(2) Both the two mythologies I have discussed here derive from the fact that an historian of ideas will unavoidably be *set*, in approaching any given writer, by some sense of the defining characteristics of the discipline to which the given writer may be said to have contributed.²⁵⁶

(3) It is obviously dangerous, but it is inescapable, that he [the historian] should apply his own familiar criteria of classification and discrimination [...] Otherwise it is hard to see how there can be any understanding at all.²⁵⁷

(4) The perennial difficulty with which I have been concerned throughout is thus that while it is inescapable, it is also dangerous in these various ways to empirical good sense for the historian of ideas to approach his material with preconceived paradigms.²⁵⁸

It is strange how these passages have been neglected for some forty years and still continue to be, when discussing Skinner’s views on anachronisms. Nick Tosh, for example, states in his (2003) criticism that

[H]istorians of science must and do allow retrospective significance (‘selection by later effect’) to help determine the scope of their subject, and Skinner’s famous arguments, turns out, do nothing to undermine that judgment [...] It is not clear whether Skinner would even want them to. Since

²⁵⁵ Skinner 1969, 31.

²⁵⁶ Skinner 1969, 43.

²⁵⁷ Skinner 1969, 45 and note 105 (p. 297).

²⁵⁸ Skinner 1969, 48.

‘Meaning and Understanding’ [sic!], he has insisted that ‘decisions we have to make about the study must be our own decisions’ [...] These brief remarks, however are not well integrated into his overall philosophy.²⁵⁹

Had Tosh taken a closer look at “Meaning and Understanding” he would find passage (3) and would probably be less eager to state his criticism in the way he does. It should be clear that it was never Skinner’s intention to undermine “that judgement” in fact he was already a proponent of the judgement in “Meaning and Understanding”.

For the moment, my aim is not to ruminate on the reception history of “Meaning and Understanding”. Rather, it is to give an apt description of Skinner’s positions in these passages. I take it that the above quotations describe an existential condition of the historian, or any other person, that ties him to the contemporary perspective from which it follows that anachronisms are in some sense inevitable in historical studies. I shall call this condition original sin and try to explain what is the nature of this anachronism.

The above quotations seem to suggest that there are two or three sides to the notion of anachronism as original sin. In passages (1), (2) and (4) it is described as a limiting and dangerous factor in the historian’s quest. But in passage (3) it is seen as a condition for “any understanding at all.” So there is a puzzle to be solved.

The following characterizations of original sin could be read as an answer to the question: “What follows from the fact that historians are always in some way tied to the present and what are these ways?” I admit that it is unconventional and debatable if this condition should be called anachronism or that all my descriptions are descriptions of anachronisms in the strict sense. I would like to refer to the bulk of Skinner critics who argue that he is naively presuming that historians can fully avoid anachronisms and then explains that interpretations are always anachronistic because historians are tied to the present (without usually realising that the argumentation is following precisely Skinner’s lines quoted above). I am using the term ‘anachronism’ to emphasize that it is not presumed that all kinds of anachronisms are avoidable, even though it may be that original sin does not have as much to do with the historical description as it does with interpretational process or with humankind’s existential condition.

Original sin as a limiting and dangerous factor

To see how original sin is a limiting and dangerous factor for a historian, we should look at Skinner’s work from the epistemological point of view, not only from the

²⁵⁹ Tosh 2003, 655–656 and note 21.

methodological.²⁶⁰ This move turns our attention first to the question: “Is it possible to understand the past ‘accurately’, to see things completely free from anachronisms?” Despite what Skinner says in the passages cited above, his answer would probably be, that there is no principal reason to say “no”--at least in the sense this that could be possible. At first, this may seem somewhat confusing, but let me explain. Skinner does not think that we do not have a possibility of understanding the past thinkers’ utterances from their point of view. It is only that as historical agents we are prepared to approach them in a certain way, but we are not determined to remain in accordance with these first efforts of trying to understand the past thinkers. Skinner thinks that there is no problem--at the level of principle, and in every case--that could not be overcome. I used passive form of the verb ‘to overcome’ here on purpose to emphasize that Skinner is not claiming that we have, or even could have, a method of inquiry, which would guarantee non-anachronistic understanding of the past. We only have the methods which are to likely move us in the right direction. On this point I disagree with Mark Bevir, who claims that Skinner is recommending his method as sufficient. In his *The Logic of History of Ideas*, Bevir maintains that “sometimes conventionalists even suggest that their preferred method might be sufficient to ensure historical understanding, as when Skinner says, ‘if we succeed in identifying this [linguistic] context with sufficient accuracy, we can eventually hope to read off what the speaker or writer in whom we are interested was doing in saying what he said.’”²⁶¹ First, it is clear that the view Bevir attaches to Skinner does not logically follow from what Skinner writes in “Meaning and Understanding”. Second, and more importantly, I do not see how this certitude would follow from the phrase Bevir quotes. For me it is an expression of uncertainty: it is written in the conditional and Skinner writes only of hopes that historical meaning could be reached by following his methodological advice. Such an interpretation would be more in line with the rest of the article than Bevir’s interpretation. Also, when Skinner uses the term ‘sufficient’ in the quotation, he is not using it to suggest that the method is sufficient, but is wondering whether the context was identified with sufficient accuracy that we could hope to read out what the author was doing. Furthermore, I have not been able to find any textual evidence that would support Bevir’s view in Skinner’s *oeuvre*. My position is that Skinner considers his method as a necessary

²⁶⁰ I owe this idea to Stephan Fietz (Fietz 2004) though our points of views are different, and Fietz does not arrive at his conclusions by reading “Meaning and Understanding”. I’m not sure how much I owe to Fietz, but his paper was certainly inspirational. It is also debatable if Skinner has presented any method. Gunnell (1982 and 1987) argues that Skinner has not formulated a method for interpretation and that he gives only a description of the process of interpretation. The answer to this dispute depends on what kind of concept of ‘method’ one has. Perhaps Skinner has not systematised his “methodological” statements but he does give at least some concrete instructions such as the historian should read other texts of the time in addition to the one historian is mainly interested in, and so on.

²⁶¹ Bevir 1991, 81. The Skinner quotation is from “Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts”, (77). Bevir repeated his view in the BSHP conference 5.4.2006 at Robinson College when I presented my paper on the matter.

tool--heuristic and critical, as Skinner writes in "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts"--if one wishes to reach a genuine historical interpretation, but he does not consider his method to be *sufficient* to guarantee results which would be absolutely non-anachronistic. In "Meaning and Understanding" Skinner writes that "[context] needs rather to be treated as an ultimate framework for helping to decide what conventionally recognizable meanings, in a society of *that* kind, it might in principle have been possible for someone to have intended to communicate" and continues "what I do claim is that the critical survey I have conducted may be said to establish and prove the case for this methodology--to establish it not as a suggestion, an aesthetic preference, or a piece of academic imperialism, but as a matter of conceptual propriety, a matter of seeing what the *necessary* conditions are for the understanding utterances".²⁶² The strongest expression of trust that Skinner expresses regarding his methodology (something which Bevir does not mention) can be found in his "Analysis of Political Thought". There Skinner states that "my original aim was merely to analyse the nature of the conditions which are necessary and perhaps sufficient for an understanding of any of these texts."²⁶³ But again there is an expression of incertitude and Skinner is actually speaking of conditions of understanding and not of methodology. The strongest passage in which Skinner explicitly denies Bevir's claim is to be found in "A Reply to My Critics" in which Skinner writes that "my precepts, in short, are only claims about how best to proceed; they are not claims about how to guarantee success".²⁶⁴ It is all about hopes, help and heuristics: there is nothing about certitude or warranty.

But in order to understand Skinner's position fully, we have to ask a second question: "Do we have epistemological criteria to make the judgement that our interpretation is not contaminated with any anachronisms?" This question often seems to be confused with the first one: "Can our interpretation be free from all anachronisms?" However, these two questions must be kept apart. To this second question Skinner's answer is certainly "no". He would probably like to add that we often do have some reliable criteria by which we are able to assess if our interpretation is contaminated with anachronism(s), and this is what the typology of myths is all about. In other words, we cannot be certain if we have managed to give an anachronism-free interpretation: tied to the present as we are, we do not have the epistemological capacity or information to make this judgment. But it does not follow that we actually did not manage to give an interpretation, which could truly describe the past in a non-anachronistic way. But, it has to be noted, an interpretation, which is not anachronistic, is not necessarily a historically correct interpretation. There are more traps and dangers lurking than just anachronisms. This is the way *original sin* works

²⁶² Skinner 1969, 64 (italics are mine).

²⁶³ Skinner 1974, 99.

²⁶⁴ Skinner 1988, 281.

as a limiting factor for historian. It is an epistemological limitation, and in this epistemological sense, when judging the correctness of one's interpretation, historians are always anachronistic and tied to the present.

Some may wonder how an interpretation can be both anachronistic and not anachronistic. The trick is to notice that this epistemological anachronism, which I have just formulated, limits necessarily only the *(epistemological) judging of our interpretation* of some given work and not (necessarily) *the interpretation of some given work*. So, historians can be anachronistic when we take a look at one of their duties, but possibly non-anachronistic in regard to another of the duties their job consists of.

The dangerous side becomes more clear in the following quotation: "the perpetual danger, in our attempts to enlarge our historical understanding, is thus that our expectations about what someone must be saying or doing will themselves determine that we understand the agent to be doing something which he would not – or even could not – himself have accepted as an account of what he was doing".²⁶⁵ The phenomenon in question is familiar from psychology and Skinner explains it accordingly, that the danger lies in the fact that in our past experiences, in our personal history, we learn to see details in a certain way. The danger arises because past experiences are always about to *determine* the present evaluations. Yet, this is only dangerous, and not fatal, for historical interpretation.²⁶⁶ Skinner suggests that even though our psychological tendencies take us in a certain direction, we need not follow them blindly. Skinner seems to think that a historian will probably have to start work within a prevailing paradigm, but he should struggle to become aware of the contingencies the paradigm carries within, and in this way --not letting anachronistic mythologies seduce us-- he may perform a personal revolution and exceed the limits the paradigm initially sets on us.

Original sin as a necessary condition for understanding

In passage (3) above Skinner states that it would be impossible to have any understanding at all if we did not use our criteria when approaching a past thinker. In the first chapter of "Meaning and Understanding" Skinner explains what this means. He writes that the ideas of "perennial interest" and "fundamental concepts" only seem to be the basic source of confusion. In fact they are necessary tools for the

²⁶⁵ Skinner 1969, 31.

²⁶⁶ Skinner indeed gives hope that the forms of anachronisms that were anatomised in the typology of mythologies can be avoided. He writes that "If the tendency, moreover, for the study simply of a writer's doctrines to generate mythologies is only to be classified as *danger*, it is surely one which with sufficient self-consciousness, the historian may well hope to avoid". Skinner 1969, 50.

historiography of any specific discipline, though it may be only because otherwise we would not be able to associate past communicative action with the respective discipline. The past would appear as a jelly-like mess and stay that way if we had no preconceptions of it to start with. But there is nothing more dramatic here than what takes place when we read a contemporary author. We always expect something and we may find out that our expectations are in harmony with the text, and when they are not we just form new expectations.²⁶⁷

Perhaps this side of original sin is more clearly visible in Skinner's later essay on the concept of the 'state'. Skinner starts with a definition that can be called a "starting definition" that is used to "'mark' the research problem"²⁶⁸ so that the concept under investigation becomes linked with historical vocabulary which demarcates or marks the object of research.

So, according to Skinner, it is not even possible to recognize what a classic writer discusses if the interpreter does not have any expectations about what the text might be dealing with.²⁶⁹ We need this contemporary perspective to get a grip on history. But again Skinner would add that there is no reason why historians should stick to their expectations. They form a starting point and historians' understanding of what they are dealing with will probably change in the course of their interpretative actions.²⁷⁰

I have to admit that this last feature of original sin might not, strictly speaking, be about anachronisms. It might have more to do with a separate but related concept of 'objectivity'. It must be kept in mind that being anachronistic and not being objective are not the same or *vice versa*: 'non-anachronistic' and 'objective' are not synonyms. If a description is not objective, it does not follow that it is anachronistic. If a

²⁶⁷ Perhaps Simo Knuuttila's idea that "avoiding anachronistic interpretative tools or deriving alien meanings presupposes some sort of systematic comparison" is in line with this early Skinner's insight: we need to compare unfamiliar to what we already know in order to understand it. Both what is common and what is different between the familiar and the alien will help us to familiarize us with the previously unfamiliar. See Knuuttila 2006, 95.

²⁶⁸ See Kurunmäki 2001, 60 and Palonen 1997, 51-52. I am here closely following Kurunmäki's formulation. Kurunmäki refers to the passage in Skinner's essay on the concept of state in which Skinner connects certain vocabulary to discussions that "gave rise to recognizably modern discussion of the concept of state". Skinner 1989, 95-96. Palonen is referring to Koselleck but I think that Palonen's description of "marking definition" which does not determine a concept but demarcates or identifies a problem also fits well to Skinner's case.

²⁶⁹ Conal Condren refers to the 2002 version of "Meaning and Understanding" and writes that "if a given past seems radically alien to an historian, then the necessity to mediate it may also seem to require the use of anachronistic categories to one side of any moral judgement. That is, there may well be some extreme situations in which some anachronism is taken as a condition for an historian's understanding" Condren 2004, 288. Condren seems to be the only one that – so far – has noticed this side of Skinner's thought even though he does not explicate the idea any further.

²⁷⁰ I am, of course, not claiming that our opinion forming takes place in a solipsistic world. It happens in dialogue with our former experiences, the text we are reading, and our inquisitive mind.

description is not anachronistic, it does not follow that it is objective. Even if it were true that anachronistic descriptions are never objective, the converse is not true. It sometimes seems that the possibility of being non-anachronistic is denied on the grounds of the obvious fact that a historian has to make choices when describing an historical event. But this is a category mistake, though again, it has to be noted that it does not follow from this that it would be possible to give a non-anachronistic description.

When we describe past events, we have to make choices, but that, as such, does not make the description anachronistic. Choices are involved in any description of an event, an object or an action. Even if we are describing our actions at the same time as we perform them, even if we are describing an object right in front of our eyes, and even if we are reporting from the midst of an event, we are making choices. It is possible, at least in principle, that after learning about the circumstances and mental world in a certain area a hundred years ago, a historian would make approximately the same choices as a person describing a building a hundred years ago, or that the ancestor would accept the later description as a good one. Choices mean only that we cannot claim to present the whole picture and all sides of the object being described, that we always construe some kind of perspective for our description.

As Skinner explains in the article “The Practice of History and the Cult of the Fact”, even a description of a building is all about choosing what characteristics which belong to the building should be included in, say, the “history of the Chatsworth House”.²⁷¹ In this article Skinner is refuting Geoffrey Elton’s views that the historian is a servant of evidence who does not really ask specific questions before they are forced upon him by historical evidence, after he has found out what the evidence truly says. Or in other words, the idea which Skinner opposes is that the historian should not start his work by questioning his evidence, but the historian should let the questions arise from the evidence. This might be somewhat surprising as Skinner is known as an advocate of “seeing things their way”, and he indeed admits that these kinds of remarks serve as a “salutary reminder” about the need to be aware of our tendency to set the evidence into familiar interpretational patterns that have no actual connection with the events historian is describing.²⁷² But what Skinner doubts is that it could be really possible to get a grip on the historical object without making choices regarding the starting point of the studies.

To conclude, I would like to add one remark. Our choices can of course be anachronistic, but the question whether a description is anachronistic has to be

²⁷¹ See Skinner 2002b, 17.

²⁷² See Skinner 2002b, 15.

considered separately from the question whether the choices it is built upon are objective. Certainly we make our choices from a distance, but it is an epistemological distance and from this it follows only that we cannot know for sure whether our choices would actually have made sense or been accepted a hundred years ago.

4.9.3. Conclusion – Skinner’s Typology of Anachronisms

I have described anachronism as *original sin* as inescapable, limiting and dangerous but yet a necessary condition for a historian’s understanding, and I have tried to show how it is possible to give a coherent account of something that is associated with these seemingly contradictory qualities. I have also given a detailed account of different forms of anachronisms, which Skinner calls ‘mythologies’ or ‘sins.’ Together these two main forms (sins/original sin) form an apparent contradiction when we ask if it is possible or even worth striving for to give a non-anachronistic description of an historical event. But this paradox appears only when we make no distinction between different kinds of anachronisms. Solving Skinner’s apparent contradiction is a matter of distinguishing between these two forms of anachronisms. We also need to see the differences between the starting point of our interpretational work, our interpretational tools and the result, namely the historical description of an event. On the general level we should notice that anachronism is itself is a contested concept, and there might not be any informative universal definition for the concept (or only on a very abstract level). We might do better if we just go on anatomising different forms of anachronisms. Now we are also in a position to state that those who claim that Skinner’s conception of anachronism is naïve, or think that he considers it possible to get rid of all kinds of anachronism, are mistaken. In all his opposition to anachronistic interpretations he gives an important and unavoidable role to the kind of anachronism that I have called ‘original sin’.

Finally, I wish to say that even though I have presented Skinner’s typology in a sympathetic way, I do not wish to suggest that it is above criticism. It is not, and it is not meant to be, a complete mapping of anachronisms. And I do not claim that the critical commentaries that I have referred to will fail because they do not pay close attention to Skinner’s typology. I merely wish to suggest that they would have benefitted from pushing Skinner’s article a little further. I also hope that I have managed to show that any criticism which deals only with 'Skinner’s maxims' or tries to summarize Skinner’s conception of anachronisms in a general way faces the danger of missing the whole point.

In the following section I shall try to take heed of what has been said above about methodologies which aim to avoid anachronisms and analysis of Arthur Danto’s work

on Nietzsche. I also discuss the approach to history of philosophy that has been called “rational reconstruction”, which is thought to have based on anachronisms.

4.10. CASE STUDY: DANTO ON NIETZSCHE

4.10.1. Introduction

It has become a commonplace that philosophy has a special connection to history. This relation has been addressed in various ways, but in the following I will comment on one line of conversation that has concentrated on two methods of reading historical writings: rational and historical reconstructions. These two genres of the historiography of philosophy are often taken as a starting point, even if one goes on to question the confrontation between the two methods. The most influential single article proposing these terms (and perhaps the first to use the exact terminology) is Richard Rorty’s seminal article “The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres” published in 1984. This is the article that is referred to when one feels obliged to say something about the methodology of one’s own interpretation of past thinkers. Rorty’s article indeed serves as a good starting point, but it does have some problems. While Rorty makes some fine systematic distinctions, he misses the historical dimensions of the methods or approaches. Perhaps more importantly, he has very little to say about what kind of activity rational reconstruction is. He seems to be more interested in the reasons why we should, or should not, do rational reconstructions of past thinkers.²⁷³

In the following, I will first take a look at A. C. Danto’s *Nietzsche as Philosopher* as a paradigmatic example of rational reconstruction. I will then turn to V. Tejera’s criticism of the work, which I consider to present a paradigmatic example of the historicist²⁷⁴ criticism of rational reconstruction.²⁷⁵ After this I shall examine the history of the concept of rational reconstruction in its original context and how it shifted in discussions concerning historiography of philosophy. At this point I return to Danto and his book to describe their historical context(s), primarily Danto’s

²⁷³ Rorty would have done better had he written about “presentism” instead of “rational reconstruction”. Presentism is a better label for all the approaches that frame consciously history into a modern perspective. Rational reconstruction has a more specific traditional meaning.

²⁷⁴ By “historicist” I mean here the variety of approaches to the history of philosophy which maintain that past thinkers should be seen from their own point of view in their own particular historical contexts.

²⁷⁵ Of the mentioned authors only Rorty uses the terminology exactly. Danto speaks of his method by simply the term ‘reconstruction’, and Tejera speaks of ‘logical reconstruction’. I think that the historical examination of the concept of rational reconstruction allows me to treat them as synonymous without serious problems.

institutional environment. The final part is an interpretation of Danto's work in these historical contexts. There I shall try to explicate Danto's intentions in the spirit of Skinner's methodological views by answering the question concerning what Danto was doing in this book. I provide the answer by studying the contexts and situating Danto's books in the conventions and norms within these contexts. It should be noted that my aim is to give an interpretation of Danto's intentions, not of Nietzsche or his intentions. Though my study is historical in nature, I regard it as a contribution to contemporary philosophical discussions. I hope to demonstrate the possibility of providing a reasonable description of authorial intentions *in* a certain text by situating the text in the intellectual context of the author at the time that the piece was written. I also regard this to be a contribution to the discussions of the (ir)recoverability of intentions. By tracing back the history of the concept of rational reconstruction and its shift from the contexts of metaphilosophy and the philosophy of science to the study of the history of science, I hope to offer a perspective that could benefit the discussions concerning the methodological questions of studying history of philosophy. I hope that this section will function as an example of a way to avoid anachronism and as well as a demonstration of ways of revealing anachronistic features in an interpretation.

4.10.2. Danto's Nietzsche

Let us first take a textualist approach to Danto's work and simply start reading what Danto himself says about the book and in the book. In the preface to the Morningside edition Danto explains the title of his book, *Nietzsche As Philosopher*, by referring to a conversation with a colleague of his, who had assured him that Nietzsche is not really a philosopher but a prosaist. Danto's book is directed against this opinion, and he goes on to declare that whatever else Nietzsche was, he was certainly a philosopher. Danto states his aim as a mission to introduce Nietzsche to analytic philosophy.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ See Danto 1980, 9-10. He also restates this in the foreword to the recently published expanded edition: one of his aims was "to demonstrate that Nietzsche really was a philosopher [...]. He is as much a philosopher in the received sense by which we admire the leading figures in the major departments in which the discipline it taught to aspiring professionals" and goes on to state that "my book gave Nietzsche philosophical credibility, admittedly in a far narrower philosophical culture than he would have recognised, that of professional philosophers in a discipline that had become technical and logical, as it had in the Anglo-American academic world, whose philosophy departments it dominated. The book introduced him as a new colleague to my admired peers" Danto 2005b, xv-xvi. The uncertainty of Nietzsche's position within Danto's philosophical circles is confirmed in an review by Newton P. Stallknecht: "In the early years of this century academic philosophers we slow to include Friedrich Nietzsche's writings as a part of their standard curriculum, and even today, except among the existentialists, his position is uncertain." Stallknecht 1967, 160. Interestingly in the preface to the extended edition, published in 2005, Danto also speaks of a moral task: "I am not quite so naive as to believe the Minotaur will never again burst out of the labyrinth he himself showed me how to build – but neither can I think of a more justified philosophical task than, by turning his arguments back

Danto tells us that there seems to be two characteristics in Nietzsche's work that have caused his dismissal by Danto's colleagues.²⁷⁷ The first can be found in the structure of Nietzsche's works. To them Nietzsche was a bad architect. Nietzsche's alleged fault was that he did not explicate his doctrines in a philosophically coherent and systematic manner. According to Danto, Nietzsche's doctrines are so scattered around that it does not really matter from which page one starts to read his books.

In order to clarify his purpose, Danto examines the way Nietzsche uses language. Danto says that the philosophical lexicon is much closer to ordinary speech than one might expect, and this causes problems when the reader expects an ordinary language word in a philosophical text to be used with the same meaning it normally has in everyday speech. Danto tells us that there is a second, though related, problem that the reader has to deal with when reading Nietzsche: Nietzsche constantly shifts between the philosophical and the everyday meaning of words, and according to Danto, Nietzsche is usually no more aware of these moves than his readers. This habit gives the impression that Nietzsche is using concepts in an inconsistent way.

These are the two problems that Danto seeks to overcome in order to give Nietzsche the status of philosopher. The object is thus to clarify Nietzsche's "philosophical language" by showing how the changes in the meanings of words are not random but are coherently dependent on the contexts in which they are used (to show the logical connections between his scattered doctrines) and to organize them into a single "philosophically systematic" theory. By this move, Danto translates Nietzsche's philosophy into the systematic and analytic discourse in which he considers real philosophy operates: had Nietzsche known what he was trying to say "his language would have been less colourful".²⁷⁸

Danto's conception of philosophy plays a major role in his interpretation. He characterizes *the* nature of philosophy by referring to two "distinct facts":

The first is the systematic nature of philosophy itself. In the character of the philosophical discipline, there is no such thing as an isolated solution to an isolated problem. The problems of philosophy are so interconnected that the philosopher cannot solve or start to solve, one of them without implicitly committing himself to solutions for all the rest [...] The fact remains however,

against themselves, to blunt his [Nietzsche's] language. How often, after all, does a philosopher, acting in the line of duty, actually help save lives?" Danto 2005a, xviii.

²⁷⁷ One further reason, which Danto does not consider, for rejecting Nietzsche is that some philosophers could have condemned Nietzsche's political views, or what they thought them to be.

²⁷⁸ Danto 1980, 13.

that philosophy as such is architectonic [...] [P]hilosophers are systematic through the nature of their enterprise.²⁷⁹

and second:

“We are apt to attribute to an author’s unconscious what is in fact in our own knowledge, which he could not have been conscious of because it has to do with the facts which lay not in the depths of his mind but in the future [...] So the unifying forces of historical intelligence work together with the systemizing dynamics of philosophical thought to produce a coherent structure in a writer’s works (his literary style and methods of composition not withstanding), quite independently of whether he ever was able to express it as such, for himself or anyone else.”²⁸⁰

Following these ‘rules’ Danto starts to construct a systematic theory from a collection of aphorisms. He tells his readers that his interpretation is to be taken like any scientific theory “that is, an instrument for unifying and explaining a domain of phenomena”.²⁸¹ According to Danto his theory even has predictive power as it tells us what Nietzsche was going to say.²⁸² His hypothesis is that Nietzsche was more a systematic thinker than an irrational or spontaneous sort of thinker, and that ‘nihilism’ is the key concept that enables us to see this. He uses Nietzsche’s textual material in the same way as scientists employ observations, i.e. to support a hypothesis.²⁸³ After stripping Nietzsche’s philosophy of all its personal and colourful characteristics and reconstructing his philosophy into a coherent theory, Danto finally concludes that Nietzsche shares to a considerable extent a modern analytic perspective and deserves to be considered an important modern philosopher. At the end of his book he hopes that he has “not merely imposed [his] own will-to-system upon the galaxy of fragments and aphorisms”.²⁸⁴ There is probably some irony here, but it seems to be fair to say that Danto considers that he has not violated Nietzsche’s philosophy in any serious way, that his interpretation is in accordance with the basic ideas of

²⁷⁹ Danto 1984, 24. Subsequently in an interview with Giovanna Borradori Danto explains what he means by architecture of thought: “I like things to be clear, I like connections to be clear, and I like to see structures [...] if you take a sufficiently distant view of that, you can see that the lack of structure is one of the great historic alternatives to clarity”. This may have a kind of holistic sound, but later in the same interview Danto insists that he is a foundationalist in a very “Cartesian sense”: “I like the idea of being able to break things down and put them back together to observe how the different elements interconnect and function”. See Borradori 2003, 90-91 and 97.

²⁸⁰ Danto 1984, 25.

²⁸¹ Danto 1984, 26.

²⁸² “[...] in at least a loose, sense this theory has a certain predictive power; that is, it allows us to know more or less what Nietzsche is going to be saying” Danto 1984, 26.

²⁸³ “I shall use texts as scientific theorists employ observations – to confirm my theory at this point or that”. Danto 1984, 26. This is also how he sees Nietzsche uses his aphorisms, namely to support his hypothesis.

²⁸⁴ Danto 1984, 229.

Nietzsche's philosophy or with Nietzsche's "own concept of philosophical activity".²⁸⁵ From a historicist point of view this is, of course, a strange suggestion even though it might be true (if only by chance and with no thanks to Danto's skills in historiography or the virtue of his method).

4.10.3. The Historicist Criticism Against Rational Reconstruction

The basic historicist criticism against Danto is that he is anti-historical in an essentially historical field. A paradigmatic case of historicist criticism is V. Tejera's comment on Danto's books in his (introductory) article "On the Nature of Philosophic Historiography".²⁸⁶ Tejera regards Danto's anti-historicist attitude as a symptom of a larger-scale phenomenon of identifying the history of philosophy with philosophy itself, which has caused this "denial of the historicity of philosophic history as such".²⁸⁷ Most of all he blames philosophers who think of philosophy as applied logic.

Tejera attacks Danto's concept of philosophy and denies the possibility that Danto could have grasped Nietzsche's conception of philosophical activity. According to Tejera, Danto's conception of systematic philosophy is theoretic and assertive while Nietzsche's philosophy is systematic "by reference to cultural practices he is criticizing and to the kind of expressiveness which Nietzsche laboured to achieve".²⁸⁸ Tejera argues that Danto should have done some philological or interpretative work on the notion of philosophy instead of showing total ignorance of the history of the concept. He uses Danto as an example, but his real target is the tradition of "logical reconstruction". He names three faults that logical reconstructionists necessarily commit.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Danto 1984, 230.

²⁸⁶ Reviews of the book at the time it was published varied. An example of very positive evaluation is Copleston's ("There is also a need, however, for straightforward studies of the structure and content of the philosopher's thought as expressed in his writings [...] Professor Danto's book belongs to [...] [this] class [...] The book should prove of real value to those who are looking for a clear, penetrating, and coherent exposition of Nietzsche's thought [...] It seems to me that the author's presentation of the structure of Nietzsche's philosophy is well grounded [...] One of the most valuable features of Danto's book [...] is the way he relates Nietzsche's thought both to that of Hume and to the modern analytic or 'linguistic' movement" 1968, 103 – 105). Stallknecht (1967) and Steinkraus (1966) provide a neutral response. Very harsh criticism is given by e.g. Fischer ("[...] it is incomprehensible why and how Nietzsche should be made available to analytical philosophy [...] a waste of effort" 1967, 567–568). The Viennese philosopher Fischer identifies Danto's more admiring public as "those who think of Nietzsche's work as containing what Brand Blanshard once thought it should present itself as containing, namely, 'the aired prejudices of a brilliant writer.'" *ibid*, 568). The tension between Copleston and Fischer about the idea of relating Nietzsche to analytic philosophy should be noted.

²⁸⁷ Tejera 1989, 1.

²⁸⁸ Tejera 1989, 1.

²⁸⁹ See Tejera 1989, 3.

1. Logical reconstruction is incapable of articulating historical thought in its own terms.
2. Logical reconstruction is incapable of perceiving the special modes in which the thinker has developed his meanings when the mode of judgement is other than assertive.
3. The ubiquitous interpretative problem of how to discount the historian's own point of view as the criterion of the rationality of his subject's activity and products, is not even present as a problem to the logicalist commentator.

In other words, the main accusation is that logical reconstructionists have constructed their interpretative frame in advance, and thus the method does not allow any dialectics between past thinkers and the modern interpreter. Tejera concludes that the absence of dialectics represents the anti-historical element of logical reconstruction, and as a result logical reconstruction fails to be self-reflective, which for Tejera means to be unphilosophical.

It is true that Danto's interpretation probably offends all the historicist criteria of historical interpretation, and it may well be anachronistic in many of the ways described above, for example there is no doubt that Danto's interpretation is parochial regarding its conception of philosophy. Danto is conscious of this and states in his preface that the work may "precipitate some anachronisms".²⁹⁰ From a historicist point of view, at first, it seems very tempting and unproblematic to accept the core of Tejera's criticism. But we should also ask whether Tejera's interpretation of Danto lives up to his own expectations? Has Tejera expressed Danto's thought in his own terms? Has Tejera been able "to perceive the special mode" in which Danto has developed his meanings? And is his reading of Danto 'dialectical'? To answer these questions we first have to examine Danto's interpretation in its historical context as Quentin Skinner demands, a task that Tejera did not perform.

4.10.4. A History of Rational Reconstruction as a Method of Reconstructing Scientific Theories

In order to gain a better understanding of Danto's work I will first take a look at the historical background to the concept of rational reconstruction. As already mentioned, it is possible that Richard Rorty is the first one to use the term 'historical reconstruction' along with 'rational reconstruction' when speaking of the

²⁹⁰ Danto 1984, 13.

historiography of philosophy, but ‘rational reconstruction’ itself does have a longer history. Before the term was transposed into this special discussion it was a common term used in the context of the philosophy of science and metaphilosophy.

If one is willing to abstract the meaning of the term, one can trace back the thought to Aristotle when he speaks about the ideal of axiomatic science, and how scientific knowledge should be rearranged according to a certain ideal form. Perhaps a little less abstraction is needed if one considers that Descartes’s aim in ‘translating’ geometry into the language of algebra, and Leibniz’s idea of a universal language (*characteristica universalis*) are close to the idea of rational reconstruction.²⁹¹ At least all this fits in with Takashi Yagisawa’s definition of ‘rational reconstruction’ in the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy:

Rational reconstruction, also called logical reconstruction, translation of a discourse of a certain conceptual type into a discourse of another conceptual type with the aim of making it possible to say everything (or everything important) that is expressible in the former more clearly (or perspicaciously) in the latter.²⁹²

However, it should be noted that historically speaking it would have been impossible for those past figures to be rational reconstructionists in the strict sense, since the concept carries certain attributes that do not belong to the times of Descartes and Leibniz.

As the most famous example of rational reconstruction Yagisawa mentions Rudolf Carnap’s attempt to translate discourse concerning physical objects into a discourse which concerns the immediate objects of sense experience. Carnap’s idea that every meaningful sentence could be defined using concepts of immediate sense experience did not endure for long, but the idea of an exact formal language certainly survived in some branches of analytic philosophy. Before Carnap, perhaps the first philosopher to use the term ‘rational reconstruction’ was Hans Reichenbach. Reichenbach distinguishes between the context of discovery and the context of justification. The context of discovery belongs to psychology while the context of justification is the proper interest of the philosophy of science.²⁹³ According to Reichenbach, a rational

²⁹¹ At least according to G. H. von Wright. See his *Logik, filosofi och språk* (1971). But I do not wish to emphasize the point that if we work at a very high level of abstraction we may find “rational reconstructions” nearly everywhere in the history of philosophy. In effect I wish to suggest that we should not do that, and instead, we should be more specific when we try to trace the history of rational reconstruction that is relevant for the history of rational reconstruction in the historiography of philosophy.

²⁹² Yagisawa 1995, 676.

²⁹³ This distinction stood up strongly for a while but later on it has been challenged. See e.g. Hoyningen-Huene 1987.

reconstruction of a scientific theory presents (or perhaps represents) a scientific theory by using methods of formal logic in a form that enables us to see, (as clearly as possible), how the hypothesis is supported by evidence. In other words rational reconstruction “constitutes the basis of logical analysis”²⁹⁴ of a scientific theory in order to decide if the theory in question can be justified.²⁹⁵

The meaningful practise of rational reconstruction is thus based on the assumption that the new discourse expresses more clearly everything of importance about some expression in the first discourse. This kind of activity was central to the logical positivists and the post-war analytic philosophers who succeeded them. For instance, the members of the Vienna Circle considered that one of their essential tasks was to carry out the rational reconstruction of scientific knowledge by restating the relations between the hypothesis and empirical evidence in scientific theories (as Reichenbach suggested). In general, logical positivists were interested in reformulating scientific theories within the patterns of formal logic, so that the problems of the proper area of philosophy of science, namely explanation and confirmation, could be dealt with as problems of applied logic.²⁹⁶

An important feature of the reconstruction of scientific theories is the idea of the hierarchy of scientific language levels which reflects the structure of scientific research: how one proceeds from observational data to a theory. Bottom-level terms form a semantically unproblematic language of observational data content that is independent of the upper theoretical level. At the bottom level there are statements like “the pointer x is on 5”. The next level of statements assigns values to scientific concepts like “the temperature is 5°C” and at the following level the (invariant) relations²⁹⁷ among scientific concepts are formulated. At the top-level there are deductive systems (or “scientific theories”) in which laws are theorems. So, the top-level theories derive their meaning from the bottom-level terms or are constructed from them by following operational correspondence rules. John Losee has summarised the “important” conclusions by “logical reconstructionists philosophers of science” about the hierarchy of language levels in the following way:²⁹⁸

1. Each level is an “interpretation” of the level below;
2. The predictive power of statements increases from base to apex;
3. The principal division within the language of science is between an “observational level”--the bottom of three levels of the hierarchy-- and a “theoretical level”--the top

²⁹⁴ Reichenbach 1947.

²⁹⁵ See Reichenbach 1938 and 1947.

²⁹⁶ See e.g. Losee 1985, 174.

²⁹⁷ That is, individual laws.

²⁹⁸ Losee 1985, 174.

level of the hierarchy. The observational level contains statements about “observables” such as ‘pressure’ and ‘temperature’; the theoretical level contains statements about “non-observables” such as ‘genes’ and ‘quarks’;

4. Statements of the observable level provide a test-basis for statements of the theoretical level. Losee presents the language levels in the following way (figure 1)

Language levels in science (Losee)

Level	content	e.g.
Theory	Deductive system in which all laws are theorems	Kinetic molecular theory
Laws	Invariant relations among scientific concepts	Boyle’s law
Values of concepts	Statements that assign values to scientific concepts	‘P = 2.0 atm’ ‘V = 1.5 lit.’
Primary experimental data	Statements about pointer readings, menisci, counter clicks, <i>et. al.</i>	‘Pointer P is on 3.5’

(figure 1)

Though it is, of course, rather rare that scientific research leads to a new general theory such as “kinetic molecular theory” this is one way of looking at ideal structure of scientific research: how research proceeds from observations to generalizations. I argue that Danto aims to present Nietzsche’s philosophical activity conforming to this structure. His illocutionary intention is to show that Nietzsche proceeds from observations to general theory and this process fits to above structure. I shall return to this argument in detail but before that we need to take a look at how rational reconstructions became connected to the historiography of philosophy.

4.10.5. History of Rational Reconstruction as a Method of Inquiry in the Historiography of Philosophy

Before setting Danto’s book in its historical context I will take a quick look at the history of ‘rational reconstruction’ as a method of history of philosophy. For Carnap, the method of rational reconstruction was an instrument to overcome what he called pseudoproblems in philosophy. He applied it to topical issues of his time and was not interested in past thinkers; in effect he hardly mentions any previous philosophers in his works such as *The Logical Structure of the World*. Richard Rorty’s article certainly made famous the distinction between rational and historical reconstruction

in the historiography of philosophy, but at least in the case of the concept of rational reconstruction that history is longer. When considering the impact of Rorty's article, it is somewhat confusing to notice that Rorty has actually very little to say about the methods he writes about. He says a lot about the motives why one wishes to do historical or rational reconstruction and almost nothing about how to actually use these methods. Of course, this may just reflect the fact that we have no common definition of the method of rational or historical reconstruction of the history of philosophy.²⁹⁹

Rorty suggests that A. J. Ayer carries out a rational reconstruction of the history of philosophy in his *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) but Ayer is not explicit about it. Rorty also mentions Strawson's and Bennett's work from 1966 and 1971 and it would not have been a surprise if had he mentioned Russell's *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, published in 1900. The first rational reconstructionist of the history of philosophy who uses the exact word to describe his work (and acknowledges the word's uses in other contexts)³⁰⁰ is probably Wolfgang Stegmüller.³⁰¹ In his article "Towards a Rational Reconstruction of Kant's Metaphysics of Experience", published in two parts in 1967 and 1968, he states that "The expression 'rational reconstruction' is normally used within systematic contexts; but under appropriate circumstances it is applicable to the historical case as well", and goes on to give three principles which a rational reconstruction of a given historical philosophical system must fulfil.³⁰²

1. The theory has to be presented in such a way that it remains *in accordance with the basic ideas of the philosopher*;
2. As far as possible it has to be presented *in precise terms*;
3. It is to be presented *as a consistent theory*, if possible (i.e. if not all rational accounts meeting requirements 1. and 2. turn out to be inconsistent).

The aim of the first principle is to prevent rational reconstructions from becoming arbitrary; and it calls for preliminary interpretation and presystematic insight. The second principle guarantees, for Stegmüller, that the reconstruction satisfies not only

²⁹⁹ In this sense, my interpretation of rational reconstruction is just one among a number of different concepts of rational reconstruction (and especially so because I am using only one example). But I nevertheless hope that my interpretation adds something to our general understanding of the genres of historiography.

³⁰⁰ Today it has become common to call all anachronistic interpretations "rational reconstructions" without any reference to the uses of the word in previous (systematic) contexts.

³⁰¹ The discussion about rational reconstruction of scientific progress was very lively in the 1960s.

³⁰² Stegmüller 1977, 67.

our historical curiosity, but our philosophical mind as well. The third principle will serve as the final criteria when choosing the most adequate reconstruction if we are offered several rational reconstructions that are indistinguishable by other standards, for instance when they are in accordance with the intuitive content of the original theory. Stegmüller insists that rational reconstruction is not intended to be a justification for a philosophical theory, even though it may serve as one. The general value of rational reconstruction is that “the account given shall enable us to *discuss* the problem of the validity of the theory”³⁰³ i.e. it presents the original theory in such a form that its pros and cons can be pointed out more easily than in the original form. This is indeed in accordance with the idea of the rational reconstruction of scientific theories and it certainly helps us to understand the method better than Rorty’s (almost only) characterization of the practice of rational reconstruction as an opposite of historical reconstruction pursuit of which is to “obey a constraint formulated by Quentin Skinner”.³⁰⁴ By this “constraint” Rorty refers to the famous (half of a) sentence in Skinner’s “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”: “[...] no agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done”.³⁰⁵ Perhaps it also worth mentioning that Stegmüller wrote and published his piece on Kant before Skinner’s “Meaning and Understanding” appeared, so Rorty’s claim is somewhat anachronistic. But even though Stegmüller’s characterization of rational reconstruction is more precise than Rorty’s, he is basically spelling out the criteria of excellence when doing rational reconstruction and not giving concrete methodological instructions.

4.10.6. Danto’s Interpretation in Its Historical Context

Let us return to Danto’s book, this time widening our horizon outside the text in order to see how this might affect our understanding of it.

In an essay, published only in Italy,³⁰⁶ Danto takes a look back at the 1960s when he wrote his book *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. Paying attention to past thinkers was somewhat unpopular in analytic philosophy, at least among Danto’s colleagues, at the time, though the interest had begun to rise in the 1950s. Analytic philosophers may have just turned to history but they wanted to stand out--or at least--differ from historians. It was emphasised that the philosopher’s task, when looking at his or her predecessors, differed from the job of the historian of ideas.³⁰⁷ As Danto reminds us,

³⁰³ Stegmüller 1977, 70.

³⁰⁴ Rorty 1984, 50.

³⁰⁵ Skinner 1969, 28.

³⁰⁶ Danto 2005a.

³⁰⁷ Though Lovejoy was a professional philosopher.

“the main qualification for writing on a past philosopher was that one had established credibility as a contemporary philosopher”. Paul Edward, who was editor of *The Macmillan Encyclopedia of Philosophy* was involved another project, which was later published as *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, and he invited Danto to write a piece on Nietzsche for the *Critical History*. The editor D. J. O’Connor invited writers to contribute to this new book in order to “explain the principle philosophical concepts and theories in the order in which they were developed; and to evaluate and criticize them in the light of contemporary knowledge and to bring out whatever may be in them that is of permanent philosophical interest”.³⁰⁸ Danto puts it even more clearly: “the main task was to scrub their writings clean of historical excrescence and to present them very much as if they might be candidates for tenure in a good respectable philosophy department in a Midwest university”.³⁰⁹ So, emphasising contemporary perspective when discussing past thinkers was a convention and a norm among Danto’s colleagues at that time, and one was expected to go along with this convention if one wanted to engage into discussion concerning past thinkers with one’s colleagues. This is how Danto later describes the starting point of his work. However, it turned out that for the *Critical History* collection, Danto’s essay on Nietzsche needed to be shortened by half. However, he was told that if he wanted to enlarge it into a book, he would get a contract. This is the origin of *Nietzsche as Philosopher*.

Danto’s own starting point is the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University. It is not groundbreaking news that Danto is or was an analytic philosopher,³¹⁰ and that the polemics or irony of the title of his book only becomes understandable in the context of American philosophy in the 1960s and 1950s. As mentioned earlier the title of the book refers to a conversation with a colleague of Danto, who did not consider Nietzsche much of a philosopher. However the *irony* is not directed at analytic philosophers who had not paid any attention to Nietzsche, but to those philosophers who had spent their lives on Nietzsche, interpreting him as some sort of non-analytic philosopher. The title bravely declares that nobody before the author of the new book had examined Nietzsche as a genuine philosopher, but as some sort unsystematic poet or novelist, especially not the “poets, politicians, potheads, and photographers from Princeton”³¹¹ who had no training in analytical philosophy.³¹²

³⁰⁸ Quotation from Danto 2005a, 18.

³⁰⁹ Danto 2005a, 18.

³¹⁰ Nowadays he would probably call himself rather a post-analytic philosopher. See his interview in *Radical Philosophy* 90/1998.

³¹¹ Danto 1980, 13. For more on the reception of Nietzsche in American academic circles see Jennifer Ratner Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: a History of an Icon and His Ideas*.

³¹² It is perhaps self-evident that it was only in Danto’s context (analytic philosophy on both sides of the Atlantic) that Nietzsche was not considered a philosopher of great interest. At the time e.g. in France he was of course one of the figures, among the three great H’s and Marx, that philosophers had to comment on.

The department of Philosophy at Columbia University was in Danto's own words, "a very pragmatist department".³¹³ However, pragmatism was not the only strong philosophical movement in America at that time. One of Danto's teachers was Ernest Nagel, and he acquainted young Danto with logical positivism.³¹⁴ Even though Danto did not identify himself as logical positivist, he describes the 1950s as golden age when everybody was interested in sciences, in mathematics and in logic, and metaphysics was overthrown.³¹⁵ So, most certainly Danto was interested in the philosophy of science at the time, and in 1960 he co-edited a reader in the philosophy of science, which included a preface by Nagel and articles among others from Carnap and Hempel.³¹⁶ It is also quite revealing that the only person Danto mentions he had discussed *Nietzsche as Philosopher* with at the time of writing was a logician and a philosopher of science, Arnold Koslow.³¹⁷ It seems to be quite evident that Danto was aware of the logical positivist's programme of rational reconstruction.³¹⁸

After this quick glance on the philosophical background of Danto, we may safely take a look on the book in light of the history of the method of rational reconstruction.

We are now able to see that Danto's principles of interpretation are in accordance with the ideas of rational reconstructionists of scientific theories, especially with the idea of language levels in science, and with Stegmüller's principles concerning the rational reconstruction of the history of philosophy. It can be seen that Danto studies Nietzsche's philosophical activity as basically a hypothetico-deductive thinking that only needs some clarification or re-structuring to be noticed as such and could then be accepted in the analytic tradition. Also Danto's own process of reconstructing Nietzsche's philosophy is to be understood as a hypothetico-deductive activity that provides clarification and brings the underlying systematic structure to the surface, so that Nietzsche's philosophy can be evaluated as a "philosophically coherent and systematic theory". Second, it is important to remember how Danto is using Nietzsche's aphorisms in the same way scientists use observations to support their

³¹³ In an interview with *Radical Philosophy* he describes the department as "heavily historical" Danto 1998, 34.

³¹⁴ His first rendezvous with analytic philosophy happened however during his short stay at the University of Colorado.

³¹⁵ Danto also recalls welcoming metaphysics back at a time when the verification principle was fading. Danto 1998, 35.

³¹⁶ *Philosophy of Science*, edited by Arthur Danto and Sidney Morgenbesser 1960.

³¹⁷ See Danto 2005a, 20.

³¹⁸ We are told by Giovanna Borradori that Danto is in disagreement with the so-called "'idealistic programs' [of analytic philosophy] that are engaged in the compilation of an ideal language capable of embracing, as best it can, the formulation of scientific theories", see Borradori 2003, 87. But it certainly looks as if he was not so much in disagreement with the programme at the time he wrote *Nietzsche as Philosopher* and he does admit his devotion to architecture of philosophy; "I like things to be clear, I like connections to be clear and I like to see structures [...]" Borradori 2003, 90.

hypothesis. The structure of his theory of ‘Nietzsche as philosopher’ can be set to the frame of hierarchal levels of language in science: on the observational level there are aphorisms and on the theoretical level there is Nietzsche’s presumed system. They are connected to each other through operational correspondence rules, that is the “facts” mentioned above: “philosophy is systematic through its nature” (i.e. it yields a coherent and systematic theory) and “the life of philosopher forms a coherent unity” (i.e. his works form a coherent structure).³¹⁹ These rules also give Danto an opportunity to test his theory with aphorisms on the “observational level”. The theory can also be reduced to aphorisms by using the same rules. By the predictive power of the theory Danto means that the theory is able to predict how Nietzsche would have built his theory had he been able to express himself more clearly. Figure 2 presents the structure of Danto’s reconstruction of Nietzsche’s philosophy. If you compare figures 1 and 2 you will notice a interesting correspondence between them.

Language levels of Danto’s interpretation (Danto’s theory of Nietzsche)

Level	content	e. g.
Theory	Nietzsche’s (alleged) coherent & systematic theory	system of nihilism
Laws	Facts concerning the nature of philosophy	1. Philosophy is systematic (h-d) 2. Philosopher’s life is a coherent whole
Values of concepts	Aphorisms 1,2, 3...t	any aphorism of Nietzsche as specified part or unit of the whole
Primary experimental data	Nietzsche’s corpus	in passage x Nietzsche writes "y"

(figure 2)

If Danto’s interpretation offers no interesting information to a historian, it is not because to a failure of carrying out his aim. It is obvious that Danto is not trying to uncover the historical meaning of Nietzsche’s work, at least in the sense Tejera is criticising him for failing to do. He is exercising philosophy as it was understood in the tradition of the logical positivists and, partly, in the later analytic tradition: he is

³¹⁹ Danto 1984, 24,25.

clarifying a theory. In this case, the act of philosophising is directed towards a historical phenomenon, but the interest is not historical.³²⁰ The aim of his reading³²¹ of Nietzsche was to provide an interpretation of Nietzsche that would make Nietzsche a philosopher worth reading for analytic philosophers: to make him “one of us”³²² and in this he was successful. As he has it: “my book made it possible for those who read philosophy also to read Nietzsche without guilt”.³²³

That philosophers who write about past thinkers do not always share the same intentions that historians do is a point that is sometimes forgotten in the historicist criticism of Danto and rational reconstructionists in general. To me it is a crucial mistake for a historicist like Tejera not to pay attention to the intentions of a given author. It does not matter that Tejera is not commenting on a dead thinker, or that the book was written only fourteen years before Tejera’s criticism was published. The same interpretational principles apply to any strange culture, not only those that have become history. As Tejera calls for the historicity of history of philosophy and denies the historicity of the historiography of philosophy through his essential conception of the field, his criticism seems to be more of a moral sort, only disguised in epistemological form.

4.10.7 Conclusion – Regarding Anachronisms

I have tried to uncover Danto’s intentions and come up with an interpretation of Danto’s work that is as unanachronistic as possible. Next I shall try to reflect on my efforts in the light of the typology of sins. But first, I would like to sum up my criticism of Tejera in terms of the typology of anachronistic sins, hoping at the same time that I have managed to convince the reader that Tejera’s ‘historicist critique’ of Danto is anachronistic in nature.³²⁴ In effect, if we take a look at the typology of anachronism we may see that Tejera commits more than one of the sins anatomised by Skinner. First he is not paying any attention to the question of what Danto’s intentions might have been Danto’s intentions, or he is doing it at a very superficial

³²⁰ It could be argued that Danto’s *essential* concept of philosophy is dubious, but on the same grounds it could be argued that so is Tejera’s *essential* concept of history of philosophy. Indeed, it is very much a denial of the historicity of the historiography of philosophy!

³²¹ Danto describes his book as based more on reading than on research. See Danto 2005a, 22.

³²² Danto 2005a, 22.

³²³ Danto 2005a, 21. This of course applies to readers of philosophy within the branch of analytic philosophers that Danto himself represents. In continental Europe Nietzsche was much more popular. There might also have been philosophers who rejected Nietzsche for political reasons, and not because he did not seem to be systematic enough. But as we know, later on Danto did describe his mission as a moral one.

³²⁴ There could be a further case for another hermeneutical round to set Tejera in his contexts. However at this point I shall just settle to note that I am conscious of the case, and hope that my interpretation of Danto will demonstrate the power of the methodology I am advancing though my more textual interpretation of Tejera leaves my interpretation of his case more open to mistakes and anachronisms.

level, by merely staring at the text. It might have been Danto's intention to offer a description of Nietzsche's philosophy that would meet the historicist criteria Tejera is advancing. Yet, as I have shown, it is more convincing to see the work as the practice of philosophy in the manner of the analytic philosophy of the time. Tejera's ignorance of Danto's intentions and his charge that Danto is not being 'historical' go together. It might be difficult to easily categorize this as any of Skinner's sins, because in his descriptions Skinner is paying great attention to attaching doctrines to past thinkers. But we do not need very much imagination to see how close Tejera's comments, (or descriptions, of Danto's work come to the mythologies of dismissing intentions and the criticism of failing to form a doctrine, although the latter one should in Tejera's case be articulated in the form of criticism for failing to follow a doctrine, i.e. not following Tejera's doctrine of studies of past philosophers. Tejera thinks that people studying history are (necessarily) committed to the historicist programme he himself is promoting.

To return to my description of Danto's work, it is clear that my interpretation contains elements that are not explicitly present in Danto's book as for example I use figures 1 and 2 to explain Danto's method. It is clear that Danto did not refer to the "language levels in science" to illustrate his method. Thus, I could be facing accusations of taking advantage of a perspective that Danto did not use and have thus committed some kind of anachronism. But it is clear that every action that I have attached to Danto's work was within his reach at the time he wrote the book. We should remember that the author of a book does not always give a full description of his methods and aims, and I did demonstrate that it was not only possible that Danto was acquainted with the philosophy of science, and with the theory that "language leaves in science" etc. but that it was also very likely considering his philosophical education and institutional context. Thus he could have been consciously doing exactly what I have suggested, though not fully articulating his method, and in that case my interpretation could perhaps also pass as a non-anachronistic description.

When it comes to original sin, it is clear I have made some choices which have everything to do with my present interests. Partly they arose from the process of getting acquainted with the book: Danto's words made me think about the rational reconstruction of scientific theories, and I decided to take a look at how his project fits within that programme. But I have not paid very much attention to the question of how Danto succeeds in following his methodological recommendation. Nor do I make any judgments concerning the philosophical or historical value of his work, or how in my opinion it relates to Nietzsche's philosophy. There would, no doubt, be much more to be said about Danto's work. The choices I have made emanate very much from my interest in methodology and from a particular Skinnerian angle; my effort was to ask what were Danto's intentions? What was Danto doing in the book? As to

the epistemological point of original sin, it is clear that it cannot be possible to be absolutely certain that I managed to explain and describe the work in a non-anachronistic way.

5. CONCEPTUAL PRISM

If there is something general to say about anachronisms, it might be that they occur when historical discontinuities go unnoticed. This may happen simply because certain evidence goes unnoticed, but it might also be because one is not prepared to watch out for certain kinds of discontinuities. Discontinuities may occur at various levels or in various forms. In the first part of this thesis I sought to deal with this problem on a more general level; in the second part I will concentrate on conceptual history. I am presenting a heuristic framework, a “conceptual prism”, which I hope will be a useful tool for identifying conceptual discontinuities (and continuities). This framework is designed to segregate different levels of meanings in which discontinuities may take place. My conceptual prism is constructed from three different ideas: W. B. Gallie’s idea of essentially contested concepts; Wittgenstein’s idea of family resemblance; and Quentin Skinner’s idea of three levels of conceptual disagreements. I believe that this tool could be especially useful in conceptual history, and I shall try to demonstrate this with a short case study on the concept of ‘liberty’ at the end of this chapter. It is obvious that conceptual prism suits better to studies of political concepts than, for example, history of scientific concepts since the pragmatic features (speech acts, tradition) included in the conceptual prism mark usually stronger differences between uses of political than scientific concepts.

By conceptual history, I mean the tradition which stems from the work of Reinhart Koselleck and Quentin Skinner, but which has of late gone in various directions beyond its origins.³²⁵ Practitioners of conceptual history often use philosophical and methodological ideas from both of the mentioned historians, though both of the scholars themselves are or were very skeptical about the possibilities of combining their approaches. The multivolume project *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* led by Reinhart Koselleck, Otto Brunner and Werner Conze, stands as major landmark in conceptual history.³²⁶ It is sensitive to the logic of conceptualization and conceptual change in the process of modernization, and focuses “on concepts that are considered to be crucial to the ‘sprachliche Erfassung der modern Welt’--the linguistic constitution of the modern world--in law, politics, science, social and economic life and ideology concepts on which various segments of society and parties relied to express their experiences, expectations, and actions”.³²⁷ The time span of studies in *Begriffsgeschichte* is typically rather long and the changes they concentrate on are often comprehensive periods of major transitions in history. In the *Geschichtlichen*

³²⁵ It is possible to track down a longer tradition of conceptual history, but these are the models that are most discussed today and in systematic discussions references to earlier times are rare.

³²⁶ Koselleck himself states that *Begriffsgeschichte* has existed as explicit modes of approach to history since Enlightenment (the term itself is derived from Hegel). See e.g. Koselleck 2002, 21.

³²⁷ Hampsher-Monk & Tilmans & van Vree 1998a, 1.

Grundbegriffe project concentrates on the period after the Enlightenment called the *Sattelzeit*. Quentin Skinner's studies of the history of concepts such as 'the state' and 'liberty', alongside his emphases on analysing language in terms of linguistic actions, have also offered an influential model for doing conceptual history. Skinner's method has more typically been to study rapid changes, or so called rhetorical redescriptions, "kind of epiphanic moments dramatised by Nietzsche".³²⁸ The impact of Koselleck and Skinner on conceptual history is strong but conceptual historians are by no means dedicated followers of these two eminent historians. Current practices in conceptual history are moving in different directions within individual, national and international projects.

Even though the terms 'history of concepts' and 'conceptual history' are often used synonymously, differences can be seen between them--at least intuitively. In the narrow sense the term the "history of concepts" refers only to such studies in which the aim is to follow the history of a given concept through years. The term "conceptual history" might also refer to studies which focus on certain events, the viewpoint being the role of a concept or a set of concepts in the changes which take place in the events under study. However, this demarcation cannot be taken for granted, and it should be noted that e.g. Quentin Skinner prefers the term "conceptual history" or even such an expression as "the history of uses of concept in argumentation"³²⁹ to the "history of concepts".

After these brief remarks short remarks I shall not refer often to the German tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte*, or to any other existing traditions. However, I shall try to find out what kind of help W. B. Gallie and Wittgenstein, combined with Quentin Skinner, are able to offer when trying to avoid anachronisms in conceptual history by providing a better awareness of the different levels of potential discontinuities in the meaning of a given concept. I shall not compare or contrast my project with the Koselleckian programme of *Begriffsgeschichte* (or any other practise of conceptual history), and accordingly I shall not take part into discussions on Skinner's and Koselleck's controversies.³³⁰ This task has already been taken up by Kari Palonen who considers that the two programmes can be fruitfully combined and his basic insight is that Skinner brings the speech act theory into the history of concepts.³³¹

I will first examine Gallie, Wittgenstein and Skinner separately and then synthesize their approaches. I will start by discussing the general idea of each approach, the rationality behind it or its legitimacy. I will also take a quick look at some recent

³²⁸ Skinner 2002j, 186.

³²⁹ Skinner 2002l, 60.

³³⁰ See e.g. the interviews of both historians in *Contributions*. Koselleck 2006, Skinner 2007.

³³¹ See e.g. Palonen 2003b.

applications and discuss some criticisms of these approaches. After presenting the general theory behind these ideas, I will draw out the implications for the analyses of the concept of concept that these ideas carry, and explain how this can be used to differentiate various levels--which all mark a potential place for discontinuity and accordingly danger of anachronism--of meanings within one concept. All this could also be presented in a form of typology of different kinds of anachronism by labelling the unnoticed discontinuities in different levels of meaning in some corresponding fashion to the way historical mistakes were labelled in Skinner's typology of anachronisms. But I have settled for just pointing to the possible conceptual scenes of anachronisms.

5.1. ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPTS

5.1.1. Structure

The so-called *essentially contested concept* thesis claims that there are some concepts which cannot be defined universally, once and for all. On the contrary, these concepts, their definitions or uses, are always under debate, and the question of the proper use or meaning of a concept cannot be settled, not even in principle. The paradigmatic articulation of this thesis is Walter Bryce Gallie's seminal article "Essentially Contested Concepts" (1956, revised 1964). I refer mainly to the less known, later version because it is Gallie's most recent articulation of the idea. The following list of seven points concerning the nature of essentially contested concepts and how they can be demarcated from other sorts of concepts, can be gleaned from this essay.³³²

1. The concept is appraisive or evaluative: it accredits some kind of valued achievement.
2. The achievement they denote must be internally complex but the evaluation must be attributed to the whole.

³³² Gallie 1964a, pp. 161, 168. Collier et al. mentions the following: (i) appraisive character, (ii) internal complexity (iii) diverse describability, (iv) openness, (v) reciprocal recognition of their contested character among contending parties (vi) an original exemplar that anchors conceptual meaning, (vii) progressive competition, through which greater coherence of conceptual usage can be achieved. See Collier et al 2006, 212. Glock sums up the criteria in the following three-point way: (i) the practice of using these expressions in a *value laden* manner, (ii) there is *disagreement* on both the extension and intension of the concept, (iii) disputants typically share a small core of *paradigmatic exemplars* and differ over which additional candidates are relevantly similar. See Glock 2008, 208–209.

3. Any evaluation must refer to its various parts or features and the action is initially variously describable e.g. it is possible to give different weight to its different features.
4. Essentially contested concepts are open because the achievements they describe admit modification depending on the circumstances in which they take place.
5. Essentially contested concepts are used against other uses. Each party of a dispute recognizes that its own use is contested by those of other parties. In other words, a concept is used both aggressively and defensively.
6. These concepts derive from an original exemplar whose authority is generally acknowledged.
7. Continuing contesting enables the original exemplar's achievement, or our understanding of it, to be sustained or developed in an optimum fashion.

I am not convinced if, for example, the points (5), (6) or (7) are necessary conditions for a concept to be essentially contested, but here my main concern is not whether the thesis about the existence of essentially contested concepts holds true. My primary concern is to explain how conceptual historians can take advantage of the thesis by applying certain structural features it attaches to (essentially contested) concepts. Accordingly, the evaluation of the criteria according to which one can judge whether a concept is an essentially contested concept is only of secondary importance, although my answer would be affirmative if I were asked whether essentially contested concepts exist. Gallie, in fact, comes up with an interesting viewpoint regarding the structure of certain concepts. He suggests that the structural features can be used to build up a framework which is of practical use when tracking down conceptual continuities and discontinuities.³³³

For the purposes of this project probably the most obviously relevant features are (2) and (3). Point (3), the idea that it is possible to give different weights to different features the concept, is made possible via (2). However, I would also like to emphasize point (7), not as a necessary condition for a concept to be essentially contested, but as a reason not to think that accepting the essentially contested concepts thesis leads to irrationalism or radical relativism. The existence of a paradigmatic or 'original' exemplar, criteria (6), can help to explain how people may be proponents of different concepts, for example, 'liberty', and can still understand

³³³ A recent survey of general criticism of Gallie's thesis is included in "Essentially Contested Concepts: Debates and Applications" by Collier et al. 2006.

each other, and assumes that they are arguing in the same conceptual continuum. This is one of the points that I shall try to prove below. However, accepting the existence of an ‘original’ example as a norm would rule out the possibility that the history of a given concept could have more than one starting point. This is why this should not be accepted as a norm. Point (4) is an explanation of contestability or contentedness, and I accept it as such, though I will gladly admit that there might be times of decontestation, of temporary closure or practical closure. By ‘decontestation’ I am referring to the work of Michael Freedon, who uses the term to mark a specific situation or context in which concepts may have a stable meaning. One situation of this kind is related to defined frameworks, e.g. scholarly uses of concepts. Another typical occasion, according to Freedon, is the situation where the interest is on decision-making and a political ideology may work as a means to close down meanings as they typically announce, for example what ‘justice’ means.³³⁴ However, it should be noted that Gallie himself seems to be aware of the fact that contestation is largely, if not completely, due to changes in circumstances, and not only due to some inner nature of these essentially contested concepts. As he explains “politics being the art of the possible, democratic targets will be raised or lowered as circumstances alter, and democratic achievements are always judged in the light of such alterations”.³³⁵ He connects this description, which belongs to the concept of ‘democracy’, with criteria (4) above, which of course connects the changes directly to the context or to changing situations. I also agree with Collier et al. that there may be a greater variety of “circumstances under which contestation may be reduced or mitigated.”³³⁶ But I take it that these are more or less questions of contracts, though not in the sense, that there should be signatures on some paper, but silent agreements. Sometimes, however, at least in scholarly cases and in legislative texts, there might be published announcements of the agreed meanings of specific concepts.

The concept of ‘decontestation’ is helpful when conceptualising the difference between contestation and contestability, which some commentators like to emphasize in their criticism of Gallie. However, it should again be noted that Gallie himself notices this difference in the essay “Art as an Essentially Contested Concept”. He notes that when we rely upon our concept of ‘art’ in criticism and wish to press the point that a particular work or style should be regarded as art “we will inevitably be using the term in contestable (and often as not in an immediately contested) way.” “What we say can easily be recognised as appreciation or criticism from the (excessively one-sided) ‘configurationist’ or ‘expressionist’ or ‘communicationist’

³³⁴ See Freedon 1996, 75–76 and 2003, 54–60. Freedon gives the following definition of ‘ideology’: “An ideology is a wide-ranging structural arrangement that attributes *decontested* meanings to a range of mutually defining political concepts” Freedon 2003, 54.

³³⁵ See Gallie on openness: Gallie 1964a, 180.

³³⁶ Collier et al. 2006, 218.

point of view”.³³⁷ This observation fits nicely with Freeden’s idea that decontestation takes place within ideologies. In Gallie’s example, decontestation takes place within certain isms or movements that belong to the art world. Gallie himself does not develop this idea further, but Freeden seems to me to do the job. However, it is significant that Gallie does make this distinction, especially since he has been criticised for being too eager to call concepts *essentially* contested contrasted with the idea that they may be contested only periodically (see the discussion on Terence Ball below). The term ‘decontestation’ is a conceptual clarification of the features of contested concepts; yet, as we saw, this feature is already present in Gallie’s thinking, at least in the article “Art as an Essentially Contested Concept” published in the same year as “Essentially Contested Concepts”.

Freeden also speaks of “essential contestability” and “effective contestability”,³³⁸ which mean that contestability is strictly speaking not a feature which pertains to concepts but is “a property of political discourse”, a way of “organizing knowledge, not verifying it”. This distinction between the feature of the concept itself and the feature of political discourse may be used in order to get rid of certain logic-centred discussions or demands. Possibly this distinction makes it clearer that concepts have existence in their use and not as autonomous agents, but I do not see this as a necessary distinction. In fact, I do not consider the difference to be very important, since the result is the same: there is no definitive, universal conclusion to be reached when arguing about essentially contested concepts.

When explaining (2) and (3) Gallie’s example is the concept of ‘championship’ or ‘the champions’ in games or sports. Gallie does not refer to the concept that defines champions as the team who won the national or world titles, but to a type of discussion, typical among sport fans, about which team is the effective or ‘real’ champion, i.e. plays the game best. This, of course, may correlate with game results but is not reducible to them. Gallie comes up with an example of an imaginary game, which is like bowling, but perhaps it would be more illuminating if we think about the familiar game of football. The internally complex nature of the concept of ‘football champions’ is due to the different areas of potential excellence such as ball control, power, speed, tactics, etc. that a team, or an individual player, may or may not possess. Among the football fans³³⁹ there is, of course, great disagreement as to what kind of play is the best: some appreciate speed, some power, some tactical skills, some defensive tactics, some more aggressive tactics, and so on. Football fans discuss this on the level of teams, though there is no official nomination of the best team in

³³⁷ Gallie 1956a, 113–114.

³³⁸ See Freeden 2004, 5–8.

³³⁹ Here I speak of football fans as fans of the game, not as fans of particular team.

this sense.³⁴⁰ In this case the choice is purely dependent on what kinds of skills are appreciated and what skills are considered to be the most important. There is no way of reaching a consensus of the definition on ‘champion’ in this sense. No matter who is nominated, it will always remain possible to challenge the choice made by others. The same goes for the fans’ discussions of which team is the best; the debate will never stop: who are the real champions of football? Some will appreciate the speed of a certain team, while others will call it a “sheer-speed team” lacking all the other skills, even though the team might be very effective in the light of game results. It is possible that some more moderately tempered fans would go on to say that team A is the champion of attack while team B is the champion of defensive play. In this case, there would be no real contestation of the concept of champion. This is of course possible. Still, the majority of hardcore fans would continue to make claims about the champion of the game (and not about the champion of some special area) and the contestation will surely be about the contents of one concept. It should be noted that even though it might be possible that fans of a particular team would pick their team first and then come up with a suitable concept of champion, the discussion would also still be about the concept of champion. When evaluating teams other than their favourites, they would apply the same criteria. Put simply, Gallie is making a difference about degrees, e.g. how important the contesting parties regard speed as opposed to other skills as the champion’s features. Normally it is very hard to put in exact terms how important one regards a certain feature. The discussion usually takes form such as “I appreciate speed more than power”. But there is at least one occasion in which the different weights are expressed exactly, though it might not be well suited as the example of football champions. This is when someone regards a certain feature X as a necessary condition, while somebody else would regard it as a sufficient condition, and a third party would regard it as a necessary and sufficient feature of a particular concept.

Gallie also discusses other examples. In “Essentially Contested Concepts” his other examples are the concepts of ‘religion’ (in fact, just ‘Christianity’), ‘democracy’, ‘social justice’ and ‘art’, the last of which he discusses more thoroughly in “Art as an Essentially Contested Concept”.³⁴¹ About the complexity of the concept of ‘Christianity’, and the fact that it can be described in a variety of ways, he states that these are evident if one thinks about the continuing debate “as to which element or aspect of Christian doctrine and inspiration is most unique to it – incarnation, redemption, atonement, grace [...]”³⁴² Democracy’s internally complex character and

³⁴⁰ Though there is of course “The Player of the Year” nomination by FIFA, which is based on the votes of the captains and coaches of international teams.

³⁴¹ In this revised version of the essay Gallie also mentions ‘science’ as his example, but he does not discuss it.

³⁴² Gallie 1964a, 169.

the fact that it “admits of a variety of descriptions in which its different aspects are graded in different orders of importance” are explained by giving examples of various aspects:

(a) Democracy means primarily the power of the majority of citizens to choose (and remove) governments – a power which would seem to involve, anyhow in larger communities, something like the institution of parties competing for political leadership; (b) Democracy means primarily equality of all citizens, irrespective of race, creed, sex, etc., to attain to positions of political leadership and responsibility in any democratic state; (c) Democracy means primarily the continuous active participation of citizens in political life at all levels, i.e. it is real when, and in so far as, there is real *self-government*.³⁴³

According to Gallie (b) and (c) weighs “features of democracy which clearly can exist in larger or less degree and are therefore liable to be differently placed for relative importance”³⁴⁴ but (a) is often presented as an absolute requirement, i.e. a necessary condition, if not a sufficient condition. Here the idea and possibility of measuring different weights is effectively displayed. It is done in terms of relative, not absolute weighing: in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Gallie’s claim is not that this is the correct way of articulating the concept of democracy; on the contrary, he claims that this can be contested. But for the purposes of this study, it is important to pay attention to how the weights of different elements are presumed to vary. Michael Freedon has also illustrated this feature by referring to the concept of democracy: “it concerns not only the question of the unavoidable absence as well as presence of conceptual components, but also that of relative weighting assigned to the components that *are* present in a given instance of the concept”. Moreover, if it includes to some degree the concepts of ‘equality’, ‘participation’ and ‘self-determination’ we do not have a rule that could determine the “correct proportion that each of those components can claim *vis-à-vis* the others”.³⁴⁵ According to Gallie, ‘social justice’ allows only two alternative descriptions, which he labels ‘liberal’ or ‘individualist’, and ‘socialist’ or ‘collective’ descriptions. Gallie deals with them very briefly. He observes that although the account of essentially contested concepts can be usefully applied to ‘social justice’, it cannot be totally successful. When writing about ‘art’ in the “Essentially Contested Concepts” essay, Gallie states that the “kind of achievement it accredits is always internally complex”³⁴⁶ since it has in different times “admitted of a number of very different but no doubt equally illuminating

³⁴³ Gallie 1964a, 179.

³⁴⁴ Gallie 1964a, 179.

³⁴⁵ Freedon 2004, 5.

³⁴⁶ Gallie 1964a, 177.

descriptions”. For example, painting has been described among other things as “the placing of colour on wood or canvas”, “the expression or result of how a given artist sees things”, the act of communication or “the source of aesthetic enjoyment”. In other words: ‘painting’ is variously describable.³⁴⁷

5.1.2. Rationale/Justification

Gallie identifies his target clearly: it is those thinkers who, since the Enlightenment, have positively emphasised the irrational elements of thought within the fields of religion, art and politics. He acknowledges that “my purpose in this paper has been to combat, and in some measure to correct, this dangerous tendency”.³⁴⁸ Indeed, for Gallie the essential contestedness of concepts is actually the *raison d’être* of philosophy. It does not lead to radical relativism even though it follows that there cannot be any general principle for deciding which of the contesting uses is the best. On the contrary, according to Gallie, there still is room for rational discussion and evaluation, for it “may yet be possible to explain or show the rationality of a given *individual’s* continued use, or in the more dramatic case of conversion his change of use, of the concept in question”.³⁴⁹ Gallie continues:

a certain piece of evidence or argument, put forward in an apparently endless dispute, can be recognized to have a definitive logical force, even by those whom it fails to win over or convert

and that they may consider that

the conversion of a hitherto wavering opponent of the side in question can be seen to be justifiable – not simply expectable in the light of known relevant psychological and sociological laws [...] It is for this reason that we can distinguish more or less intellectually respectable conversation.³⁵⁰

What Gallie could be trying to say is that even though one may consider one’s own use of a given concept to be superior, one may also recognize rationality in other uses and consider some steps taken in conversation, even though the participants might still go in different directions concerning the their ideas of the best use of the concept in question. Indeed, Wokler supposes that it was the philosophy of essentially contested concepts that led Gallie to always acknowledge the merits of alternative

³⁴⁷ Gallie 1964a, 172.

³⁴⁸ See Gallie 1956b, 196.

³⁴⁹ Gallie 1964a, 184.

³⁵⁰ Gallie 1964a, 185.

views. This could be used as an empirical piece of evidence against those who hold that after accepting Gallie's thesis there would be no other option than to say that you have your concept, I have mine, and there is nothing further to discuss.³⁵¹

In the original version of the essay, Gallie also observed that "in the case of an appraisive concept, we can best see more precisely what it means by comparing and contrasting our uses of it now with other earlier uses of it or its progenitors, *i.e.*, by considering how it came to be".³⁵² This argument could be used as a legitimating argument for the practise of conceptual history. But it is more important to see that the essentially contested concepts thesis yields not (radical) relativism, but rather some kind of perspectivism. It acknowledges that there are no universal or general criteria or powerful argument with which to decide of the different concepts of liberty,³⁵³ democracy, art, etc. are the best. But when seen from different contexts or perspectives, it is sometimes possible to demarcate more or less rational or productive efforts. It is also possible to acknowledge the rationality of competing concepts by recognising that their use is historically and logically (*i.e.* coherently) permissible;³⁵⁴ to notice that from certain perspectives, other concepts, over and above the personally preferred concept, could actually make sense. An awareness of this will manifest itself in the improved intellectual quality of discussions between rival groups. Furthermore, if one convinces someone on the other side that one's concept is, at least under certain circumstances, also a rational and morally justifiable concept, it could be one step along a road that leads to positive moral consequences in terms of the ethics of conversation or the adaptation of a more understanding attitude toward one's opponent(s). However, this does not necessarily mean that the steps would lead towards unanimity in regard to the question how *the* concept under discussion is to be defined. Perhaps, in a nut shell, we could say that Gallie values the logic of conversation but is at the same time highly suspicious of the possibility of having of an "end of conversation" in the sense that there would be nothing left to have an

³⁵¹ Wokler 2001, 153.

³⁵² Gallie 1956b, 198.

³⁵³ It should be noted that Gallie is somewhat sceptical about whether the concept of liberty is an essentially contested concept: "Possible candidates are concepts of science and of law, on the one hand, and of liberty and government on the other. I am doubtful whether any one of these concepts can be brought satisfactorily under the framework of ideas by means of which I have defined essentially contested concepts" because these concepts "all seem to me to be tied to more specific aims and claims, as well as admitting of more easily agreed tests, than the concepts with which we have hitherto been concerned" Gallie 1968, 190. But I have proceeded and shall proceed regardless of these doubts as if liberty was an essentially contested concept.

³⁵⁴ See Gallie 1964b, 210, 211. This is also what Quentin Skinner does when he discusses the concept of positive liberty and tries to show that, contra MacCallum, it is possible to formulate a coherent concept of positive liberty which is incommensurable with MacCallum's formulation of (negative) liberty (as has been done by T. H. Green). Skinner does so despite the fact that MacCallum regards his formulation as the only rational conception of liberty. Skinner also states that positive liberty is something that he would not endorse; he is only making the claim that such a notion of liberty exists and that it is a coherent concept. See Skinner 2003.

argument about. Or, perhaps, we could agree with Newton Garver who describes Gallie's project as a project of countering "the prejudice, easily engendered by a simplistic empirical or scientific outlook, that any concept which cannot be clearly and unambiguously applied is bound to be confused. Essentially contested concepts are neither...[Gallie] seeks to provide order and structure to a particular sort of adversarial discourse".³⁵⁵ To me this is a fair description.

Gallie's own statements have not managed to convince all critics about the rationalistic nature of his approach. Many have wondered if this thesis will lead to radical relativism. But since the question whether Gallie's thesis will lead to relativism is not the subject matter here, and I am not trying to contribute, at least directly, to the field of political theory, but to intellectual and conceptual history, I shall mention some of the critics very briefly. I will, however, discuss Terence Ball's criticism in more detail, since he identifies himself as a conceptual historian,³⁵⁶ though his reservations are not only about the alleged relativism of Gallie's thesis.

John N. Gray, who is not totally sceptical about the program, wishes to develop the idea further, but remains suspicious about Gallie's original thesis.³⁵⁷ "If my suspicions are at all well founded," Gray observes, "it follows that any strong variant of an essential contestability thesis must precipitate its proponents into radical (and probably self-defeating) sceptical nihilism."³⁵⁸ In another article he states that "Gallie's claim that concepts are essentially contested in virtue of their norm-invoking functions effectively precludes debates about these concepts from susceptibility to rational settlement for as long as we accept the view – endorsed by Gallie – that the ultimate questions of morality and politics cannot be answered by an appeal to reason".³⁵⁹ At this point Gray restates his fears of relativism, which might be understandable, but it seems again that the question of criteria for a rational discussion is dismissed and his view on the matter is taken as granted. Barry Clarke is, if possible, even more worried about the possible loss of "rational discourse" in face of the essentially contested concepts thesis. He claims that the very notion is radically mistaken and observes that it is possible to make sense of the notion only "at the cost of introducing radical relativism into all discourse using such disputable

³⁵⁵ Garver 1987. Quotation taken from Collier et al. 2006.

³⁵⁶ For example, the title of his published lecture in Tampere "Confessions of a Conceptual Historian" can also be counted as a confession that he identifies himself as conceptual historian.

³⁵⁷ According to Gray it would be "highly unfortunate" if we "fail[ed] to exploit the central insight contained in the notion of essential contestability [...] I want [...] to propose an understanding of essential contestability which is free of the defects of those I have examined so far, and to suggest that the investigation of contested concepts (so understood) forms a traditional conception of the intellectual activity of a political philosopher." Gray 1977, 344. Furthermore Gallie thinks that he is saving political philosophy from "e.g. the sociology of knowledge and the history of ideas" which "have deprived political philosophy of its status as an autonomous intellectual activity" *ibid.* 346.

³⁵⁸ Gray 1977, 343.

³⁵⁹ Gray 1978, 392.

concepts”. He suggests that “it might be useful in future to delete all references either to essentially contestable or to essentially contested concepts. Unless we are willing to embrace radical relativism it is inconsistent to view concepts as essentially contestable”.³⁶⁰ John Hoffman and Paul Graham state that according to Gallie’s thesis “we have no way of resolving the respective methods of competing arguments” and that “we can note the rival justifications offered (they are mere emotional outpourings), but we cannot evaluate them in terms of a principle that commands general agreement”. According to them this “implies that evaluation is only possible on matters about which we all agree. Such an argument stems from a misunderstanding of the nature of politics”.³⁶¹ As it is clear by now, Gallie has not said that the rival concepts can be noted only as “mere emotional outpourings”, but he sees that it is possible to identify them as rational opinions. I hope that I have managed to show above the inappropriateness of these accusations. However, it should be added that not even all ‘realists’ tend to criticize Gallie in the above mentioned manner. Robert Grafstein presents “A Realist Foundation for Essentially Contested Political Concepts” in a 1988 article. He writes that “the political dimension transforms a relatively inert divergence between distinct definitions of concepts into an active contest among them. A realist conception of *politics* completes the foundation for essential contestability”.³⁶² In his article “What Makes a Subject Scientific?” (1957) Gallie tackles the question from a kind of meta-perspective. According to Gallie, what makes a subject scientific is actually the fact that it has been accepted into a scientific tradition, and to render this answer more illuminating or clearer, is to attempt to write history in a more “truly historical manner i.e. so as to reveal on what grounds new results, methods, approaches, etc. have been or are being accepted into the scientific tradition.”³⁶³ However, when it comes to the conclusion, Gallie tells us only that it is for “scientists, philosophers, historians, above all historians of science, to draw their own”.³⁶⁴ This suggestion is of course somewhat unsatisfactory, because it immediately raises the question of who has, and what has been, accepted into “the scientific tradition”. Whose opinion should we take into account when there is disagreement, since even within purely academic discourse, there are disagreements whether certain academic disciplines are or are not “really” science? The most obvious contemporary example of these debates is probably women’s studies. But Gallie’s statement is illuminating in regard to his position, because it implies that the concept or criteria of ‘scientific’ is (essentially) contested. Even though there might be something which connects the activities that are taken to be ‘scientific’ (Gallie refers to ‘method’ as a means to achieve results which counter

³⁶⁰ Clarke 1987, 125–126.

³⁶¹ Hoffman and Graham 2006, xxv–xxvi.

³⁶² Grafstein 1988, 19.

³⁶³ Gallie 1957, 139.

³⁶⁴ Gallie 1957, 139.

‘mysticism’ or ‘pure guessing’ etc.) it is not enough to formulate a universal definition or criteria for the ‘scientific subject’.

I am not sure if I have been able to do justice to Gallie’s arguments, but it should be clear that Gallie does not think that the essentially contested concepts thesis reduces the value of philosophy. As he states in the introduction to his collection of essays: “far from being a philosophical scandal, [it] is rather a proof of the continuing need of philosophy and of vital, agonistic philosophy”.³⁶⁵ Philosophers that do not dispute the proper connotations of a given term, e.g. in ethics, but discuss instead the proper method for the field and recognize “close affinity between moral and historical judgments”³⁶⁶ do it better.

Within conceptual history the contestedness or contestability of concepts is something of a commonplace. Perhaps Gallie is not the theorist that conceptual historians usually refer to, but the idea that (at least evaluative) concepts are essentially contestable is a very common assumption, even though not an absolute--at least not in the form of Gallie’s thesis.³⁶⁷

5.1.3. Applications of the Essentially Contested Concepts Thesis

Applications of the essentially contested concepts thesis typically take the form of examining whether a given concept is an ‘essentially contested’ according to Gallie’s criteria. In “Art as an Essentially Contested Concept”, Gallie himself examines the concept of ‘art’ in this manner and argues that it fulfils the criteria. Though this is not exactly the question which I wish to ask, since my aim is to use the structure for comparative purposes, I shall take a look at a number of other applications of this sort.³⁶⁸ A typical example of this genre is Jeremy Waldron’s article “Is the Rule of Law an Essentially Contested Concept (In Florida)?” (2002). Waldron concentrates on the concept of the ‘rule of law’ and how it was used when discussing “the counting and recounting of votes in the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election”.³⁶⁹ Bush supporters

³⁶⁵ Gallie 1964c, 156. Instead of “agonistic” he could have described this philosophy as “agnostic”.

³⁶⁶ Gallie 1964c, 156. It should be noted that Gallie uses the concept of historical basically as an antonym to ‘universal’ in the sense that we should also take into consideration what is specific and individual.

³⁶⁷ For example, Terence Ball has challenged the essential contestability thesis. See below. And, as we have seen, even Quentin Skinner has cast some doubt on the idea of disputes being about concepts and suggested that more often they are about the criteria of applying a concept than about the concept itself.

³⁶⁸ Perhaps the most recent and, at face value, informative article would be Oliver Hidalgo’s “Conceptual History and Politics: Is the Concept of Democracy Essentially Contested?” published in *Contributions to the History of Concepts* (2008). Unfortunately Hidalgo’s discussion of Gallie is minimal and the article’s main point is the possible normative implications of the history of concepts. Hidalgo 2008.

³⁶⁹ Waldron 2002, 137.

said that the real winner, after the Florida recount was stopped by a decision of the United States Supreme Court, decision, was the rule of law; but critics claimed that it was actually an affront to the Rule of Law. There is an obvious case of contestation, and Waldron tries to decide if it is essential in nature. From my perspective the interesting part is how Waldron deals with criteria (2) and (3). He states that the complexity of the rule of law is well known: it is a “laundry list of features that a healthy legal system should have”, consisting of variations of such features as laws should be general, publicly promulgated, practicable, intelligible, etc. These are promoted with varying degrees of emphasis; some features are considered more important than others; and the hierarchy of importance varies from discussant to discussant. According to Waldron John Finnis, John Rawls, Joseph Raz and others have made lists that are rather similar, though there are slight differences in terminology, in the number of principles and features that are weighted. There are also two other levels of complexity: the ways “of trying to solve [...] the problem of designing a political system in which the laws rule rather than men” and “the several values which arguably might be served by the Rule of Law” (e.g. fairness and human dignity).³⁷⁰ Waldron is not specific about the alleged different weights or levels of importance of different features. It is of course difficult to establish even relative weights when it is not explicitly stated whether someone regards feature X as more important than feature Y, or the differences are not marked by the technical terms of “necessary” and “sufficient” conditions. But Waldron makes an interesting move when he adds that the complexity is also about the values which the rule of law may be contributing to, and not only about the features that are used to define the concept. This is a new addition to Gallie’s idea since, as Waldron points out, Gallie seems to suggest that we already know the value(s) of achievement in question. This may remind us of Skinner’s use of speech act theory, of using the concept in the appraisive sense, but it is not exactly the same thing, since Waldron is not talking only about judging if a given concept is used to appraise or to mock something or somebody, but is suggesting a more precise analysis, namely exactly what values are in question.

The point about giving different features different weights seems to be a neglected part of Gallie’s thesis. For example Collier *et al.* do not discuss this at all when evaluating Waldron’s article, even though they do discuss Gallie’s criteria (2) and (3). They consider Gallie’s example concept *par excellence*, democracy, and in discussing criteria (2) and (3) they state that the complexity is clear. Referring to Guillermo O’Donnell’s and Philippe C. Schmitter’s study, *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, they present “four dimensions of liberalization”:(1) civil liberties, (2) democratization in the specific sense of meaningful electoral competition with universal suffrage, and fair and open elections,

³⁷⁰ See Waldron 2002, 154-158.

(3) democratization of social institutions and economic processes, and (4) democratization in the sense of the extension to citizens of substantive benefits and entitlements.³⁷¹ The complexity is easily established, but the weighting of different features is again covered more carelessly; it is only noted that “some components are emphasized more than others by certain authors, and some components may appear to be more or less relevant in particular contexts”.³⁷² This is not very helpful if one wishes to find ways of comparing the weights in some more precise way.

Collier *et al.* refer to an interesting problem to which internal complexity and diverse describability may lead. When different parties in a dispute describe a concept of democracy using different components the concept suffers from disaggregation, and one might be tempted to ask if the concept is still the same. But this question is, in my opinion, too simple. The proper questions are to what degree different articulations are similar and how the similarities reveal themselves. From certain perspective different ‘democracies’ can be seen as similar even though similarity does not necessarily consist of a common core, but of a family resemblance. In short, there are similar components but there is not necessarily a single component that they all share. Moreover, if there is some common feature to all articulations of the concept, it might not be a core or centre. In many cases it might be better to speak of “common margin” or perhaps of a “common periphery” rather than a common centre. I will discuss this problem in more detail when discussing the family resemblance thesis. At this point I will simply note that a typical application of Gallie’s thesis would be to write an article on a given concept and ask whether it is an essentially contested concept. I do not regard this as a very interesting question, and my application goes in quite a different direction. As it is already apparent I would urge that advantage is to be taken of the structure of concepts that Gallie has sketched. To make the connection with the issue of anachronisms clear, it can be said that if a historical change in the relative weight of a given feature of a concept goes unnoticed then we are likely to commit an anachronistic mistake. If one writes a history of a concept of art and does not notice that the relative weight of the feature ‘beauty; varies, and expects that it has played a similar role throughout history, we would be guilty of offering an anachronistic interpretation. If we wished to give a label to this kind of anachronism we could call it, perhaps, the mythology of stable weights.

Before looking at Wittgenstein I will tackle two lines of thought that are not always explicated in the form of a critique of Gallie, but stand in strong contrast with his ideas presented above. These lines, called restrictivism and the concept/conception distinction, do have contemporary relevance, so they need to be discussed at some

³⁷¹ Collier et al 2006, 223. O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 13.

³⁷² Collier et al 2006, 223.

length. The danger in regard to conceptual history is that the implications of these lines of thought on the concept of ‘concept’ and the nature of rationality may lead the conceptual historian to pay undue attention to some minor (common) features of different concepts in order to construct a common core by abstracting the concepts on a level disconnected from concrete uses. A not so obvious, but nevertheless a more general, danger is that the historian may be tempted to construct historical narratives based on a parochial view of rationality--a topic already touched on above--when trying to uncover rational discussions from the past.

5.1.4. Restrictivism

While Gallie’s thesis does not sound very radical today, at the time he wrote his piece it ran very much against the intellectual tide (though its radicalism can also be exaggerated). However it did not receive much attention at the time of its publication. Opposition to Gallie’s position was strong within a certain branch or a particular tradition of thought. There was a marked objection to the idea that concepts such as liberty, democracy, etc., cannot be defined in a neutral way and that they always remain open to discussion. I will take a brief look at this line of objection in order to make it clearer what is at stake. In what follows this current will be called “restrictivism” (after John Gray). Restrictivism may not be as popular as it once was, but I shall argue that the proponents of more the popular ‘concept/conception’ distinction share similar assumptions and encounter similar problems.

First, I shall discuss two representatives of restrictivism, namely Gerald MacCallum and Felix Oppenheim. More precisely, I shall take a look at their discussion of the concept of liberty as exemplifying the restrictivist mode of thought, though this mode is not limited only to the concept of liberty. MacCallum and Oppenheim wished to rebut the claim that there are different (rational) concepts of freedom, and wanted to give the concept of liberty in one rational, universal and neutral formula.³⁷³ In particular MacCallum sought to refute Isaiah Berlin’s famous distinction between positive and negative liberty. MacCallum opens his essay by stating that “this paper challenges the view that we may usefully distinguish between two kinds or concepts of political and social freedom negative and positive”³⁷⁴, and that this distinction is to a large extent based “upon serious confusion, and has drawn attention away from precisely what needs examining if the differences separating philosophers, ideologies, and social movements concerned with freedom are to be understood”.³⁷⁵ MacCallum

³⁷³ See e.g. MacCallum 1967, 100: “This paper challenges the view that we may usefully distinguish between two kinds or concepts of political and social freedom [...] The corrective advised is to regard freedom as always one and the same triadic relation.”

³⁷⁴ MacCallum 1967, 100.

³⁷⁵ MacCallum 1967, 100.

also insists that the problems are not about finding out which of the ‘freedoms’ is “most worthwhile” or “the truest”. For him, the problem is the distinction itself. According to MacCallum, the problem has been that political actors have attempted to link the criteria of freedom to the social benefits or forms a social organization that they advocate or prefer. This has been possible because of the continuous confusion concerning the concept of freedom, which “results from failure to understand fully the conditions under which use of the concept is intelligible.”³⁷⁶ According to him, in order to proceed we have to first formulate a concept of freedom which is neutral in its relation to social benefits and social organizations.

MacCallum and Oppenheim both insist that all intelligible statements about liberty should be possible to put in a triadic relation, and that other kinds of formulations are sources of confusion or are simply unintelligible.³⁷⁷ MacCallum states that “whenever the freedom of some agent or agents is in question, it is always freedom from some constraint or restriction on interference with, or barrier to doing, not doing, becoming, or not becoming something”.³⁷⁸ The formulation of the concept is following:

X is (is not) free from Y to do (not do, become, not become) Z

in which X is always an agent, Y stands for the preventing conditions and Z for actions, ends, etc. In other words, all statements of liberty are about an agent being free from interference or constraint to perform or not to perform some action or to become or not become something. According to MacCallum, the actual differences between philosophers are not about the concept of freedom (the concept of freedom being freedom *of* somebody *from* something *to* something) but about the range of term variables of the above formula.³⁷⁹ MacCallum tells us that after adopting this “single ‘concept’” of liberty as the only reasonable one, and accordingly specifying “each term of this triadic relation”, we would be able to discuss separately the real questions that mark differences introduced by different ideologies, social movements or philosophies. Among these questions are: “what counts as interference?”³⁸⁰; “what kind of interference is justified?”; “how much freedom should people have?”³⁸¹ and so on. In conclusion we could say that MacCallum’s aim is to strip the concept of freedom of its ideological load in order to make progress in the discussion of the question.

³⁷⁶ MacCallum 1967,102.

³⁷⁷ MacCallum refers to Oppenheim’s formulation in his *Dimensions of Freedom* (1961).

³⁷⁸ MacCallum 1967, 102.

³⁷⁹ Berlin’s own response to this was that since a person in chains might just want to get rid of his chains and have no further aims or ends, the relation would actually be dyadic instead of triadic; *freedom from interference*. See Berlin 2005 (1968), 36, fn 1.

³⁸⁰ See MacCallum 1967, 121-122.

³⁸¹ See MacCallum 1967 in D. Miller 1991 p. 101

What kind of concept of concept does MacCallum have in mind when he makes this claim? MacCallum does not stop to think about this question. I would like to suggest that Felix E. Oppenheim provides us with valuable information in this matter in his article “‘Facts’ and ‘Values’ in Politics: Are They Separable?” (1973). Regarding the concept of freedom, Oppenheim states that though it is often used as a normative concept it can also be used in a purely descriptive sense. According to Oppenheim, examples of normative uses are to be found, for example, when proponents of the welfare state equate freedom with “‘freedom from want’, which for them means the availability of a certain amount of welfare to all” because “their purpose is not so much to *define* the concept of freedom as to *advocate* that the government provides a minimum standard of living [...] This is not a genuine, but a ‘persuasive’ definition – i.e., a normative judgment couched in definitional form for the sake of rhetorical effectiveness”.³⁸² According to Oppenheim, these kinds of definitions might be useful tools of political rhetoric, but they are not suitable for political science. In the case of political science we have to formulate definitions that are “acceptable to anyone regardless of his normative and ideological commitments, so that the truth (or feistiness) of statements in which these concepts (thus defined) occur will depend exclusively on intersubjectively ascertainable empirical evidence.”³⁸³ In regard to the concept of freedom: “the expression we must explicate is: ‘With respect to B, A is free to do x’”.³⁸⁴ Oppenheim continues to explain that this definition consists only of descriptive terms and is value-free since it is not dependent on the assessor’s political convictions. The argument here is that this concept consists of purely descriptive variables of B, A and x, and of connective expressions such as ‘with respect to’ and “is free from” which we could call connective functions. Since the formulation does not contain normative or evaluative terms in the premises, it follows that it is not logically possible to make normative conclusions.

Oppenheim is writing against what he calls the “inseparability thesis”, according to which “political scientists’ ideological convictions necessarily determine his ‘allegiance’ to one or another ‘paradigm’ [...] – his choice of concepts, the meaning he attaches to them, and the theories which he formulates with their help”.³⁸⁵ Instead he supports the view that “political science can and should be ‘value neutral’” and that “political science [should] limit itself to factual assertions [...] which are objectively – i.e., intersubjectively, verifiable by reference [...] to observational

³⁸² Oppenheim 1973, 56.

³⁸³ Oppenheim 1973, 56.

³⁸⁴ Oppenheim 1973, 56. As can be seen, this triadic formula is quite close to MacCallum’s, but Oppenheim is more restrictive when it comes to the variation ranges of the variables. See MacCallum 1967 in D. Miller 1991, p. 102 fn. 2 and Oppenheim 1961 in which, before MacCallum, he first formulated freedom as a triadic formula.

³⁸⁵ Oppenheim 1973, 54.

evidence”.³⁸⁶ Oppenheim makes a distinction between value-free language and ordinary, or political, language, and maintains that in political science it should be our aim to operate with value-free language. This Oppenheim regards as a condition for the scientific study of politics, and a possibility for “objective grounding of normative principles”.³⁸⁷ This also seems to be very much MacCallum’s aim since he wishes to move from the question how to define the concept liberty to questions concerning the applications of the concept. Oppenheim restates his convictions in *Political Concepts* (1981).

John Gray has labelled this a “restrictivist approach”³⁸⁸ and has summarised this way of thinking about the concept of liberty in the following way.³⁸⁹

The restrictivists typically:

1. ... view freedom as primarily a *descriptive* concept.
2. ... affirm that rational consensus on the proper uses of the concept of freedom can be reached in absence of any prior agreement on broader issues in social and political theory: they deny that different uses of the concept of freedom can be shown to hinge on various conjectures about man and society in a way that is always theory-loaded.
3. ... reject the claim that metaphysical views about the self and its powers are germane to disputes about the nature of social freedom.

I consider this to be a fair summary. However, it must be kept in mind that restrictivists are not claiming that all efforts to articulate what freedom means conform to these features. It is only “the real”, “neutral” or “the intelligent” ones that fit in, whereas “ideological” efforts contradict these guidelines.

5.1.5. Three Arguments Against Restrictivism

The common core of MacCallum’s and Oppenheim’s views is that it is possible and desirable to provide an autonomous, neutral descriptive definition for ‘liberty’ which is independent of any metaphysical views and which all rational persons would agree

³⁸⁶ Oppenheim 1973, 54.

³⁸⁷ Oppenheim 1973, 60.

³⁸⁸ I have borrowed the term from and Gray has borrowed it from W. L. Weinstein’s unpublished conference paper ‘The Variability of the Concept of Freedom’ (1975).

³⁸⁹ Gray 1984 in Pelczynski and Gray (eds) 1984, 322.

to.³⁹⁰ To Gallie they would reply that, at least in the case of liberty, it does not hold that the concept is necessarily evaluative.³⁹¹ MacCallum and Oppenheim seem to endorse a different kind of criteria for the rationality of discussion than Gallie does. For Gallie the essential contestedness of concepts is the *raison d'être* of meaningful philosophy. For MacCallum and Oppenheim one has to begin with an objective and descriptive definition of concepts such as liberty in order to have meaningful scientific discussions—and, by extension, progress.

I am very much tempted to think that this restrictivist concept of concept is very closely related to, and influenced by MacCallum's and Oppenheim's ideals of rationality and science (perhaps we should speak of 'scientific concept'). And if I am correct here--that their concept of rationality has implications for their concept of concept, and the concept of concept has implications for the concept of liberty-- then, the concept of liberty cannot be purely descriptive since, at least *in this* philosophical discussion concerning the concept of liberty, rationality is an evaluative, not a purely descriptive, term since it is used to mark the difference between better and worse explications of the concept of liberty.

But let me present three other, and perhaps more convincing, arguments against the idea that there could be one neutral concept of freedom that all rational persons would finally agree on. First I will speak about two arguments that have been made by William E. Connolly and Quentin Skinner in response to MacCallum, Oppenheim and other restrictivist positions on the concept of liberty. Then I will present a third one, which is in some sense a combination of the first two, one which is new, or, at least, I have not come across it before.

In his *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1983) Connolly refers directly to Oppenheim's concept of freedom. He writes in opposition to a restrictivist project project, which considers that the task of conceptual analyses is "first to purge the concept of all normative or value connotations and then to explicate it in ways that enable all investigators, regardless of the ideological orientation they 'happen' to adopt, to use it in description and explanation of social and political life"³⁹² Connolly argues that "normative dimensions in the idea of freedom are not attached to it as 'connotations' that can be eliminated" since if we had no normative point of view regarding the concept, we would not have a basis on which to ground our decisions of

³⁹⁰ They do not mean that people actually agree on this matter, and that people were not *de facto* proponents of some other kind(s) of 'liberty'. MacCallum's and Oppenheim's thesis is a normative requirement relying on an idea of what is rational.

³⁹¹ As already mentioned, Gallie doubts whether the concept of liberty is an essentially contested concept. I, however, would say that it is. My analysis of three concepts of liberty below will provide some evidence for this view, though they are not decisive.

³⁹² Connolly 1983, 199.

what descriptive terms the definition should consist (or not consist) of. According to Connolly, “‘freedom’ is contested partly because of the way it bridges a positivist dichotomy between ‘descriptive’ and ‘normative’ concepts”.³⁹³

This is an idea that could be taken in at least two directions. In the third argument I will go in another direction than Connolly, but here Connolly takes up another word, the English suffix ‘less’, and compares the use of it to the use of the suffix ‘free’. He concludes that the suffix ‘free’ is always used to report something valued, and ‘less’ is more negative when it is used to express the absence of something. Among his examples are the difference between ‘carefree’ motoring and ‘careless’ motoring; when something has no value in our eyes it is called ‘worthless’ and not ‘worthfree’; and similarly we speak of a ‘penniless’ persons and not a ‘pennyfree’ persons, while a room might be ‘dustfree’ and not ‘dustless’. The conclusion is that even though both of these two suffixes refer in these examples to situations that can be described as ‘the absence of something’ they “pick out different elements *because* each notion bears a different relationship to the wants, interests, and purposes of the agents implicated in those situations”. Thus the suffixes not only differ in value connotations “but in fact the suffixes pick out different aspects of situations that are only similar in some respects.” The “positive normative import of ‘free’ [...] is not attached to it accidentally but flows from its identification of factors pertinent to human well-being in situations where something is absent. And that normative import sets general limits to the sort of situations to which the idea of freedom can be applied”.³⁹⁴ According to Connolly, because of this, we should not aim to strip the normative load from the concept of freedom, but ask instead, why does it carry positive normative significance?

This sounds quite reasonable to me, although I do wonder how this could be explained to someone who speaks only Finnish, a language that does not have similar suffixes or at least the use of “vapaa” (‘free’) as in “älyvapaa” (free from rationality, irrational). Nor do words ending ‘-on’ or “-ön” (close to ‘less’), as in “päästötön” (emission free), conform to the English uses of –less and –free similar way as the English suffixes that Connolly discusses. In other words, it is not possible to repeat Connolly's argument in Finnish.

The second argument I will discuss is Quentin Skinner’s, as presented in his “Third Concept of Liberty” (2002). Skinner is discussing the claims of MacCallum and his follower Adam Swift, that there is just one concept of freedom (which we discussed

³⁹³ Connolly 1983, 200.

³⁹⁴ Connolly 1983, 200-201.

above) together with the demand that there must be a formulation under which “all intelligible locutions about freedom can be subsumed”.³⁹⁵

Skinner’s argument is historical as well as analytical. He shows that a perfectly coherent concept of positive liberty both can be formulated in a coherent way and has actually been promoted as the real concept of liberty. It is a concept that is incommensurable with or cannot be reduced to MacCallum’s formulation of freedom as the absence of constraint. Skinner discusses Isaiah Berlin, Bernard Bosanquet and Thomas Hill Green, who all share a rather similar, positive, understanding of liberty, i.e. that liberty is not merely about being free from constraints. Skinner pays special attention to T. H. Green, who defines “real freedom” as “the whole man *having* found his object”.³⁹⁶ According to Skinner, this means that to “attain freedom is thus to have ‘attained harmony with the true law of one’s being’.”³⁹⁷ This is to speak of a liberty as an end-state; as a state which one has succeeded in realising.³⁹⁸ The key here is to notice that liberty is something that the agent is no longer aiming at, but has already managed to achieve. Thus only a person who *de facto* lives according to the “true law of one’s being” is free.

Skinner is not claiming that this concept of liberty is the real concept of liberty. His claim is only that this positive concept of liberty is intelligible, coherent and is indeed not about absence of constraints, or actual absences of anything. It may of course be that the absence of constraint is a necessary condition for one to achieve the state of positive liberty, but it is not a sufficient condition, since an agent’s success in realising an ideal of himself could possibly be hindered by some constraint. But the absence of all constraint does not guarantee that the agent is *de facto* realising his real self. The agent could still live a life quite different from the ideal even if there was nothing preventing him from living the life of the “true self”, which historically speaking could be to live according to one’s “political essence”, “religious essence”, etc.

I find Skinner’s argument rather sound and I do not know how MacCallum and Oppenheim could answer to this challenge, except by making the openly normative claim that to define liberty in this way is nonsensical.

The third counterargument is of a formal nature. The restrictivist’s idea of the pure descriptiveness or neutrality of a concept seems to be the following: since Oppenheim’s or MacCallum’s formulation of liberty consists only of variables and

³⁹⁵ Skinner 2002m, 237

³⁹⁶ Green 1986, 240.

³⁹⁷ Skinner 2002m, 240, Green 1986, 240.

³⁹⁸ I discuss T. H. Green’s concept of liberty in more detail below.

connecting functions, which as such are not value-laden, the whole formula is also value-free. If this is their position, then it does leave space for speculation, because it is possible to formulate a concept of positive liberty in the very same way. Moreover this concept of positive liberty is incommensurable with Oppenheim's and MacCallum's formulations or, at least, cannot be reduced to or subsumed under them. If we define positive liberty as an achievement in the way just mentioned--that the actor is free only when she/he is truly living according to an ideal of self-realization, and that the actor is *de facto* carrying out this idea--we get a concept of positive liberty which is incommensurable with the triadic formula. As such it is an argument against the claim that there is one universal (triadic) concept of liberty. But we could also formulate this concept of positive liberty by simply using variables X and Y and connective functions. This would meet Oppenheim's and MacCallum's requirements of neutrality or 'pure descriptiveness' in the sense that the values of the variables are not determined *a priori*:

X living according to Y

OR

X achieved Y

Here X is the actor and Y is the ideal of living or self-realization, one of many different views of human nature, which could be religious, spiritual, rational and so on, depending on one's idea of human nature.³⁹⁹ X is the correlate of MacCallum's X, and Y is a replacement of MacCallum's Y and Z. We could discuss the possible values for these variables in more detail after having agreed on this formal definition of liberty, and then see what kind of different 'ideological uses' of the concept we might find (religious, political, etc). Somebody could very well suggest that Y (the ideal life) is "to play golf all day and to become better in it" while somebody else would suggest that it is "to serve God", "to live the *vita contemplativa*", or even

³⁹⁹ It is probably a commonplace to speak of positive liberty as self-realization. Skinner also does so in his later writings. See, e.g., Skinner 2003. But I am not totally convinced that it is always appropriate to describe it as self-realization since it has been considered from time to time that the self-realization of certain people is to be slaves while free men were to realize their real selves in the political arena. Here, at least, self realization has not been seen as equal to liberty, even though one could succeed in realising one's true self. This could perhaps be expressed by the familiar phrase that self-realization in this respect is not a sufficient condition for an agent to be free. Furthermore, if we take a look at Benjamin Constant's famous distinction between the liberty of the ancients and the liberty of the moderns, with liberty of the ancients as a formulation of positive liberty, we will notice that Constant is speaking more about conditions or ways of living than anyone's self-realization. He is simply saying that in antiquity it was understood that to live a free life was to live a certain kind of active political life; he is not claiming that any kind of political life is anyone's self-realization. See also Lagerspetz 1998 (92–96) for a more detailed account on the different kinds of positive freedoms.

“livin’ *la vida loca*”. Similarly, one might suggest that only “rational humans” or “all humans” count as the agent X, while someone else would suggest that also “those animals that are capable of experiencing pain” or that “all animals”, or maybe even stones could count as agents. That some of these suggestions may strike us as straightforwardly irrational or absurd is not a problem for the argument, since the whole point of the formal “value-free” or “non-ideological” concept of liberty is to give an account of the supposed common core of different conceptions of liberty. This then is supposed to enable us to move beyond the question of concept formation into the discussion of an ideological nature: what counts as an agent, the ideal life or self-realization? What are the rational values that can be attached to the variables? And so forth. In principle we could all agree that liberty is always about an agent living according to an ideal or carrying out self-realization, but disagree on what counts as an agent or an ideal. When one argues that rocks or animals do not count as agents, only humans do, or “playing golf all day” does not count as the ideal of a free life, we make normative claims and get involved in ideological debates. Just as in the case of MacCallum’s formulation, someone could agree that the “real formulation” of liberty is really such, but then suggest that “cows” can be agents (X), “to fly” count as an end (Z), and “the fact that cows do not have wings” count as interference or restriction (Y). After this suggestion we could agree with the person who suggested this on the idea of “the real concept of liberty” but disagree on the acceptable contents of the variables X, Y and Z.⁴⁰⁰ I do not suggest that this holds true in general about the concept of liberty, but this is in accordance with the structure of MacCallum’s and Oppenheim’s lines of reasoning.

So it could be argued in harmony with MacCallum’s and Oppenheim’s arguments, that when (positive) liberty is formulated in this way, it enables us to discuss what should count as Y or X and so on. In this formula the relation is of course only dyadic and not triadic, as in MacCallum’s and Oppenheim’s formulations. But it makes no sense to insist that the relation should be triadic, or ‘not dyadic’, in order to be

⁴⁰⁰ Followers of MacCallum and Oppenheim, or others, might suggest that in my formulation Y is not a variable since it is always “self-realization”, while they would of course accept X as variable, since this can also be found in their formulations. For the critique of positive liberty as always about “self-realization” see the previous footnote. More generally I would argue that Y is a variable if the X, Y and Z in MacCallum’s formulation are to be counted as variables, even if it was always about self-realization. We should to notice that on the general level too MacCallum’s X, Y and Z have been defined as “agent”, “restriction” and “goal or end”. One cannot give a value to X that one would not consider to be an “agent”. X is simply always about “agents”. What values one can give to these variables is not arbitrary. But if it is not a necessary condition for an object to be a variable that it could receive any (kind) of value, the possibilities could be restricted to any number higher than one. So, the Y in my formulation is as much of a variable as the X, Y and Z in MacCallum’s formulation, since the Y in my formulation can receive a (probably infinite) number of values as individuals determine what self-realization truly means for them, or for humans in general (from “serving God” to “active political life” etc.). It is also important to notice that the theory of “self-realization” can be based on a theory of common human nature, or it can be based on the idea that each person has a particular, individual, real self.

descriptive or neutral. It seems to me that now we have a second concept of liberty, which according to MacCallum's and Oppenheim's standards is 'purely descriptive' and becomes ideological only when values are attributed to the variables.

If I am correct, MacCallum and Oppenheim are left with two options: either they would have to conclude that there are at least two rival 'purely descriptive' concepts of liberty; or they would have to conclude that when we decide what kind of connective functions and what kind of variables the formula consists of, we are making value-laden or normative decisions. I would suggest that this latter option is more likely to be true. In regard to the question whether there is a single concept or several different concepts of liberty, we should speak of at least two concepts of liberty. These arguments can, in my opinion, be used against restrictivism, as well as against the concept/conception distinction, which I will discuss next.

5.1.6. The Concept/Conception Distinction

There have been efforts to clarify the problems raised by the dichotomy between descriptive and normative concepts. One such effort is to maintain that while various *conceptions* of liberty are likely to carry evaluative or normative load within them, a *concept* of liberty might be purely descriptive.⁴⁰¹ This idea can be traced at least to Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (1971) and L. H. A. Hart's *The Concept of Law* (1961). Hart states that "it is possible to isolate and characterize a central set of elements which form a common part to all the questions when defining the concept of law" even though it is not possible to give a concise definition. Rawls announces that "[...] it seems natural to think of the concept of justice as distinct from the various conceptions of justice as being specified by the role which these different sets of principles, the different conceptions, have in common" and that "here I follow H. L. A. Hart".⁴⁰² The connection with the ideas of MacCallum and Oppenheim is obvious even though Rawls, for one, refers to neither of them when discussing the distinction. But it is not a coincidence that Rawls formulates his concept of liberty following MacCallum: "Therefore I shall simply assume that liberty can always be explained by reference to three terms: the agents who are free, the restrictions or limitations which they are free from, and what it is that they are free to do or not to do"⁴⁰³ and "here I follow MacCallum 'Negative and Positive Freedom.' See further Felix Oppenheim

⁴⁰¹ Christine Swanton has suggested that a person who holds essentially contested concepts thesis true necessarily commits to concept/conception distinction. This might hold true when one does not have in his mind family resemblance. But otherwise I see no reason why essentially contested concepts thesis should lead to concept/conception distinction which gained popularity much later than Gallie presented his idea. See Swanton 1985, 811.

⁴⁰² Dworkin 1978, Adam Swift 2001. Hart 1961, 16; Rawls 1999, 5 and fn. 1.

⁴⁰³ Rawls 1999, 177.

Dimensions of Freedom [...]”⁴⁰⁴ The most recent of the aforementioned philosophers, Adam Swift, describes this position in the following way:

The ‘concept’ is the general structure, or perhaps the grammar, of a term like justice, or liberty, or equality. A ‘conception’ is the particular specification of that ‘concept’, obtained by filling out some of the detail. What typically happens, in political argument, is that people agree on the general structure of the concept – of the grammar, the way to use it – while having different conceptions of how that concept should be fleshed out.⁴⁰⁵

It is, in my opinion, quite easy to see the connection of this with the efforts that Oppenheim and MacCallum made in order to avoid ideological formulation(s) of liberty. Swift’s suggestion is about discovering up a universal core from the collection of articulations of specific concepts by extracting the “general structure” from “the flesh”--the flesh being what Oppenheim and MacCallum call the “ideological” content (matters they regard as more contingent). I regard this move of making a distinction between concept and conceptions as basically a conceptual clarification of Oppenheim’s and MacCallum’s ideas. It will be claimed that contestants do not disagree about the concept, but about the conceptions.⁴⁰⁶ We may also say that the extension of the concept is larger than the extension of the conception while the intension of the concept is smaller than that of the conception. A concept is more general and abstract than any particular conception of it.

While, on the other hand, Swift’s formulation captures the idea rather well, it also quickly raises a number of questions concerning this distinction: wouldn’t it be at least equally appropriate to call different conceptions different concepts, and not conceptions, if different conceptions do denote different objects? Further, it is unclear how many and what kinds of details one can fill in without changing the particular concept. If we go in two totally different directions, how long are we in a position to say that the concept remains the same? Is the composition and the number of variables open to any kind of suggestion? Or, in other words, what does the general structure/grammar of a concept precisely consist of, and how do we determine it in each case? I would imagine that for the last question the basic answer would be: by reducing different conceptions into their constitutive parts and finding out what is common between them. But what if there are one or more ‘conceptions’ that do not have a single common core and still the proponents of these ‘conceptions’ would argue that they are all conceptions/concepts of, for example, e.g. ‘justice’? How then are we to distinguish between real conceptions of justice and fake ones, and avoid

⁴⁰⁴ Rawls 1999, 117 fn. 4.

⁴⁰⁵ Swift 2001, 11.

⁴⁰⁶ See e.g. Swift 2001, 54.

being despotic about this process? It seems that the starting point of this type of analysis is one's own idea of how the concept of liberty *should* be formulated. Thus it is a normative and value laden act. Had Swift stopped for a while to consider these questions, his contribution would have been more interesting. But he provides no answers to these questions. So we need to take a look at other proponents of the concept/conception thesis.

We should first take a look at H. L. A. Hart, whom Rawls mentions as his exemplar, and who subsequently has been described as the first person to make the concept/conception distinction. However, as far as I know, Hart does not use these terms in his text *The Concept of Law*, to which later proponents of the distinction refer when they mention Hart. But, regardless of this drawback, Hart offers some information that may help us understand what his followers might mean when they use this demarcation. First, let us take a look at what Hart would *not* count as a “general structure” or “general grammar” of a concept:

The uncritical belief that if a general term (e.g. ‘law’ [...]) is correctly used, then the range of instances to which it is applied must all share ‘common qualities’ has been the source of much confusion. [...] Wittgenstein’s advice ([*Philosophical Investigations*] para. 66) is peculiarly relevant to the analysis of legal and political terms. Considering the definition of ‘game’ he said, ‘Don’t say there must be something in common or they would not be called ‘games’, but look and see whether there is anything common to all. For if you look at them you will not see anything common to all but similarities, relationships, and whole series of that.’⁴⁰⁷

This is, of course, a direct reference to Wittgenstein’s idea of “family resemblance”. Hart wishes to disprove the claim that all the uses of concepts, such as law or democracy, would have a minimum of common content, a shared core that reveals a well-understood general category to which they all belong. Following Wittgenstein, Hart hints that what is common between different uses of a term is how they relate to each other, and to other terms that often come up when discussing the matters in question. Now, for a moment, it seems that Hart’s opinion is actually the opposite of the concept/conception distinction. However, Hart seems to begin moving away from Wittgenstein rather quickly.

At one point Hart gives an example of the general structure of the concept of justice. , Hart, as Rawls observes, speaks of the “notion of justice “ and the “idea of justice” (instead of “concept” or “conceptions of justice”) and tells us that the “general

⁴⁰⁷ Hart 1961, 235, end note to page 15.

principle latent in these diverse applications is that individuals are entitled in respect of each other to a certain relative position of equality or inequality". To "treat like cases alike and different cases differently" is a central element in the idea of justice". However this central element or "constant feature" is too incomplete to determine our actions as such. It needs to be supported by criteria to determine when cases are alike; and this second part forms a structure about which people more commonly disagree.⁴⁰⁸ This is of course only one of the examples that Hart raises, but he does seem to drift away from "family resemblance". He moves in the direction that he first criticizes when describing some kind of common "quality" to all uses of the term "justice". It seems to me that this is also what John Rawls and others who make the distinction between concept and its conceptions actually do. At the least, Rawls interprets Hart in this way. In his *Theory of Justice* (1971) Rawls refers explicitly to Hart and states that he is following Hart in the matter of demarcating the concept from conceptions.⁴⁰⁹ He claims to have distinguished a "concept of justice as meaning a proper balance between competing claims from a conception of justice as a set of related principles for identifying the relevant considerations which determine the balance." According to Rawls, the concept of justice is "defined by the role of its principles in assigning rights and duties and in defining the appropriate division of social advantages" and "a conception of justice is an interpretation of this role".⁴¹⁰ At this point it appears that there is some kind of contradiction or paradox at work here: if Rawls follows Hart in distinguishing a concept from conceptions, why does he not follow Hart when describing the concept of justice? We have two philosophers arguing that there is some kind of common core which forms the concept of justice, but they seem to have two rival versions of the common core of the concept. For Hart the core was to "treat like cases alike and different cases differently", while for Rawls the concept consists of the principles according to which rights and duties are assigned and the principle that there should be "appropriate distribution of benefits and burdens of social life".⁴¹¹ It is possible that they could, and perhaps would, argue that they are not speaking of exactly the same type(s) of 'justice': Rawls speaks of 'social justice', while Hart speaks of justice within law and legal matters. These rival conceptions are rivals only within these respective fields and not across borders. This might form a defence of their position, but it should at least be accompanied by some kind of definition of how we are to draw the boundaries between different fields of 'justice'. Otherwise there is the danger of falling down a slippery slope, as we could always claim to be talking about a different concept (one which belongs to a different field). This could easily lead to a situation which could be described as "essentially

⁴⁰⁸ Hart 1961, 155-156.

⁴⁰⁹ Rawls 1999, 5, note 1. It is worth bearing in mind that Hart did not use these terms.

⁴¹⁰ Rawls 1999, 9.

⁴¹¹ Rawls 1999, 47. See also 9.

contested *contexts*". Or, possibly, it could take us back to Gallie's thesis: that there are actually different *concepts* that are competing.

Another proponent of the concept/conception distinction, Ronald Dworkin, referred in 1972 to a "distinction that philosophers made but lawyers have not yet appreciated" which he illuminates with the following story: "Suppose I tell my children simply that I expect them not treat others unfairly. I have in my mind examples of the conduct I mean to discourage, but I would not accept that my 'meaning' was limited to these examples, for two reasons. First I would expect children to apply my instructions to situations I had not and could not have thought about. Second, I stand ready to admit that some particular act I thought about was fair when I spoke was in fact unfair [...] if one of my children is able to convince me of that later; in that case I should want to say that my instructions covered the case he cited, not that I had changed my instructions". Dworkin could have said that what he wanted was that the children would be guided by the concept of fairness and not by a particular conception of fairness.⁴¹² He describes the distinction further by referring to two competing groups wherein one thinks that unfairness is connected with the "wrongful division of benefits and burdens", while the members of the other believe that unfairness is due to "wrongful attribution of praise or blame". He encourages us to imagine that despite this disagreement they have "a great number of standard cases of unfairness and use these as benchmarks against which to test other, more controversial cases". Then, Dworkin tells us, they would have a common concept of fairness but different conceptions, as they differ "over large number of controversial cases, in a way that suggests that each either has or acts on a different theory of *why* the standard cases are acts of unfairness". To make it even clearer, Dworkin says that 'conceptions' are different answers to the question: which fundamental principles that form the 'concept' of fairness must be relied on when judging a controversial case? In other words, to appeal to the concept of fairness, to ask persons to act fairly, would mean that others are only asked to act according to their own conceptions of fairness. But, of course, it is also possible that the person who is asking others to act fairly could have in mind some special conception of fairness. Dworkin regards this to be a difference in level of action. In the first case, the person is posing a moral issue (what is it to act fairly?); and in the second case he is trying to answer this (to act fairly means to act in the following way...).⁴¹³

The distinction serves Dworkin as a tool to analyse how the constitution of United States should be interpreted today. His claim is that when we are, for example, interpreting the constitutional clause which prohibits "cruel and unusual punishment",

⁴¹² Dworkin 1972, 134.

⁴¹³ See Dworkin 1972, 134–135.

the terms “cruel” and “unusual” should be seen as concepts and not as conceptions. Otherwise the punishments should forever follow the practices of the eighteenth century even though our conceptions of cruel and unusual have changed.⁴¹⁴ To take up the concept/conception distinction in this case might be a rhetorically good move, but he could equally well maintain that the constitution was passed by historical agents and that we should and do think differently than our ancestors on many things, among others on the concept of cruel and unusual punishment.

Among Hart, Rawls and Dworkin only the latter makes a direct reference to W. B. Gallie or his thesis on the essentially contested concepts. Dworkin, however, seems to understand that the essentially contested concepts thesis is compatible with the concept/conception distinction. In another essay he writes that “[...] their full force can be captured in a concept that admits of different conceptions; that is, in a *contested* concept”, and makes a reference to Gallie’s “Essentially Contested Concepts” in a footnote.⁴¹⁵ If one were being generous, one could see some similarities between an “original exemplar whose authority is generally acknowledged” as mentioned by Gallie and the concept (in the concept/conception distinction) when listing the criteria of essentially contested concepts (see the discussion below). But Gallie does not refer to any general grammar, core, principle, or structure that would be common to all concepts contesting with each other. Gallie does not discuss these ideas at all. Instead he makes some notes that hint in the direction of the Wittgensteinian family resemblance thesis (see the section on “family resemblance” below) though he clearly remains doubtful about this thesis.

In any case, Dworkin’s, Rawl’s and Hart’s assertions have been regarded as a denial of the essentially contested concepts thesis in the sense that they are claiming that people are not disagreeing about a given concept but about their conceptions of that concept. I am not absolutely sure if a denial of the essentially contested concepts thesis follows from this, if only because they do not explicitly deny that there could never be a case in which two concepts could be competing. It could be that none of the philosophers quoted above is speaking about general conditions. In fact, Hart, Rawls and Dworkin all apply the distinction between concept and conception in special cases, at least originally, and it is only later commentators who have placed them in conversation with Gallie, or with a milder version of the contestedness thesis. The relation between the concept/conception distinction and Gallie’s idea of essentially contested concepts remains a bit ambiguous, although it is clear that they are not the same thing.

⁴¹⁴ See Dworkin 1972, 135–136.

⁴¹⁵ Dworkin 1975, 103 and fn. 1.

It is interesting in this regard that Gallie's criteria (7), which says that rival concepts often have a common original exemplar, has been interpreted as espousing the same ideas that the concept/conception distinction is based on, and Gallie has been criticised for this. John N. Gray, for example, wonders whether this requirement does not "commit Gallie to a form of essentialism [...] according to which there stands each essentially contested concept [...] 'a non-contested, unambiguously defined and fully determinate concept of exemplar'".⁴¹⁶ Gray also suggests that criteria (6) and (7) cause problems for Gallie's main thesis. He continues: "to take two of Gallie's political examples: when there is a dispute whether a given form of government is democratic, or about what a just society would look like, it is far from obvious that the disputants must (or usually do) share a common concept of democracy and social justice while endorsing divergent criteria for its correct applications".⁴¹⁷ It is of course possible that often the contesting parties do not, at least consciously, share a common, well-individuated exemplar. It is more often likely that the exemplar is a somewhat loose popular understanding of the concept. But the main point is that Gallie is speaking about exemplars, and to have an exemplar does not mean that one should agree with it in the sense that there are no other alternatives to it. An exemplar can be an exemplar in a much more loose way and for many other reasons. Unfortunately, Gallie is not very specific on this matter.

Gallie explains that conditions (6) and (7) are needed "for distinguishing an essentially contested concept from a concept which can be shown, by a careful inspection of its different uses, to be radically confused".⁴¹⁸ It does not follow from this explanation, nor from conditions (6) and (7) themselves, that there is "a non-contested, unambiguously defined and fully determinate concept of exemplar," e.g. of democracy, though neither does it exclude the possibility. If the original exemplar of democracy consisted, let us say of six features (a, b, c, e, f and g) it could be that while the contesting concepts "derived" from one original exemplar they would include different elements of it: the first one includes features a, d and g (and q, w and s); while the second one includes features b, c and f (and r, t & y). Then there would be a common exemplar, but no common core or unambiguously defined concept of democracy. The competing parties had adopted different features from the "original exemplar". Furthermore, it also could be that both of the rival concepts would share one of the six features, but they would not regard it as very important. Or, possibly, one would regard it as very important and the other as not so very important when compared to other features. This would also yield a common exemplar, but the concept still would not be regarded as unambiguously defined by the two rivals.

⁴¹⁶ Gray 1978, 391. The quotation within the quotation is from Ernest Gellner 1974.

⁴¹⁷ Gray 1978, 391.

⁴¹⁸ Gallie 1964a, 168.

It is another matter to ask whether Gallie would accept this explanation, especially as he was suspicious about the concept of family resemblance. My explanation is partly about family resemblances and partly about applying Gallie's criteria (2) and (3). But if we once more take a look at the concept of democracy, we see that Gallie mentions that the exemplary authority is a long tradition of "demands, aspirations, revolts and reforms of a common anti-inegalitarian character", and states that though this tradition is vague, it does not effect "its influence as an exemplar".⁴¹⁹ Now if this does form a common core, the core would be a very loose, very abstract one.

5.1.7. Terence Ball on Essentially Contested Concepts

Another representative of Gallie's critics, if the above mentioned can be described as his critics, is Terence Ball, who identifies himself as a conceptual historian. Although Ball thinks that the essentially contested concepts thesis may be valuable as a rhetorical stratagem, he disagrees with Gallie. Ball claims that no concept is essentially contested and denies that the thesis is a "valid philosophical thesis about language and meaning".⁴²⁰ I shall only take a look on his argument because, if I have understood it correctly, it is based on false assumptions. Regardless of this, Ball's objections are illuminating in terms of the debate. If true, they would have a negative effect on the potential utility of Gallie's approach for conceptual historians.

In an article on 'Power' in *Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* Ball argues that there is a common core to be found for different "conceptions" of power, at least for "influential" ones, and that the essentially contested concepts thesis is wrong.⁴²¹ About the common core Ball says that "despite their apparent diversity, they [conceptions of power] nevertheless share several common 'core' features".⁴²² He adopts the distinction between concept and conceptions that described above. He systematically uses the term 'conception' when he speaks of differing articulations of 'power' and speaks of 'concept' only when referring to the common core that conceptions of power presumably share.⁴²³

⁴¹⁹ Gallie 1964a, 180. Gallie mentions also the American and the French Revolutions being claimed as exemplars of a few political movements.

⁴²⁰ Ball 1993, 556.

⁴²¹ This formulation would in my opinion refer more to the family resemblance thesis than to Gallie, but Ball is here writing against the idea propagated by "several modern political theorists" according to which "'power' has, and can have, no single agreed upon meaning, but is an essentially contested concept" Ball 1993, 549.

⁴²² Ball 1993, 548.

⁴²³ At this point it might be worth noticing that Gallie is not actually claiming that there is not a common core (or that there is). It remains a possibility depending on how much one demands from common core on how abstract level it can be established.

Ball construes Gallie's thesis of essential contestability as a claim that there can never, be agreement on the meaning of political concepts, not even for a while. He describes Gallie's thesis in the following way:

You have your understanding of power; I have mine; and never the twain shall meet [...] one cannot even hope to construct a conception of power upon which everyone might conceivably agree, since 'power' belongs to the class of essentially contested concepts.⁴²⁴

For Ball this implies that:

“there can be no common moral language or civic lexicon: hence no communication; hence no community [...] because concepts compromising these individual languages cannot be translated or otherwise understood, each speaker is a stranger and an enemy to each other.”⁴²⁵

To make his point even plainer, Ball even goes on to state that “clearly, then, claims about the essential contestability of political concepts are not about merely assertions about the limits of language and meaning, but about [...] the possibility of communication and thus of community”.⁴²⁶ And in another essay he writes most revealingly:

[...] politics itself – is about the public airing of those differences, it as an end in itself but as a prelude to possibly resolving those differences through argument and persuasion. And this requires, as a precondition, a shared language or lexicon [...] But if the concepts constitutive of political discourse, and therefore of political life, are indeed *essentially* contested, then there can of course be no common moral language or civic lexicon; hence no community – indeed, no *hope* of establishing and maintaining a civic community or commonwealth. If the thesis of essential contestability were true, then political discourse – and therefore political life itself – would be well-nigh impossible, and for exactly the same reasons that civility and the civic life is impossible in Hobbes' imaginary and solipsistic state of nature: each individual is a monad, radically disconnected from all other individuals

⁴²⁴ Ball, 1993, 554. Ball repeats this statements in his “Confessions of a Conceptual Historian” (2002, 22–26) and also in “Political Theory and Conceptual Change (1996): “But to claim that a particular concept is essentially contested is to take a timeless and ahistorical view of the character and function of political concepts. Not all concepts have been, or could be contested at all times” (1996, 33).

⁴²⁵ Ball, 1993, 555.

⁴²⁶ Ball 1993, 555. Later he states that “if the essential contestability thesis holds true about political concepts, then the prospects of meaningful communications, and hence community, would appear to be exceedingly bleak” Ball 2002, 24.

insofar as each speaks, as it were, a private language of his own devising. Because the concepts comprising these individual languages cannot be translated or otherwise understood, each speaker is perforce a stranger and an enemy to every other [...] Hobbes's imaginary state of nature is nothing less than a condition in which the thesis of essential contestability holds true: the inability to communicate is, as it were, the essential or defining characteristic of that state.⁴²⁷

His strongest claim is:

“For if anyone seriously and sincerely believes that political concepts are *essentially* contestable, the one could hardly judge one understanding *better* than other, for there would be no grounds upon which to base such a judgement. That judgements are made and arguments advanced suggests that the thesis of essential contestability is both logically and practically self defeating”⁴²⁸

Some basic points are repeated in these quotations, but a summary of Ball's claims would be as follows:

1. According to the essentially contested concepts thesis, it not possible at any time among any group to reach an agreement on concepts, i.e. contestation takes place at all times and everywhere.
2. Contestedness covers all the constitutive concepts of political discourse, as well as some other areas of discourse.
3. It follows from the essentially contested concepts thesis, that:
 - a) There cannot be a common moral language or civic lexicon
 - b) From (a) it follows that there cannot be communication
 - c) Furthermore from (b) it follows that there cannot be no community
 - d) Because of this, each individual becomes a stranger and enemy to each other like in Hobbes's state of nature.
4. The untranslatability of concepts follows from the essentially contested concepts thesis.

⁴²⁷ Ball 2002, 23–24.

⁴²⁸ Ball, 1993, 556.

5. Politics is about resolving problems (and we need a common lexicon or shared language to do that).

6. The essentially contested concepts thesis holds true only in the conditions of Hobbes's state of nature, meaning solipsism, monadism, and disconnection: that is to say radical atomism.

7. The essentially contested concepts thesis is logically and practically self defeating.

Let us now evaluate Ball's claims.

(1) The problem with Ball's claim is that he seems to think that essentially contested concepts thesis holds that concepts are *de facto* being contested.⁴²⁹ This was discussed above, when I noted that Gallie says that often concepts are used "in contestable (and often as not in an immediately contested) way".⁴³⁰ But more can be said about the fact that Gallie's essentially contested thesis does not claim that essentially contested concepts are necessarily contested all the time. It says only that it would be possible that certain concepts could be actually contested at some point history on, in circumstances in which Gallie's criteria no. 5 is fulfilled: "Essentially contested concepts are used against other uses. Each party of a dispute recognizes that its own use is contested by those of other parties. In other words, a concept is used both aggressively and defensively". Until this and other conditions mentioned by Gallie are fulfilled, contesting is just a possibility or potentiality. And, indeed, in his article "Moral Philosophy Rests on a Mistake", Gallie writes that while many moral disputes stem from "our adherence to different particular uses of some essentially contested concept" it is possible that the parties could at least in theory agree to a "moratorium on competition between their respective uses of the concept in question".⁴³¹ Moreover, it also possible that the two parties would agree that the other's use in a particular context is "historically and logically" permissible (though they would probably consider each other's particular uses unfortunate).⁴³²

And, of course, Ball should have noted that Gallie speaks mostly of *groups* that are contesting with other groups. This means, that some people within a particular smaller or larger group do *de facto* agree on some concepts. An absolutely private language, or everyone's war against everyone else is not anticipated.

⁴²⁹ This is shown partly when in the first place he takes the argument to the empirical level and especially when he writes that "But all that can be inferred from an enumeration of instances of disagreements [...] is that there *have been* disagreements, and not that there *must always* continue to be." Ball 1993, 556. See also Ball 2002, 25.

⁴³⁰ Gallie 1956a, 114.

⁴³¹ Gallie 1964b, 209,211.

⁴³² Gallie 1964b, 211. For a similar example on 'actions' see 204–205.

That concepts which become contested are not contested at all times is also very clear when one thinks about conceptual novelties. Of course, they are not necessarily contested immediately from the moment of their introduction. It is more probable that it takes some time before they become contested, before they acquire such a status in society that it becomes important to challenge them. Ball suggests something like this himself in his *Political Argument and Conceptual Change* (1988): “conceptual contestation remains a permanent possibility even though it is, in practice, actualized only intermittently.”⁴³³ But he does not see that this is in accordance with Gallie’s thesis.⁴³⁴

(2) Gallie is very hesitant about whether certain constitutive concepts of political discourse are essentially contestable. At the end of the “Essentially Contested Concepts” essay, Gallie seriously wonders whether there are more essentially contested concepts than the ones he has mentioned in the article. He considers concepts of science, law, authority and liberty, but is doubtful: “I am doubtful whether any one of these concepts can be brought satisfactorily under the framework of ideas by means of which have defined essentially contested concepts.” The reason for this doubt is that those concepts are “tied to more specific aims and claims, as well as admitting of more easily agreed tests, than the concepts with which we have hitherto been concerned” and continues “In general, I would say, it is in those fields of human endeavour in which achievements are prized chiefly as renewals or advances of commonly accepted traditions of thought and work that our concepts are likely to prove essentially contested.”⁴³⁵ So, Gallie is rather cautious about the matter of which concepts are essentially contested, although it might be that those who have followed him have been more eager in naming essentially contested concepts.

(3) The premises of reasoning are simply inadequate.

(a) Ball’s idea is that there cannot be a common moral lexicon if people do not agree on the meanings of concepts. He may be right, but it does not follow that the meanings could not be written down in a dictionary from which everybody could check on the meaning of a concept in use if they know something about the speaker or

⁴³³ Ball 1988, 14.

⁴³⁴ One related note: Ball also commits an argumentative failure here. First, he correctly goes on to say that even though there is empirical evidence that people disagree on meanings of political concepts, it does not follow that these disputes would go on forever. He does not mention that neither is there any guarantee that an agreement would continue forever. But he should not have made the subsequent claim, that from this it follows that there are only “*contingently contested concepts*” Ball 1993, 555–556. If we were to make any kind of conclusion from the empirical world it would be only that some concepts are contested, or are contested at some point of time in some places (or are not). If conceptual contesting is of a contingent or essential nature, we cannot decide on the grounds of our experiences.

⁴³⁵ Gallie 1956a, 190.

the context of a given articulation. If they do not know, it could be possible to proceed on a hypothetical level of trial and error to see what works. There is no reason why someone could not be aware of more than one of the circulating meanings of a given concept, learn new ones, and have the sensitivity to recognize which meaning is being used in a particular communicative situation. I am not sure whether this means that they must have some shared concepts. But the essentially contested concepts thesis does not oppose this idea.

(b) Communication is not only nor mainly about agreement. Rather, it is about understanding and trying to make oneself understood. To understand another, I do not have to constantly agree on the meaning of all the concepts used in our conversation. I will only have to understand what he means.⁴³⁶ It is enough to have, or to reach, some kind of shared or commonly recognised use of some of the concepts used in conversation. There is no reason why I could not understand what a person means by a concept, which I personally or as a member of another group would use differently. If I notice that I have difficulties in understanding what is meant by some concept, I would simply ask what do you mean by ‘power’, etc.

(c) This depends of course what is meant by community. “Community” itself may be a contested concept. In any case, Ball’s point seems to be is that a community needs communication in order to be a community. I agree, but as explained above, it does not follow that if Gallie is correct, it would lead to such a situation.

(d) I shall not go on to evaluate how well Ball uses Hobbes, but there is no reason why the idea of essentially contested concepts would lead to a state of nature and to a state of war. Or that it is only in the state of nature that Gallie's thesis would hold true. To make such a conclusion one needs to add extra premises to the thesis.

Another problem with Ball’s view is that when he states that “far from supporting the thesis of essential contestability, these considerations suggest that disagreements about the meaning(s) of power are rationally debatable and, at least potentially and in principle, resolvable” he makes a claim that the existence of essentially contested concepts would undermine the possibility of rational debate. As seen above in the discussion of Gallie’s thesis, this does not follow. Rationality is preserved, but the necessary criteria of rationality do not include the possibility of a final solution.

⁴³⁶ It could be that we do not have a single common stable vocabulary of the necessary words that enable us to communicate with different persons. Perhaps we need to have a minimum number of words or concepts with agreed upon meanings, but there is no reason why they would have to be the same on each communicative occasion. Or why could we not have vocabularies instead of one vocabulary?

(4) Why should an individual concept not be translatable because I do not agree that the definition offered is the right one, or is the one and only definition for it? Why could I not, if I tried, learn to understand and translate a person's utterances even if he had a different concept of, for example, e.g. freedom? Of course it might be that I could not translate all the words from the first 'language' into exactly corresponding words in the second language. But this is not a problem that could not, in principle, be overcome. This problem is not that unusual even with non-contested concepts. The trivial solution would be to use more words in translation or even coin a new word. They do occur and sometimes they come into one language from another. It is also somewhat alarming that Ball does not present any arguments to back up this conclusion, but instead simply asserts it.

(5) Politics is not about--at least not only about--solving problems. Nor is it about solving conceptual disagreements. Politics is about pursuing the interests of interest groups and nurturing and managing problems or conflicts in ways which do not necessarily entail solving them. Politics involves making compromises, negotiating, striking deals, discussing and understanding the views of other parties, etc. Quite possibly politics has to do with solving problems. But are political problems about definitions of concepts? Maybe they sometimes are, but certainly not always. But, most significantly, would politics come to an end if politicians did not agree what is the concept of liberty? Wouldn't political life continue despite ever continuing contestation? If there is no definitive answer to the question of what is democracy, and if politicians became aware of this, would they then become paralyzed? As it should be clear, this is not the case. Politics is carried on despite the fact that politicians do not agree on these matters (and perhaps do not care about them), or the possibly the disagreements are the condition for political life.

(6) What does it mean to be practically self-defeating? For Ball, it appears to mean that ultimately no one holds that the essentially contested concepts thesis is true. He presumes that if someone does consider his concept to be better than another's, then it follows that he does not subscribe to thesis. But this is not true. One could maintain that the essentially contested concepts thesis is true, and also claim that concept x of freedom is, within this or that context, more illuminating, coherent (or whatever criteria one has in mind) than concept y. It is also not a problem to maintain that there are several (incommensurable) concepts of liberty which are equally good, which possibly represent different perspectives, and that there are some concepts that are not so good. But all this depends on what Ball means by "practically self defeating".

Logically it is not self-defeating. Why would it be? If someone holds that some concepts are essentially contested, how does it follow (logically) that it is not true? To make any kind of conclusions we need more premises. And if Ball is saying that he

presented the premises when he discussed the relation of essential contestedness and communication or politics, it has to be noted that in this discussion Ball injected his own premises about the nature of communications, community and politics. If these hold as true, even though I have argued that they do not, they do not belong to Gallie's thesis as such. Thus it would not mean that it is, at least, *logically* self-defeating. The idea that the essentially contested concepts thesis is practically self-defeating seems to me to be tied to a bigger problem which might be the basic source of almost all the problems with Ball: he seems to posit criteria for reason or rationality in a rather one-sided way. As we already noted, Ball writes that somebody who seriously believes that concepts are essentially contested could not judge one construal as better than another, and that "these disagreements cannot be resolved by fiat or by force or arms or ideological conversion but only by power of a peculiarly human kind – the power of reason, of argument and persuasion".⁴³⁷ When charging that the essentially contested concepts thesis rejects the possibility of gaining a better understanding of a given concept, he does not consider possibility that "better understanding" could be measured within historical or spatial contexts. To gain a better understanding does not mean to have a complete understanding, and to have complete understanding could mean to understand the real ambiguity or many sidedness of a given concept or phenomenon. Perhaps more importantly, Ball seems to think that the only question worth asking is, what is the 'real' or 'true' nature of some concept or what does some concept truly mean? I would like to suggest that there are other questions which are commonly answered by some kind of definition (or perhaps by a theory) of a concept, and which allow rational judgments regarding better understandings of the concept in question. If we ask, for example, what kind of liberty is important for us now at this historical situation or context, we might quite rationally argue on behalf of some concept of liberty as better or more important, regarding human conditions, than others. We can do this and still acknowledge that there are other rational concepts of liberty, and that, very likely, subsequently some other concept of liberty will be more important and provide a better answer to the challenges of the time. It is obvious that Ball has not considered what Gallie himself said about rationality (see the section on Gallie and rationale), which is unfortunate, since Gallie's views might have made Ball reassess his critique.

5.2. FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

Next I would like to consider Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblance as an alternative to restrictivism and the concept/conception distinction, as a means of understanding the similarities and dissimilarities of concepts. I suggest that

⁴³⁷ Ball 1993, 556.

Wittgenstein's theory is not in contradiction with the essentially contested concepts thesis. On the contrary, by combining these two theses with certain Skinnerian ideas, we can discuss questions of conceptual continuities and discontinuities (or similarities and dissimilarities) in more detail and in a more promising way than either restrictivism or the concept/conception distinction allow. The family resemblance thesis forms the backbone of my model of a conceptual prism. It provides the general framework, and I use Gallie and Skinner to fill in the details. It would be possible to use other ideas when filling in details, but here I suggest that the combination of Skinner's and Gallie's ideas provide a fruitful solution. The connection between the essentially contested concepts and the family resemblance thesis has been pointed out before.⁴³⁸ But when compared to Gallie's thesis Wittgenstein's is more radical, since the essentially contested concepts thesis is concerned only with evaluative terms, while the family resemblance thesis is about all possible terms from liberty to the concept of 'colour' and concepts of different colours, and with both evaluative and descriptive terms.

5.2.1. Structure

In remark number 65 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein lets an interrogator demand that he explain what is common to all that is called language. Wittgenstein answers that "these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, but they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship or these relationships, that we can call them all 'language'". In the following remark, number 66, Wittgenstein tries to explain in more detail what was just said. He takes up the example of "proceedings we call 'games'" and asks why all these--board-games, card-games, ball-games, noughts and crosses, a child throwing a ball at a wall, tennis and ring-a-ring-a-roses--are all called 'games'. The answer is that there is nothing common to all of them, but they form "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail". "I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'".⁴³⁹ What is being said is that a concept like 'game' may not have such a stable meaning that would allow it to be given an all-embracing dictionary definition (by listing the features that all 'games' share).

⁴³⁸ See, for example, Geoffrey Thomas, who contrasts these two theories, as a pair, with another pair of "essentialist" and "closed" theories of concepts. Thomas 2006, 22–24.

⁴³⁹ Wittgenstein 2006/1953, remark 66. It is a question of Wittgensteinology what the stakes really are: is it just about universals or is it about all kinds of systematic theories of meaning. I am trying to see what kind of implications the family resemblance thesis has to discussion on the concept of liberty, as an example, and how it could be usefully applied in conceptual history.

A basic interpretation of the family resemblance thesis can be illustrated in the following way.⁴⁴⁰ A set of objects (a, b, c, d, e), all of which could be called “games”, is classified by reference to (the presence of / absence of) features A, B, C, D and E. It might be that all of the objects have four of these features but lack the fifth feature (a different feature in all cases).

e	d	c	b	a
ABCD	ABCE	ABDE	ACDE	BCDE

There is no common feature to all of the objects but they are related to each other through similarities or relations to certain set of features. In this case they are related overall by all having four features, and in detail their relations are structured by the actual features. This diagram is illustrative, but it presents a very simple case. If we draw a similar diagram for different uses of ‘liberty’ the picture is more complicated because the features can be almost anything: external or internal relations, substantive qualities, etc. All the examples of the application of the family resemblance thesis discussed below are actually rather loose on the matter of what kind of features may constitute family resemblance, i.e. how to define ‘feature’, how the features have been picked up in each case. Wittgenstein did not specify the nature of the concepts’ features. They are there just to be recognised, and thus it becomes possible to establish the family resemblance in various ways (presuming that giving a perfect account of them would be too much in practice). We will have to use our imagination and see how it works.

There is a relevant question that, for example, Bede Rundle raises and Hans Glock mentions. Does the application of family resemblances lead to a situation in which a concept is not a “univocal term, but has different, albeit related meanings?”⁴⁴¹ Perhaps this question could be formulated in this way: in order for a concept to exist, is just one precise understanding, i.e. definition, required for it? As Glock states, Wittgenstein insists that the case is really about a concept which does not have a family of meanings but consists of family resemblances and so, the different understandings of, for example, the concept of ‘understanding’ make up the concept of understanding.⁴⁴² Glock invokes the Wittgensteinian view that the meaning of a concept is its use and continues to claim that “diversity of uses entails diversity of meaning”.⁴⁴³ This is interesting theme, but one’s view in regard to the question whether there is a “univocal term” or not is irrelevant to the applicability of the idea

⁴⁴⁰ See e.g. Stern, G. 2004, 113 and Bambrough 1966, 189.

⁴⁴¹ Glock 2008, 215. See Rundle 1990, 48–63.

⁴⁴² See Wittgenstein 2006, §§ 531–532.

⁴⁴³ Glock 2008, 215.

of family resemblance in tracking down conceptual changes or the search for conceptual stabilities which I am trying to do. I believe that this problem is a matter of convention, and from my point of view the idea of family resemblance offers a good means for tracking down conceptual continuities and discontinuities (or similarities and dissimilarities). We may, for example, take a look at different articulations of the so-called negative concept of liberty and notice that they do in fact differ from each other, and moreover note what kind of differences do exist. On the other hand we may take a look at positive, negative and republican concepts of liberty. The application of the family resemblance thesis to this comparison enables us to see how these different concepts of liberty still fall somehow under the same concept, 'liberty'. Glock also thinks that the objection is not relevant in the context of defining analytic philosophy in terms of family resemblances, as the point is to say that "there are perfectly legitimate concepts that are explained through such similarities rather than analytically."⁴⁴⁴ I agree with Glock and do not think that we need any kind of general theory to support us. The family resemblance thesis offers a fruitful perspective to conceptual history.

5.2.2. Rationale/Justification

The basic justification for Wittgenstein's thesis is simply the claim that this is how things really are. Wittgenstein tries to prove this with examples, e.g. by discussing the concept of game. It is noteworthy that he insists that for a concept to be usable it does not have to have a precise definition. But then again we have to note that this does not rule out the possibility that we may give a specific and precise definition of a concept for special purposes,⁴⁴⁵ although, in the end, all definitions or explanations of terms--or signs--are open to different interpretations, and are dependent on further definitions and explanations).

It is very important to notice that the family resemblance thesis does not make the claim that it could never be the case that some concepts share a common core and are thus related.⁴⁴⁶ For example, if two terms are actually synonyms their similarity is about having exactly the same features though the words used to mark these features are different. But the important implication is that the possible existence of a common ground has to be established individually in each case and not presupposed. If the uses of a given concept do share a common core, it will become visible *a posteriori* when one examines the resemblances of certain concepts and leaves open the possibility that the resemblance could be a family resemblance. But if one begins with the idea

⁴⁴⁴ Glock 2008, 216.

⁴⁴⁵ See Wittgenstein 2006/1953, remarks 68-71 and Stern, G. 2004, 114-116.

⁴⁴⁶ Glock also points this out. 2008, 214.

that for example concepts of liberty need to have a common core then the possibility that similarity is due to family resemblance is counted out *a priori*. There are basically two dangers if one expects to find a common core. The first is that one continues to abstract the concepts under discussion more and more until a common core can be seen, though this is at the cost of losing all distinctiveness and connections to the historical articulations of the concept. A subsidiary form of this danger is that rather than an important core feature, a common periphery, or a feature that is important only for some articulations and of minor importance to others, is elevated to a position of a common core. It might also be that the existence of the resemblance of the concepts goes unnoticed just because the resemblance is not due to a shared common core, but to a family resemblance. In general, within historical studies, the dangers of abstracting different articulations of concepts to the level of common core are obvious. Even if there was a common core to be found after stripping off everything else, what kind of historical information would such a treatment have to offer? I am not saying that it is only the differences that count. Indeed, the importance of differences can be exaggerated. What I am saying is that they is equally important historical information, and concentrating on what is common in a series of articulations (or just what is different about them) would entail disregarding important historical information. So, as a means of describing, and perhaps even explaining, historical formations and changes in concepts, an emphasis on the persistence of a common core is likely to miss important dimensions of specific articulations. Perhaps the problems of expecting a common core can be illustrated by what Wittgenstein says in the so-called preliminary studies to the *Philosophical Investigations*, namely the *Blue and Brown Books*. There Wittgenstein says that the idea that general concepts consist of a common, shared feature of the particulars is as misguided as the idea that properties are ingredients of the object that has the properties, as if beauty was an ingredient of beautiful things and we have something like pure beauty (as an ingredient).⁴⁴⁷

As David Bloor notes, in *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein himself points out that family resemblance could be especially useful if it were applied to historical and cultural concepts or categories.⁴⁴⁸ Wittgenstein writes that “Spengler could be better understood if he had said: I am *comparing* different cultural epochs with the lives of families; within a family there is a family resemblance, though you will also find resemblance between different family members.”⁴⁴⁹ Accordingly Bloor suggests that the concept would be specially suitable in cases when we speak about “school’s of thought”, such as “materialism”, “idealism” and “naturalism”, and that if we wish to situate Wittgenstein within a certain philosophical tradition, we should think of

⁴⁴⁷ See Wittgenstein 1965/1958, 17.

⁴⁴⁸ See Bloor 1996, 354.

⁴⁴⁹ Wittgenstein 1998, 21 (MS 111 119: 19.8.1931)

traditions in terms of family resemblances: criss-crossing similarities, specific and overall.⁴⁵⁰ Bloor's own article is an application of this idea in order to see if Wittgenstein was a linguistic idealist, and if so in what sense.

5.2.3. Applications of the Family Resemblance Thesis

The applicability of family resemblance has been noted in scholars in philosophy, political science and in other social sciences, but not by many practitioners of conceptual history. Michael Freeden did spend two and a half pages considering the relevance of the family resemblance thesis for neighbouring a genre, the study of ideologies, and concluded that “the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblances, when transported to ideological analysis, serves as a reminder that history plays a crucial role in the study of political concepts”.⁴⁵¹ Another exemplary study relevant to conceptual historians is Mark R. Beissinger's study of the concept of ‘empire,’ especially ‘the Soviet Empire’. Beissinger begins his study by stating that “the term [empire] has been deployed by historians and social scientists to cover an immense variety of political enterprises: short-lived, deterritorialised projects of conquest; bureaucratised rule over vast territories; claims of sovereignty of control over nominally independent states or rulers; pretensions to universal monarchy and global predominance; monarchical control over multiple realms; and various forms of colonial undertakings”.⁴⁵² Though Beissinger discusses family resemblances on an even more general level than I do, when it comes to an interpretation of the thesis, he regards it as a solution to the same conceptual problems that I do. He suggests that the different uses of ‘Soviet Empire’ should not be seen as a case of “conceptual stretching” which requires that the concept be replaced with some other “more sanitized vocabulary”, but applies Wittgensteinian family resemblance, which allows “people to play different games across history with the same word”.⁴⁵³ This means that we can speak of the same concept, as long as we bear in mind that the “sameness” is due to the overlapping similarities and criss-crossing and not necessarily due to a shared core or features.

In political sciences the idea of family resemblance also has also been proposed as a solution to the concern, within comparative studies, that we should not “stretch”

⁴⁵⁰ See Bloor, 1996, 354.

⁴⁵¹ Freeden 1996, 91. It is interesting to note that the idea has also been used to tell what are the necessary components of a given concept. See e.g. Johan Nyström on the concept of “partnering”. He finds two necessary components, namely “trust” and “mutual understanding” Nyström 2005.

⁴⁵² Beissinger, Mark R. 2006, 294.

⁴⁵³ Beissinger, Mark R. 2006, 297. At this point Beissinger uses the word “word” possibly implying that the object of his study is a word rather than a concept, but otherwise he is writing about a concept.

concepts until they lose their ability to make any significant demarcations,⁴⁵⁴ and that we should make sure that the cases compared are really comparable. David Collier and James E. Mahon Jr. acknowledge that the problems may arise “not only from movement across cases but also from change over time within cases”.⁴⁵⁵ They discuss more ways of extending “models and hypotheses to encompass additional cases” in comparative analysis rather than in historiography in the strict sense. But the problems are, indeed very similar to ones within conceptual history, especially since comparative conceptual history is becoming more popular. Collier and Mahon point out that applying the family resemblance thesis addresses the problem that an “overly strict application of classical principles of categorization can lead to the premature abandonment of potentially useful categories” or to “modifying it inappropriately”.⁴⁵⁶ These are roughly the same problems mentioned above: of abstracting the category (concept) so that it is no longer recognizable to the agent originally using it, or when the resemblance of given concepts is not taken into account because the nature of resemblance is different from what is expected.

But from the point of view of my work, the most interesting application of the notion of family resemblance is Hans-Johan Glock’s recent attempt to answer the question: what is analytic philosophy? Glock is not tracking down the diachronic changes in the concept of analytic philosophy, but his book is an effort to say what analytic philosophy is at present. In order to do that he takes into account the (mainly) synchronic differences within the use of the concept or label, and treats the concept of analytic philosophy as a concept that unites via family resemblances. On the other hand, the recent attempts to define and trace the history of the concept of analytic philosophy have sometimes ended up with absurd conclusions because of the longing for a common core in all the practices within the philosophical tradition called ‘analytic philosophy’. One illustration of the difficulties which may follow from the demand for a common core, instead of relying on family resemblance, is Dagfinn Føllesdal’s effort to explain what analytic philosophy is.⁴⁵⁷ A comparison between Glock and Føllesdal can be used to illustrate the differences. Though Føllesdal is at first critical of definitions that rely on a supposed common feature, he still insists on finding one. Not surprisingly, he always finds a counter example if one is trying to define the tradition of analytic philosophy by means of common feature like a doctrine or a genetic influence or method or problems. Føllesdal does not stop to consider if the demand for a common core is reasonable. Instead his conclusion is that a distinct philosophical tradition called “analytic philosophy” does not exist. Føllesdal

⁴⁵⁴ This concerns the same problem that I named above, namely to the increasingly abstract use of concepts.

⁴⁵⁵ Collier & Mahon 1994, 845,

⁴⁵⁶ Collier & Mahon 1994, 852,854. It should be noted that they are treating concepts and categories as similar. See note 1.

⁴⁵⁷ Føllesdal 1996.

takes the tradition of “analytic philosophy” away from the map of philosophical traditions, but does not touch phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, structuralism, ethics, naturalism, aesthetics, etc. Føllesdal’s essay is an exemplary illustration of the problems that the *a priori* expectation of a common core causes. First, it would seem that looking for a common feature shared by all of the representatives of a large historical tradition may prove to be very difficult. Secondly, when one finds such a feature, it will be at such an abstract level that it is completely useless, because it has no discriminating capability. This is also the case with Føllesdal. He claims that the only thing common to analytical philosophers is a distinctive approach:

[...] I believe, that analytic philosophy is very strongly concerned with argument and justification. An analytic philosopher who presents and assesses a philosophical position asks: what reasons are there for accepting or rejecting this position? This question necessitates an investigation of what follows from the position at issue, and from what other positions it can be derived. How can one strengthen or invalidate this position? This is what is usually meant when one asks: what precisely does this position mean?⁴⁵⁸

If we accept this, it is easy to see that there are, and have been, philosophers who fulfil this criteria to a better or worse degree in many different traditions. Accordingly, ‘analytic philosophy’ changes from a historically embedded tradition into an abstract approach that has been and is practised to a larger or lesser degree by philosophers from all traditions or schools of thought. He deconstructs analytic philosophy and then finds instances of it in all traditions of philosophy. Some phenomenologists, Marxists and structuralist philosophers are simply more ‘analytic’ than others, and the autonomous tradition of ‘analytic philosophy’ vanishes from the history of philosophy. But is it reasonable to claim that there is no tradition of analytic philosophy? I do not think so. Had Føllesdal thought about family resemblances instead of insisting on a shared common core, he would not have made such a conclusion. As Glock puts it: “while ‘analytic philosophy’ has a generally recognized extension in this use, it is too wide and diverse to be captured by an analytic definition, one which specifies conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for a thinker or work to qualify as analytic”.⁴⁵⁹ It is exactly for this reason that family resemblances prove to be a fruitful approach, and, as Wittgenstein claimed, if there is no such definition for a given concept that does not meet the requirement of necessary and sufficient criteria,⁴⁶⁰ it does not make the concept

⁴⁵⁸ Føllesdal 1996, 202.

⁴⁵⁹ Glock 2008, 212.

⁴⁶⁰ What is meant here by necessary and sufficient criteria is a straightforward non-complex criteria such as individual features. If the criteria are formulated in a complex way using the connective “or”, it

useless. In effect, as we have seen in the case of Føllesdal, the very insistence on this criteria may well render a concept virtually useless, al P.M.S. Hacker, however, has insisted that the term has to be held together, and not only by family resemblance, since if that was the only thing that holds the term together it “would diminish its usefulness in characterizing a particular historical movement of the twentieth century”.⁴⁶¹ Hacker’s demand seems to me strangely normative. I would rather say that if the history of a given movement does not meet Hacker’s requirements, it does not vanish from the map of movements. In the final analysis the question is empirical in nature. Such *a priori* demands of a common core or feature are problematic.

Glock applies the idea of family resemblance, but states that “a definition in terms of family resemblances draws the lines of analytic philosophy irrespective of any historical timeframe”.⁴⁶² I do not see any compelling reasons for this. One may, or may not, take historical features into account when describing something in terms of family resemblances. Glock’s solution is to separate historical features from family resemblances and to include historical influences as a distinct feature, so that “analytic philosophy” becomes “a tradition held together *both* by ties of mutual influence *and* by family resemblances”⁴⁶³ the former of which present for Glock “historical features”.⁴⁶⁴

5.2.4. A Note on W. B. Gallie and Family Resemblance

It is striking how close Gallie comes to Wittgenstein’s family resemblance thesis without making any references to him. In his 1957 article “What Makes a Subject Scientific”, published four years after the first edition of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* Gallie uses ‘farming’ as an example when pointing out the problems involved in the process of demarcating what activities fall under the same label. Gallie wonders whether there are common characteristics belonging to all the activities we call ‘farming’ and answers that there are no such characteristics: “There are no activities in which (a) all farmers and (b) no one except farmers engage. Thus

is, of course, possible to formulate necessary and sufficient criteria by applying family resemblance: the analytic philosopher is interested in “x” OR “y” OR “z”... or is using a method “a” OR “b” OR “c”... and IS NOT using method “d” OR “e” OR “f”... AND fills at least “n” percent of the criteria. However, it is easy to imagine that the requirements might become very complex. David Bloor speaks of the impossibility of delineating religions and ideologies by giving “clear, necessary and sufficient conditions” and that the emphasis should probably be put on the term ‘clear’. Bloor 1996, 354.

⁴⁶¹ Hacker, 1996, 4.

⁴⁶² Glock 2008, 205.

⁴⁶³ Glock 2008, 205.

⁴⁶⁴ It could be mentioned that Dudley Shapere has suggested that a "chain of reasoning" can be used to used to describe what remains the same while the features change radically. It is an interesting idea, but works perhaps better with scientific than political concepts. See Shapere 2001, 197-199.

(a) some farmers are dairymen, others not; some raise crops, others do not; some keep tractors, others hire them; some fill up forms, others employ accountants to do so, etc. Again (b) many farmers keep keep poultry, but so do some miners [...] It might happen to be true that at some given time there is some one activity which all living farmers are engaged in, but this would be a contingent fact in no sense deducible from the way we commonly employ the words ‘farm’ and ‘farming’”⁴⁶⁵ Gallie goes on to suggest that “if there were only four farmers in existence, their respective activities could be set out as follows”:⁴⁶⁶

Farmer 1 engages in activities A, B, C

Farmer 2 engages in activities B, C, D

Farmer 3 engages in activities C, D, E

Farmer 4 engages in activities D, E, F

Gallie explains that “[...] if we wish to define ‘farming’ in terms of characteristics, as opposed to overlapping resemblances, we can do so only in terms of a disjunction, not in terms of a set of characteristics that is common to, and belongs exclusively to, all farmers”.⁴⁶⁷ The diagram is not exactly the same diagram used above to illustrate family resemblance but it is quite close to it; and if we take into account what Gallie says about a “set of common characteristics” we could perhaps conclude that at least Gallie’s illustration of the problems shares a resemblance with the Wittgensteinian family resemblance thesis.

But Gallie’s position in regard to family resemblance is critical. In “Art as an Essentially Contested Concept” published in 1956, he discusses briefly the concept of family resemblance, though again without direct reference to Wittgenstein. He mentions that he used to think that, for example, the concept ‘work of art’ “expresses most a fact of family resemblance”⁴⁶⁸ but no longer does. About the concept ‘work of art’ Gallie says that in various cases it “might be said to express a concept, but one of a very slippery and dangerous kind, resting – unsteadily – on our recognition of a ‘family resemblance’ or a perceptible overlap between a number of lines of resemblance running through a wide ‘family’ of instances”⁴⁶⁹ and that “[n]o doubt the

⁴⁶⁵ Gallie 1957, 119.

⁴⁶⁶ Gallie 1957, 119.

⁴⁶⁷ Gallie 1957, 119. Gallie’s focus in this article is on ‘science’ which he considers in detail, but the example of ‘farming’ gives a good general picture of what Gallie has to say about the problems of giving a definition such general concepts.

⁴⁶⁸ Gallie 1956a, 101

⁴⁶⁹ Gallie 1956a, 100.

family resemblance account applies to a number of features of works of art [...]”⁴⁷⁰ But after these remarks Gallie continues in more critical tone: “[...] until it is worked out in detail I cannot see that it provides any grounds for rejecting the view that certain highly general features may in conjunction be found necessary and peculiar to the heads of object or performance that are commonly regarded as works of art. Moreover, the family resemblance account offers no explanation of why among all the conceivable sets of over-lapping resemblances that could be traced between and among, say, printed books, vocal performances [...], *one particular line of resemblances*, or one set of such lines, has been picked out and valued under the rubric ‘work of art’”.⁴⁷¹ Here Gallie seems to be sceptical about two interpretations of the family resemblance. First he claims that perhaps there might be some common general features connecting ‘works of art’, etc. Second, he is not satisfied with family resemblance because it does not offer an explanation why certain resemblances seem to be regarded as more important than others within a given ‘family’. These might be perfectly correct remarks, but they are not relevant in regard to the application I am trying to develop. To the first problem I would say that applying the family resemblance thesis does not exclude the possibility of sharing a common core or set of common features. To the second I would say that Gallie is right when stating that the family resemblance thesis does not explain why certain features and not others are chosen and it could be added that it does not even answer the question what a feature is. My answer is that there is no need for a general answer and that these features can probably be established in endless ways. It is a matter of the imagination, of trying and failing until you find features that make sense and fit into a larger picture. It is worth mentioning that, regardless of Gallie’s own suspicion, Collier et al. state that regarding Gallie’s relation to family resemblances it is “noteworthy that he situates himself in relation to that tradition and he seeks to build upon it [...] we see both strong parallels with Gallie’s framework and interesting potential contrasts. Exploration of these common and divergent elements would be a productive avenue for further study”.⁴⁷² For example, the idea of family resemblance could even explain how parties propagating different concepts of liberty, without a common core, could still say that they are speaking about the same concept; the real and true concept of liberty, and understand what the other is saying despite the fact that their concepts, at the level of definition, do not share a common core. Let us say that there is a paradigmatic articulation of this concept, for example some past philosopher wrote a book about it two hundred years ago, and this book has become the standard reference in discussions about the concept. In his account the concept consists of features a, b, c and d. Subsequently, two philosophers both acknowledge the paradigmatic status of this seminal work, and are also critical of it. They are of the opinion that in the current

⁴⁷⁰ Gallie 1956a, 101.

⁴⁷¹ Gallie 1956a, 101.

⁴⁷² Collier et al. 234, 235.

historical situation (or in general) the concept has to be revised. The first of these philosophers accepts that features a and b belong to the definition, but replaces features c and d with y and z, while the other identifies features c and d as the rational core of the past articulation but replaces features a and b with g and h. We would then have three definitions:

L1	L2	L3
abcd	abyz	cdgh

Definitions 2 and 3 do not have a common core, but they do share a relation to definition 1. So, we can now see that the fact that different definitions share only a family resemblance does not mean that they have nothing in common. It is about constructing the similarities in different ways. Though I would maintain that not even these kind of relations are required for two contesting parties to be able to communicate and understand each other, I think such a situation is a apt illustration of the descriptive and perhaps even explanatory power of the family resemblance thesis.

5.3. LEVELS OF CONCEPTUAL DISAGREEMENTS

5.3.1. Structure

Quentin Skinner's idea of three levels of conceptual disagreements was already explained in the section on "Concept and Social World Relation". The levels of conceptual disagreement were as follows:

1. Disagreement about the meaning.
2. Disagreement about the criteria for applying the word.
3. Disagreement about what range of speech acts the word can be used to perform.

In a conceptual prism, this is a more general structure than the one that I derived from Gallie. It can partly be seen as an adjustment to the first level and partly as a separate feature in the overall structure that is based on the family resemblance thesis. Gallie's thesis helps to establish discursive connections by paying attention to possible original exemplars and by recognising other contesting concepts.

The point derived from Skinner's three levels of conceptual disagreements is simply that in order to grasp the meaning of a given use of a concept we would: (1) need to

understand how the user would define it; (2) what things or actions in the world he would (and would not) accept as representatives of the concept; and (3) what kind of speech act he was performing. When doing comparative research, for example tracking down continuities and discontinuities (vertical or horizontal / diachronic or synchronic) in the uses of concepts, the disagreements at level 2 are not as interesting if there is also disagreement at level 1. But it might be interesting if there was continuity at level 2 even if there was disagreement at level 1, and vice versa. Level 2 disagreements may be very hard to anatomize if there is no direct effort to apply the concept to some concrete phenomena in the world. Thus, in this sense, this level might not be as useful as the other two. In his own work Skinner concentrates mainly on levels 1 and 3; and of these two, his emphasis has been on level 3. Introducing the speech act dimension to historical studies is certainly one of the things which Skinner is famous for. My aim in the next section is to apply this three-level model as far as it is appropriate.

5.3.2. A Short Note on Skinner, Family Resemblance and Essentially Contested Concepts

Even though it is not my intention to show that Skinner would agree with my suggestions about combining his, Gallie's and Wittgenstein's ideas, a very short note on Skinner and the family resemblance thesis should be added. In general, Skinner is more interested in what Wittgenstein says about language games and other matters than the notion of family resemblance. Nor does he really discuss Wittgenstein anywhere in detail. However, Skinner did argue in "Meaning and Understanding" that "there can be no question that the histories of different intellectual pursuits are marked by the employment of some 'fairly stable vocabulary' of characteristic concepts. Even if we hold to the fashionably loose-textured theory that it is only in virtue of certain 'family resemblances' that we are able to define and delineate such different activities, we are still committed to accepting *some* criteria and rules of usage such that certain performances can be correctly instanced, and other excluded, as examples of a given activity". As to recognising an activity he says "for if there must be at least some family resemblance connecting all the instances of a given activity, which we need first of all to apprehend in order to recognize the activity itself, it becomes impossible for any observer to consider any such activity, or any instance of it without having some preconceptions about what he expects to find".⁴⁷³ This might be the only time that Skinner brings up family resemblance, but he does elucidate it further. He seems to consider that it is a possible way of establishing a tradition of action, and as such it is a pity that he does not take it up again. An

⁴⁷³ Skinner 1969, 31.

unfortunate shortcoming of his methodological views is that they seem to lack a theory of traditions (or continuities) although they are extremely illuminating about discontinuities.

As to Gallie, I have not been able to find a single reference to him in Skinner's corpus. However, the short passage, quoted above, from "Rhetoric and Conceptual Change" about philosophers being too eager to say that the disagreements over what counts as 'child abuse' concerns concepts, and not the circumstances of application, might count as a reference to the discussions on essentially contested concepts.

5.3.3. Rationale/Justification

Skinner's views on how concepts are used are based on the same assumption as are Wittgenstein's, and it does not follow that rational discussion is in vain. He does not suggest that concepts such as the state, liberty, etc. could be defined neutrally, once and for all. They are, instead, subject to continuing change. The three different levels of disagreement and semantic holism offer a way to analyse how conceptual formation and change take place.

In a later essay "On Intellectual History and the History of Books" (2005) Skinner sums up his arguments against the possibility of coming up with neutral definitions, and the implications of this. He writes:

Concepts like liberty, or natural rights, or political representation, or the state have been so deeply embedded in our culture for so long, and have given rise to so many rival theories, that there is no prospect of gaining any significant measure of agreement about what the terms we use to express these concepts really mean [...] The belief that there is some definitive conceptual analysis to be offered has been one of the governing illusions of recent moral and political philosophy.⁴⁷⁴

Skinner's argument is historical or empirical and, as such, it is not logically decisive, but a look at the ever-continuing discussions around these concepts seems to offer quite a lot of evidence that he is right when it comes to the more important first part of the quotation. I hesitate with the last part, however, since I think that the idea of "definitive conceptual analysis" has been challenged within recent, and not so recent, moral and political philosophy, for example by Wittgenstein and Gallie, although the idea has by no means vanished. But this point is not of major importance in my

⁴⁷⁴ Skinner 2005, 33-34.

argument. As already stated, Skinner argues that acknowledging that the meaning of a concept is tightly connected to its use, does not entail that discussion becomes less rational. If we start tracking down and discussing the uses of concepts instead of trying to formulate a single universal definition, we may, to quote Skinner, actually find ourselves in a position to “liberate ourselves from any disposition to suppose that our concept must somehow be the real or the only one, and at the same time to give ourselves the chance to reflect anew on the concept we have lost, and to reconsider what we should think of it”. In the case of concept of ‘freedom’, Skinner continues, this is bound to lead to “wholly new perspectives on questions about when we are and are not free, what the additional duties our governments may have to protect our freedom, and other questions so far from being ‘merely’ historical that I have dared to describe them as having a practical significance”.⁴⁷⁵ This summarizes the rationale and justification of Skinner’s approach.

5.3.4. Applications of Three Levels of Conceptual Disagreements

I have not been able to find any application that would take into account all levels of Skinner’s typology.⁴⁷⁶ As already mentioned, Skinner himself has largely concentrated on the speech act dimension, definition and not much on the second level. The first level, of definition, is often taken as granted or as self-evident, but it does in fact pose a serious problem. It often happens that an author gives various explicit definitions or characterizations of his or her concept of liberty. When the differences are between different essays or books, the problem is not so obvious, since they may be considered as the author’s views from different positions or periods. A problem arises when this happens within one text. For example, if one reads T.H. Green one will certainly find different kinds of characterizations within one text (which are again present in another text). It is not that Green’s characterizations are incoherent, or that they are in conflict with each other as they may be illuminating ‘liberty’ from different angles. It might be that formulating one single coherent Greenian concept of liberty is impossible. My solution, which may, of course, be contested, is to take one formulation and look it through a conceptual prism. Someone else may have tried to synthesize of all Green’s formulations, and some might argue that some of the formulations should be discarded as mental aberrations, etc. However since this is my initial effort in using the conceptual prism, I shall just try it by grasping one characterization, which Quentin Skinner also took as Green’s original contribution.

⁴⁷⁵ Skinner 2005, 33. Similar comments in Skinner 1998, 116–118.

⁴⁷⁶ Nor was Skinner himself able to mention any studies that applied all the levels when I asked him if he knew of such studies.

In general, applying the second level of Skinner's typology, the "application of the concept to the world", would be a demanding task. This might explain why it has not been used extensively. It is obvious that one cannot list all the things that would apply to the extension of the concept, and sometimes it might be possible just to say what does not fit there. However, there is no doubt that in some cases it would be possible to illuminate the difference between two concepts by mentioning different things in the world that these concepts are used to refer to. Thus I will mention one interesting difference between two of the concepts of liberty that can be brought to light by paying attention to the difference between them on the second of the three levels of conceptual disagreements.

5.4. SYNTHESIS: THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL MEANING STRUCTURE OF A CONCEPT

As is by now clear, a synthesis of the theories or theses presented above will be rather complex, and I will not even try to take into account all the features of the respective theories. I will, however, concentrate on the features that I consider useful in order to analyse conceptual continuities and discontinuities (synchronic as well as diachronic) in my case study. First I will take the basic structure from Wittgenstein's family resemblance thesis, to which I will add Skinner's "levels of conceptual disagreements", and then I will use Gallie's essentially contested thesis to sharpen the structure. Or to be exact, I will draw implications from these theories and use them with the acknowledgement that the questions that Wittgenstein, Skinner and Gallie originally had in their minds are different from mine. I am not trying to come up with a complete theory of levels of meaning or a complete list of all the different types of meanings that we can attach to concepts. My aim is to construct a heuristic tool that will be of practical help. In other words, I will provide a theoretical insight into these complex matters, but will not claim that this is the only rational or useful view of the matter. There is indeed much work to be done in this area. But despite the incompleteness of my work, I shall argue that the conceptual prism as a heuristic device can be of help in identifying and analysing both historical discontinuities and continuities in conceptual history.

5.4.1. The Multidimensional Meaning Structure of a Concept

From Skinner we can derive three components of a concept's meaning structure, namely the three levels of conceptual disagreements, although in the final exposition of my case study I will be making more use of the first and third level, and simply mentioning the second level. The first one of the levels is 'definition', i.e. the

expression of literal meaning in a relatively small number of words. We may find these kinds of definitions from dictionaries or we may come up with our own definitions. In the case of analysing the uses of a concept, the relevant definition is of course the one that the agent using the concept is offering explicitly or implicitly. It might be worth noting that the same definition of a concept might be expressed in several ways by using different words.

To this I will add Gallie's idea of the complex structure of an essentially contested concept: the achievement that concepts denote must be internally complex, but the evaluation must be attributed to the whole. Moreover, any evaluation must refer to its various parts or features and must be variously describable, e.g. it is possible to give different weight to its different features. This allows us to analyse the definition in a more detailed way. A definition might consist of different features of differential importance. In the first definition there may be more weight placed on feature A than on feature B, while the second definition consists of exactly the same features, but with more weight placed on feature B than feature A. Here I may not be following Gallie's ideas very faithfully. But this approach could help us to see how concepts change, for example at the level of how much weight is given to different features of the definition. This might not be a large change when compared to other kinds of changes, but nevertheless it still might be important, for example the team referred to as 'the champions' of football may change if the weights are altered.

The second component derived from Skinner is the criterion for applying the concept. Or, to be more precise, Skinner speaks of 'word' which is somewhat confusing as few people disagree over the application of word: isn't the "application of a word" actually just the definition for a series of letters?⁴⁷⁷ I cannot imagine that anyone would see the point in arguing what series of letters we should apply to a given object. When people discuss if, for example, the state of the Democratic Republic of X is really a democracy, they are arguing if "the" or any concept of democracy can be applied to the state X, and not whether a particular series of letters can be applied to it (since it already has been).⁴⁷⁸ In any case, Skinner's idea can be used as another component of the conceptual prism. Since it is possible to disagree about the criteria for the application of a concept, these criteria are a meaningful part of the use of a concept. To understand a particular use of a concept, one should have an idea of the

⁴⁷⁷ Or if we wish to speak in Koselleckian terms, the difference between a word and a concept is that word becomes a concept when it acquires multiple interpretations. But Skinner is not Koselleckian so this way of making the difference is perhaps not relevant at this precise point.

⁴⁷⁸ This would also go together with the idea that ontologically concepts are abilities by which you are able to discriminate e.g. a democracy from a non-democracy. See Brandom 1994, Dummett 1993, Millikan 2000. And even though conceptual historians are perhaps not so much engaged in discussions about the ontology of concepts, this view is often implicitly present since the history of concepts is usually about the use of a concept (e.g. how it is used to discriminate). It does not take a form of, for example, the history of concepts as mental representations.

criteria of applicability used to distinguish objects that the concept covers from the objects that it does not cover. This simply means that one should be able to know what the user would accept as a representative of the concept and what he would not accept as a representative. But it has to be noted that often it may be that there are no coherent general criteria to be discovered. Instead, we may simply have a particular instance that we need to understand, and in this case we need to know on what grounds this particular instance of a particular object should be counted to belong to the category that the concept in question is concerned with.

The third basic part of the structure of meaning is the speech act dimension. This also provides a link from linguistics to the social world since the social world both enables speech acts and gives limits to the range of possible speech acts. It should be noted that it may not be possible to determine the whole range possible of speech acts since that would mean that nothing really new could not be done.

The family resemblance thesis provides a framework for the whole structure and enables us to mark conceptual continuities and discontinuities in the uses of a given concept, or different concepts. I am using it to enable us to see what is common and what is different between particular uses of concepts, or how different members of the family actually relate to each other. It helps to understand how changes in concepts can cause changes in other concepts and how concepts gain part of their meanings from this conceptual network. In the structure of meaning the family resemblance thesis is used to connect components of the structure of one member of the family to related components in the structures of other members.

I want to emphasize that the model is not an ontological model. The structure is analytical and heuristic. My argument is that it provides a frame which, when filled with information, helps us understand how a given concept was used, and that it helps us compare articulations of concepts in order to discover continuities and discontinuities (synchronic as well as diachronic) in their meanings. I hope show this with the example of *liberty*, but the idea is simply that if we are interested in finding out in what sense Machiavelli used *virtu* in his *Prince*, we could set this concept in the centre of the structure and work the information into the frame. We could then do the same with some other uses of *virtu* and by comparing the differences we could see how Machiavelli's use in *Prince* differs from those other uses and in what respects it is similar.

Those familiar with *Begriffsgeschichte* and Reinhart Koselleck may intuitively compare the conceptual prism to the idea of 'semantic fields' used from that tradition. A semantic field is a unified part of the vocabulary that is used to define the concept in question, not directly in the form of a definition, but in "terms of ranges of

characteristic synonyms, antonyms, associated terms”.⁴⁷⁹ If one wishes to make a comparison, the conceptual prism is not meant to replace semantic fields as an analytic instrument. It is a complementary frame, and together they can form a rather comprehensive map of different factors at the meaning formation of a given concept.⁴⁸⁰ In the next section I will try to use multidimensional meaning structure as a framework to track down the continuities and discontinuities between three concepts of liberty from different periods of time.

5.5. CASE STUDY: NEGATIVE, POSITIVE AND REPUBLICAN CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY

If we acknowledge as I do, that there are several concepts of liberty, we might end up asking how it can be that there is more than one concept of liberty and yet they are all about liberty. How can we speak about negative, positive and republican (or neo-Roman) liberty and at the same time claim that we are somehow talking about the same thing? Restrictivism in the style of MacCallum and Oppenheim and the concept/conception distinction (or the idea of a shared common core) could be used in efforts to solve this problem. But these efforts seem to lead to a situation in which only the concept of (negative) liberty survives, and other concepts of liberty will either have to be abandoned as mumbo-jumbo or else be reduced to negative liberty. In the following, the similarity or continuity of these concepts is established first by analysing them into constituent features, and then the degree of similarity is established by applying the idea of family resemblance to them. It should be said that I am fully aware of the nature of any attempt to analyse a given concept into its elements. It is very much a matter of imagination and the construction of demarcations. In other words, I am sure that someone else could perform this analysis in a different way and that an alternative analysis might be illuminating in its own way. But I do claim that my analysis manages to bring some important demarcations to the surface. In other words, I am putting forward a particular kind of analysis and claiming that it enlarges our understanding of the analysed concepts, even though it leaves plenty of room for other alternatives.

I will start my analysis on the level of definition, as does Wittgenstein when he analyses ‘game’ in his famous discussion on family resemblance (although I go onto greater detail than Wittgenstein). I will then add other elements before reaching a conclusion. I am also convinced that there are alternative ways to dissect these

⁴⁷⁹ Hampsher-Monk, Tilmans & van Vree 1998a, 2.

⁴⁸⁰ My suggestion is rather similar to Jan Ifversen’s suggestion of combining semantic fields with Foucauldian discourse analysis in which “the conceptual architecture proposed by Foucault” is to be taken as the analytical counterpart to semantic fields. See Ifversen 2003,67.

articulations, not least because Wittgenstein in his discussion of family resemblance features is not very specific about how these different features are to be perceived.

In philosophical terms the three ‘liberties’ that I will study (re)present somewhat paradigmatic examples of three different types of liberty that have been conventionally used to distinguish, at least tentatively, negative, positive and neo-Roman or republican liberty.⁴⁸¹ Since my aim in this work is not so much to contribute to scholarly debates on the concept of liberty, but mainly to point out that the conceptual prism could help us in these discussions, my historical examination of the articulations remains on a rather superficial level. I shall rely very much on secondary sources, mostly on Quentin Skinner’s studies in the era. Accordingly, one might read my presentation as a re-reconstruction of Skinner’s interpretation of different theories of liberty and not as a proper historical study of Hobbes’s and Thomas Hill Green’s concepts of liberty. As already noted, I shall first study these concepts of liberty on the level of ‘definitions’, and in Skinner’s three-level typology of potential conceptual disagreements this means number 1, “disagreement about meaning”. Then I shall try to see if there is a “common core”, in which the proper concept of liberty can be isolated from these three concepts. After these efforts I shall move beyond the simple level of definitions and try to apply other features of the conceptual prism to these concepts. I hope that this examination demonstrates that conceptual prism does enlarge our understanding of these concepts and helps us to establish continuities and discontinuities between them, thus heightening our capability to avoid anachronisms when discussing conceptual history of liberty.

⁴⁸¹ Accordingly I shall call these three concepts of liberty, following the tradition of political philosophy, “negative”, “positive” and “republican” liberty. It is obvious that this terminology is of relatively recent origin. The Romans did not call their concept of liberty “republican” and certainly not “neo-Roman”; Hobbes did not call his concept a “negative” concept of freedom. But T. H. Green did call his formulation “positive” and even contrasted it with a purely negative concept of freedom. The contrast between positive and negative concepts of liberty was made famous by Isaiah Berlin. But according to Josh L. Cherniss (the reference to Cherniss’s unpublished paper is from: <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/information/a-z.html>) the contrasting terminology of positive and negative liberty was used before Berlin by Bernard Bosanquet in *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (1899), Guido Ruggiero in *Storia del liberalismo europeo* (1925) and John Plamenatz in *Consent, Freedom and Political Obligation* (1938). Immanuel Kant used these terms in theorem four in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; Jeremy Bentham and John Lind used these terms in their correspondence; and according to Philip Pettit this was the first instance when this distinction was made. But the exact point when these terms were used for the first time used in the sense they are used here is not germane to my argument. We can safely say that it was well after Hobbes wrote *Leviathan*. This does not pose a problem for me, since I agree with Skinner that concepts can be formulated before the corresponding terminology. It should also be noted that though the following articulations may be described as paradigmatic examples, they also are all challenged within their respective traditions.

5.5.1 The Definition of Hobbes's Negative Concept of Liberty in *Leviathan*

I shall discuss the concept of liberty that Hobbes formulates in *Leviathan* though fully aware that Skinner has argued that Hobbes's theory of liberty in *Leviathan* "not only alters but contradicts his previous line of thought".⁴⁸² This change is of course an important element when studying the (speech) act dimension of Hobbes's 'liberty'. However, I am not reviewing the changes within Hobbes's thought, which could also be done using the conceptual prism, but I am comparing Hobbes's concept liberty in *Leviathan* with other concepts articulated by Green and Skinner. When I consider it relevant to point out changes of Hobbes's mind, I shall refer to Skinner's comments on the matter.

Thomas Hobbes is often regarded as the first person to have formulated a negative concept of liberty in its literal form,⁴⁸³ though he is of course not using the term 'negative concept of liberty' or 'negative liberty'. In *Leviathan* Hobbes expresses serious concern about the 'proper' meaning of words and in Chapter XXI, "Liberty of Subjects", he raises the question what proper 'liberty' means. The opening sentence of the chapter is powerful and revealing: "Liberty, or Freedome, signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition; (by Opposition, I mean externall Impediments of motion ;) and may be applied no lesse to Irrational, and Inanimate creatures, than to Rationall".⁴⁸⁴ He continues to state that "A Free-Man, is he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to doe what he has a will to. But when the words *Free*, and *Liberty*, are applied to any thing but *Bodies*, they are abused; for what is not subject to Motion, is not subject to Impediment".⁴⁸⁵ Earlier, at the beginning of Chapter XIV Hobbes defines the central terms and writes that "By *liberty*, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of externall Impediments: which Impediments, may oft take away part of a mans power to do what hee would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgement, and reason shall dictate to him".⁴⁸⁶ In these short passages Hobbes's concept of liberty is defined rather clearly. From these passages, Skinner derives "two essential elements" of Hobbes's concept of liberty:⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸² Skinner 2008a, 128. According to Skinner, Hobbes silently throws overboard the idea that arbitrary impediment could take away liberty. This is an important factor if one tries to achieve a deeper understanding of the political nature of Hobbes's thought and it makes negative liberty stand in an interesting contrast with republican liberty. In Skinner's levels of conceptual disagreements, this contrast also marks a difference at the second level.

⁴⁸³ E.g. Skinner 2002m, 247.

⁴⁸⁴ Hobbes 1996, 145. The first instance in *Leviathan* where Hobbes writes about liberty is in Chapter 14.

⁴⁸⁵ Hobbes 1996, 146.

⁴⁸⁶ Hobbes 1996, 91.

⁴⁸⁷ See Skinner 2002n, 211.

1. The idea of possessing an underlying power or ability to act; the relation between abilities and liberty.
2. The idea of being unimpeded in the exercise of such powers; freedom consists of finding no stop in doing what one wills and forbears if he wills.

These might be too general descriptions since the freedom in the Hobbesian or *Leviathan* sense is not about stopping what one wills, it is about hindering movement (or forcing something to move). And even though “movement” in Hobbes’s writings may include a large variety of acts, it certainly does not include everything that is possible for a body to will and potentially perform. Moreover, in the case of inanimate bodies it might be somewhat problematic to speak of their will. Related to this last note, we also might wish to add to Skinner’s list of “essential elements” the notification that the term liberty can, according to Hobbes, be applied to animals, to both inanimate objects and human beings, and to irrational beings as well as to rational beings. The only constraint seems to be that a body which by its constitution is not able to move cannot be said to be subject to impediment. A stone cannot be said to be unfree because it is not moving, but water descending by means of a channel has not only a necessity to descend but also the liberty.⁴⁸⁸ The banks of a river may count as impediments since without them water “would spread it selfe into a larger space” and so it is not in liberty to “move in such manner, as [it would.] without those externall impediments”⁴⁸⁹ Thus to the MacCallumian question of what counts as an agent, Hobbes’s answer would also include animals and inanimate objects that are by their constitution able to move.

Hobbes completes these characterizations with an account of what kind of limitations count as impediments. According to Skinner, Hobbes reacts to the lack of “criterion for distinguishing between inherent limitations of our powers themselves, and positive constraints upon our freedom to exercise or forbear from exercising those powers in accordance with our will and desires”.⁴⁹⁰ It could be noted that here is a change in Hobbes’s philosophy of liberty, which according to Skinner is crucial. In *Leviathan* Hobbes starts to speak about “external” impediments while before, in *De Cive*, he had written only about absence of impediments. But we will settle for a discussion of only *Leviathan*. Skinner finds two kinds of criteria for impediments from *Leviathan*:⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁸ See Hobbes 1996, 146. “*Liberty* and *necessity* are consistent; as in the water, that hath not only *liberty*, but a *necessity* of descending by the Channel [...]”.

⁴⁸⁹ Hobbes 1996, 146.

⁴⁹⁰ Skinner 2002n, 211.

⁴⁹¹ See Skinner 2002n, 212-213.

1. In cases when the agent is impeded from doing something: the opposition of some external body, which operates in such a way that the agent is tied so that it cannot move except within a certain space. This applies to a case when action within an actor's powers is rendered physically impossible.

2. The other case concerns someone being forced to do something. To be free one must to be able not to do what one does not want to do. So there must not be an irresistible external force. A slave or a person who admits God's providence is not free, since in both cases they face an external power which is irresistible; they are bound to obey in a way so "that their bodily liberty is fortified". We could conclude by saying that according to Hobbes in *Leviathan* a body is free when it is not impeded by an external force from using its capability to move.

Hobbes's theory of freedom is much more complicated than this, as Skinner recognizes. However, the "Hobbesian" concept of liberty, as taken up by classical utilitarianism, is one in which, according to Skinner, "freedom can be taken away only by identifiable acts of interference on the part of external agents, acts of interference that have the effect of rendering movements within our powers impossible to perform".⁴⁹² This concept, Skinner points out, has "eventually won the day" and "proved impressively successful at occupying the entire conceptual space, thereby managing to dismiss any rival interpretations of liberty as either pernicious or confused".⁴⁹³ Perhaps if we give up a certain amount of exactness, on the general level, Hobbes's concept can be said to have a structure in which freedom is the absence of constraints. But compared to e.g. MacCallum's formal definition, Hobbes's concept is, according to MacCallum's criteria, idealistic or political, since Hobbes has a normative view on the questions of what counts as an agent and what counts as a constraint, and Hobbes is indeed very strict about these matters. MacCallum's formulation would clearly be something Hobbes would not accept as a correct description of his concept of freedom since it allows too much speculation. The agent seems to be any potentially moveable object, anything that does not lie still by its constitution. There is no criterion concerning the demanded amount of rationality, nor demand that the object should be animate (as the freedom of descending water proves). Constraints are external impediments. Nothing else counts as a constraint. As an 'opposition' that may be said to limit liberty, only external impediments that are set or caused by some external body count. Furthermore, we can say specifically what counts as an end, as it is rather limited within the Hobbesian concept of freedom: the end is always movement (or not to move, when something is forced to move).

⁴⁹² Skinner 2003, 15-16.

⁴⁹³ Skinner 2002m, 247.

We can distinguish (at least) three important features in Hobbes's definition:

1. Agent = any (material?) body that does not stay still by its constitution.
2. Absence of impediment = absence of opposition by an external body.
3. End = movement (or not forced to move).

In other words, to be free means that a body, which is capable of moving is not impeded from moving (and is not forced to move).

5.5.2. Definition of Thomas Hill Green's Concept of Positive Liberty

We have already touched upon this theme in the section on restrictivism. As we have seen, when Skinner criticised MacCallum's idea that there is only one rational, coherent way to define the concept of liberty, his strategy was to show that a perfectly coherent concept of liberty, which is incommensurable with MacCallum's concept, can be and actually has been formulated. As an example of this kind, Skinner mentions T. H. Green's concept of liberty. The basic logic has already been discussed above, but we need to provide more details. First, Green defines liberty as an achievement. In "States and the Freedom of Citizens" Skinner writes that to achieve this state is the fulfilment "of our highest potentials"⁴⁹⁴, he and wonders if Green is the first "Anglophone philosopher to articulate the argument in precisely these terms" following Kant and Hegel.⁴⁹⁵ Second, Green's most important texts on liberty are "On Different Senses of 'Freedom'" (1879, published posthumously) and "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract" (1881). In the latter Green writes:

We shall probably all agree that freedom, rightly understood, is the greatest of blessing; that its attainment is the true end of all our effort as citizens [...] We do not mean merely freedom from restraint or compulsion. We do not mean merely freedom to do as we like irrespectively of what it is that we like. We do not mean a freedom that can be enjoyed by one man at the cost of a loss of freedom to others. When we speak of freedom as something to be so highly prized, we mean a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Skinner 2003, 21.

⁴⁹⁵ Skinner 2003, 21.

⁴⁹⁶ Green 1986, 199.

In this passage Green clearly states that freedom is one of the most, if not the most, desirable end for humans. Freedom includes the demand for social equality: it is not true freedom if one man's enjoyment of it causes its loss for other(s). Green also distinguishes the most desirable freedom from purely negative concepts of freedom, of not being hindered from doing what one likes to do.⁴⁹⁷ For Green, it counts what it is that one does; it has to be "worth of doing". What, then, is worth doing? He continues:

When we measure the progress of a society by its growth in freedom, we measure it by the increasing development and exercise *on the whole* of those powers of contributing to social good with which we believe the members of the society to be endowed; in short by greater power on the part of the citizens as a body to make the most and best of themselves.⁴⁹⁸

To be free means to exercise⁴⁹⁹ (i.e. "to do") successfully the power to "make the most and best of themselves". It is not enough that a person is not interfered when trying to make the best of himself; one actually has to make the most and the best of oneself. This is an important point, which makes this concept different from a MacCallumian negative concept of liberty. It is the same point that Skinner raised and which Green states clearly in his essay "On Different Senses of 'Freedom'". Man's freedom is tied to self-satisfaction, not to satisfaction of "this or that desire". Self-satisfaction consists "in the whole man having found his object [...] becoming what he should be, what he has it in him to be, in fulfilment of the law of his being [...] in the perfect obedience to self-imposed law" and this kind of freedom is precious to man "because it is an achievement of the self-seeking principle" and "'freedom' is the natural term by which the man describes such an object to himself – describes himself the state in which he shall have realised his ideal of himself".⁵⁰⁰ This formulation is very Kantian, but the important point is that freedom is defined as a realised or achieved state, not merely as a possibility which one could chose to achieve without being hindered. The exact meaning of self-satisfaction is not of major importance to my aim of demonstrating the applicability of the conceptual prism, nor is Green very precise about what it means to realize the ideal self. In negative terms, Green states that it cannot occur at the cost of other people's freedom. In positive terms, it consists of developed capacities forming a coherent system, a harmony, and as such it is the perfection of the self. It means becoming the one that fills up the valuable potential of

⁴⁹⁷ Green also writes that "the mere removal of compulsion, the mere enabling a man to do as he likes, is in itself no contribution to true freedom". Green 1986, 199.

⁴⁹⁸ Green 1986, 199.

⁴⁹⁹ The point about *exercising* is also mentioned in the passage: "We mean by it a power which each man *exercises* through the help or security given him by his fellow-men" (italics mine). Green 1986, 199.

⁵⁰⁰ Green 1986b, 221, 240-241.

the self most perfectly. Self-consciousness is an essential feature, since the agent should be able to “grasp his system of desires as an object to himself”⁵⁰¹ in order to strive for the actualization of his real self. The criterion of self-consciousness also establishes a criterion for what counts as an agent. Though the formulation of freedom as an achieved state of self-realization it is obviously not all that Green has to say about the concept of liberty, Skinner takes this formulation as an example of a formulation which is not about absence of constraints, and I will follow Skinner in this matter.

In relation to other possible formulations of positive liberty and especially the criticism of positive liberty, it is important to notice one feature that Green’s concept of freedom does not include. Green is fully aware of the dangers involved in a situation in which legislation does not have support from the citizens, and for this reason he concludes that “to attempt a restraining law in advance of the social sentiment necessary to give real effect to it, is always a mistake”.⁵⁰² So, at least in the case of Green, the concerns about positive liberty leading to totalitarianism and slavery that Isaiah Berlin expresses are not justified.⁵⁰³

We can now distinguish different features in Green’s concept of freedom. We can obviously find the agent and self-realization. The agent is always a human being, though not just any human being. As was made clear, the highest liberty is achievable only within society. Thus Green’s agent is always a member of society, a citizen. Self-realization, on the other hand, is making the best of oneself without harming others. The fact that one cannot achieve a state of self-realization if one is being hindered from doing so raises a slight puzzle when considering Skinner’s interpretation. In this sense absence of constraints could be claimed to be a feature of the concept of positive liberty, and this could be justified by a direct reference to Green’s text. Green states that “We do not mean *merely* freedom from restraint or compulsion” (italics mine). It could be argued that this formulation does not abandon the absence of interference, it actually includes it, but the real freedom does not end with the absence of interference. But this is very relevant. Here the absence of interference is concern only with those interferences that prevent a person from making the best of himself. Some interferences, for example, by law, may actually contribute to the advancement of liberty, such as restrictions on the sale of alcohol. This does not undermine Skinner’s claim that Green’s formulation of positive liberty is a concept that cannot be reduced to a simple absence of constraints.

Then the features of Green’s concept of liberty are the following:

⁵⁰¹ See e.g. Gaus, Gerald F. 2005, 346-347

⁵⁰² Green 1986a, 210.

⁵⁰³ See e.g. Berlin 2001, 191-200.

1. Agent = human citizen (or a member of a society)
2. Achievement of self-realization= the real essence of the self (of a social nature)
3. Absence of interference = which applies only to those interferences that stand in a person's way impeding his self-realization without harming others.

5.5.3. Definition of Quentin Skinner's Republican (Neo-Roman) Concept of Liberty

The concept of republican liberty has been one to the main themes of Skinner's work from the 1980s to the present. At one point he started to use the term "neo-Roman" instead of "republican" liberty to refer to this particular concept of liberty first because not all of the proponents of this understanding of liberty were really republicans. For example, John Locke defends an ideal of a mixed monarchy, and would have found it rather disturbing if he had been called a 'republican'. Second, because the central text "in which the distinction between liberty and slavery is drawn in precisely the manner that interests me is the *Digest* of Roman Law".⁵⁰⁴ But in his most recent work Skinner has again adopted the term 'republican', even though he thinks that it is misleading as well as anachronistic. However, he chooses to use the term 'republican' for technical reasons, in order "to remain in line with the other contributors".⁵⁰⁵ He explains that there is a need to "adopt the terminology now constantly in use"⁵⁰⁶ as "practically everyone seems to agree that the most interesting distinction is between 'republican' and 'liberal' theories of liberty".⁵⁰⁷ Skinner has also moved away from his original idea that republican liberty is a sub-category or a supplement to the concept of negative liberty to an insistence that republican liberty is not about the absence of interference, but a distinctive concept of liberty. He writes that this "is best understood as the claim that we are free if and only if we are independent--if we are able to act independently of the arbitrary will of others".⁵⁰⁸ This shift took place in 1990s largely due to Philip Pettit's influence, with Skinner's first articulation of this change arising in *Liberty Before Liberalism* (1997). Despite obvious and important modifications, one of his original claims still remains: he continues to insist that republican liberty is not a positive concept of liberty.⁵⁰⁹ In what follows I shall concentrate on the positions that Skinner has developed in his from 2008 on.

⁵⁰⁴ Skinner 2008c.

⁵⁰⁵ Skinner 2008b, 84.

⁵⁰⁶ Skinner 2008a, ix.

⁵⁰⁷ Skinner 2008c.

⁵⁰⁸ Skinner 2008c.

⁵⁰⁹ See e.g. Skinner 1984.

According to Skinner, “the basic claim of the republican theorists is [...] that the mere presence of arbitrary power serves in itself to make us slaves”.⁵¹⁰ If there is somebody that has the power to force an agent to do something against the agent’s will (or not to do something according to the agent’s will), then the agent is unfree in the republican sense of the concept, even though the master would not actually use his power. In other words, a person may be unfree even if she is allowed to follow her will. She is unfree if she is allowed to follow her will only by the grace of somebody else’s good will.

It follows that according to the republican concept of liberty an agent can be unfree without anybody coercing him. This would occur if a person were living under domination – as a slave – and was subject to arbitrary power. Skinner stresses that what is primarily in question is the existential condition of an agent.⁵¹¹ The point that agents are, or are not, being concretely constrained or that they feel, or do not feel, constrained to follow or to avoid certain courses of action is of a secondary nature. The point can be put this way: it does not matter if a person under arbitrary power does not acknowledge his/her condition, nor that no one is *de facto* constraining him or her. An agent might be living as if he were free.⁵¹² According to the republican concept of freedom the agent, if living under arbitrary power, is unfree. In terms of absence, it could be said that liberty is the absence of dependency, of arbitrary power, and of domination. Though this is the specific point of republican freedom, Skinner does not deny that republican writers acknowledge that coercion and different constraints in general did not affect freedom. It is a necessary condition that in order for a person to be free he must not be constrained. But it is not a sufficient condition.⁵¹³ The claim, however, is not that a Hobbesian concept of negative liberty

⁵¹⁰ Skinner 2008b, 90.

⁵¹¹ Hampsher-Monk has marked this difference in concepts of liberty as “a (continuing) condition” or “*jural condition of persons*” and as “a quality of (particular) acts” or “a *quality of individual acts* considered *seriatim*”. Hampsher-Monk 1998c, 1184.

⁵¹² Skinner has in “A Third Concept of Liberty” (2002) addressed the psychological consequences, namely self-censorship, of a person who is aware of living under arbitrary will. In “States and the Freedom of Citizens” he presents “battle lines” in a diagram in which he explains freedom as “no dependence”: “your freedom will thus be curtailed if you are aware that there could be interference [...] due to your dependence on the arbitrary will of another” (Figure 1, 22). But in “Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power” he states that this argument has been pursued mainly for polemical reasons and that republican writers “agree that anyone who reflects on their own servitude will probably come to *feel* unfree to act or forbear from acting in certain ways. But what actually *makes* them unfree is the mere fact of living in subjection to arbitrary power. This is what leaves them at the mercy of others, and this is what takes from them the status of free-men and makes them slaves”. Skinner 2008b, 94–95.

⁵¹³ “The neo-roman writers fully accept that the extent of your freedom as a citizen should be measured by the extent to which you are or are not constrained from acting at will in pursuit of your chosen ends. They have no quarrel, that is, with the liberal tenet that, as Jeremy Bentham was later to formulate it, the concept of liberty ‘is merely a negative one’ in the sense that its presence is always marked by the

and republican liberty should be united to one concept of liberty. To Skinner these are two different concepts. But they do not exclude each other, nor can the republican concept be reduced to the Hobbesian one.

We have again two obvious features: the agent and the absence of arbitrary power (or the absence of domination). The latter might be phrased positively: independence from arbitrary will (or a state of non-domination). It could be pointed out in a manner similar manner to the case of Green, that interference could limit freedom and could be an obstacle to one's complete freedom. Skinner himself reminds us that theorists of republican liberty would agree on the point. However, Skinner insists that then they are speaking about a negative concept of freedom, even if the concepts do not exclude each other and neither of them is the sole 'real' one. Since I do not wish to take a stand on the question of whether the absence of constraints should logically be included in the republican concept, I shall accept Skinner's concept of republican liberty. Thus the features of the republican concept of liberty are:

1. Agent = human being
2. Absence of arbitrary power = independence, non-domination

It is notable that there is no end or goal put forward. This is because the absence of arbitrary power is a condition, an existential state of a person, and there are no aims beyond that. An agent who wills nothing, aims at nothing or wishes for nothing can be unfree or free. Skinner's republican liberty consists basically of only two features.

5.5.4. Three Concepts of Liberty: Continuities and Discontinuities.

We now have three separate descriptions of the features of three different concepts of liberty. Next I will use the family resemblance thesis to examine the continuities and discontinuities between them. One way of examining the family resemblances of the three articulations of liberty is to set their features to this kind of (preliminary) table.

absence of something, and specifically by the absence of some measure of restraint or constraint".
Skinner 1998, 82–83.

	Hobbes's negative	Green's positive	Skinner's republican
Agency			
agency as any movable body	X	–	–
agency as human member of society	–	X	X
Absence			
absence of interference	X	X	–
absence of arbitrary power	–	–	X
End			
movement as end	X	–	–
self-realization as end	–	X	–

What do all three concepts have in common at this level?

Nothing, unless we move to a very abstract level and speak only in terms of ‘agency’, ‘absence’ and ‘end’. They all have something to do with absence of something, though in Green’s case this remains debatable. Skinner is emphasising the fact that real freedom in Green is not about the absence of anything but about achieved self-realization. I, however, concluded that Green includes absence of interference as a necessary condition, but only in the sense that it concerns matters that are necessary for the success of self-realization. For Green, all interference does not hinder the success of self-realization: sometimes interference by law might aid self-realization. On the practical level they might even be of help on the way toward self-realization; this one of Green’s central ideas concerning the justification of certain laws. Here the absence of interference is, after all, quite different from Hobbes’s idea on the matter, since Hobbes’s case is rather straightforward: only external impediments on the movement which a body by its constitution would have been able to perform belong to this class. In the case of republican liberty, the question is about the absence of arbitrary power. Even though they all have something to do with absence, what is common among them in this regard remains rather minimal.

Two of the concepts are also about reaching an end, though it is debatable if *end* is a correct label for the last feature. Since, to be strict, there is an important difference between Hobbes and Green. In Hobbes's concept of liberty, the end is always having the possibility to perform (or not to perform) 'movement' and not about actually performing (or not performing) movement. If there is a possibility to move, then one is free. The absence of external impediments is a sufficient condition to Hobbes, while for Green the possibility to achieve self-realization is just a necessary condition to live in freedom. To actually achieve self-realization is sufficient condition. In republican liberty the agent does not really have an end or goal. The absence of arbitrary power is a sufficient condition marking the state of freedom, no further actions or particular kinds of behaviour are required.

Naturally, all three concepts include the feature of the agent, but Hobbesian agency permits a larger variation of objects than do the others. Green and Skinner mention only humans as agents, although this is not a logical necessity. There is no logical reason why they should not, at least, speak of animals: Green could include animals in as far as they can achieve self-realization and can form some kind of society (an idea that would probably have been strange in Green's times). In Skinner's case there really is no reason why animals could or could not be under arbitrary will. In both cases it is of course historically (and empirically) clear that they are speaking only of humans: we have noted Green would not even accept that a man living in nature, like an animal, could be truly free. Skinner also connects republican liberty to the humans or maybe only to "citizens".

There is, in fact, not much in common among these concepts. A factor of absence is present in all of them, but it is not always absence of interference. There is also the feature of the agent in all of them, but there is also variation in what counts as an agent, thus the common feature would be a general notion of the agent. If we were to isolate from these three concepts of liberty a common core that would make up some sort of general definition, we would not have much to build it on. The best I can come up is something like this: liberty is about agents and absence. This is the most definitive common definition of liberty that they can allow, if the definition has to be based on the common core of these three concepts. It is, however, not very informative definition, is it? To understand something as a definition of liberty, even in a minimum sense, one should be able to associate it with the term 'liberty'. "Has four legs and a head" does not count as the core concept which all conceptions of 'dog' share, since quite a large class of other animals share it too. In addition, a rather a large class of phenomena does share the 'core': "has to do with agents and the absence of something", for example 'poverty'. Thus I doubt that very few in the

world would mention “liberty” if they were asked what is about agents and includes the absence of something?

If one agrees with this analysis, one might think that all concepts speak about different things, or possibly two of them are about liberty, but not all three of them. Let us take a closer look and see if, despite the lack of a common core, there is still a strong enough continuity that could be established, so that we could reasonably agree that these concepts are indeed all about liberty. In order to do that, I shall add more features to the meaning dimensions of the three concepts. The new features are: weights, speech acts, paradigmatic examples and recognition.

5.5.5. The Weight of the Features of Hobbes’s Negative Concept

The weight dimensions are useful when comparing concepts. The relative importance of certain features may be an important difference between the two concepts. Within one concept the analysis in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions may offer important information. In terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, as explained above, Hobbes’s requirement of the absence of external impediments is a sufficient condition for the freedom of a given body.

5.5.6. The Speech Act –Dimension of Hobbes’s Negative Concept

Skinner emphasizes that Hobbes’s study of liberty and his insistence on this kind of concept was due to the political situation in England at the time: “By making this move, he was able to mount a powerful attack on a number of new opponents of absolute sovereignty who had risen to fatal prominence in England during the period since the publication of *De Cive* in 1642”.⁵¹⁴ In other words, according to Skinner, Hobbes’s definition of liberty was a political act: an attack against “democratic gentlemen” and a defence of the Crown. To underline the political dimensions of the concept of liberty, Hobbes warns the reader about the dangers if liberty is understood in some other way. Hobbes writes about “The Liberty which writers praise” which is the “Liberty of Sovereigns; not of Private men”:

The Libertie, whereof there is so frequent, and honourable mention, in the Histories, and Philosophy of the Ancient Greeks, and Romans, and discourse of those that from them have received all their leaning in the Politiques, is not the Libertie of Particular men; but the Libertie of the Common-wealth; which is the same with that, which every man then should have, if there were no

⁵¹⁴ Skinner 2008, 138-139.

Civil Laws, nor Common-wealth at all. And the effects of it also be the same. For as amongst masterlesse men, there is perpetuall war, of every man against his neighbour; no inheritance, to transit to the Son, nor to expect from the Father; no propriety of Goods, or Lands; no security; but a full and absolute libertie in every Particular man.⁵¹⁵

This quite impressive list of the problems of adopting a different concept of liberty is of course very much related to the daily political life of England in that era and to the Civil War. To further clarify his argument Hobbes warns that “it is an easy thing, for men to be decived, by the specious name of Libertie; and for want of judgements to distinguish, mistake that for their Private Inheritance, and Birth right, which is the right of the Publique only. And when the same error is confirmed by the authority of men in reputation for their writings in this subject, it is no wonder if it produce sedition, and change of Government”.⁵¹⁶ Skinner also demonstrates that in the “opening decades of the seventeenth century”⁵¹⁷ liberty was one of the central concepts in arguments between the royalists and republicans in England, and that Hobbes’s eventually successful effort, was to win the battle against the concept of liberty, which Skinner calls the republican or neo-Roman concept of liberty.

So, there are two points to notice in regard to the speech act dimension. First, Hobbes is attaching a positive value to liberty, though he is making it clear that it is his concept of liberty that deserves this positive value while others do not. On the contrary, they are dangerous and corrupted concepts of liberty. Secondly, Hobbes’s writings may be seen as a move within the political discussion of the time. We may say that Hobbes was acting against the “democraticall writers”, such as Henry Parker or John Hall, who suffered from “*Tyrannophobia*”.⁵¹⁸ There was also a “number of new opponents of absolute sovereignty who had risen to fatal prominence in England”⁵¹⁹ who, according to Hobbes, were reading the books of policy and histories of the ancient Greeces and Romans,⁵²⁰ and who, according to Skinner, were using the original Roman arguments that the liberty of man consists of him “living independently of the will of the others”⁵²¹ to attack the King. Hobbes’s concept of liberty was an attack against them and a defence of the monarchy. Thirdly, it is worth noticing that this specific concept of liberty propagated by Hobbes’s enemies to which Hobbes attaches a negative value is precisely the concept which Skinner calls republican concept of liberty.

⁵¹⁵ Hobbes 1996, 149.

⁵¹⁶ Hobbes 1996, 149.

⁵¹⁷ Skinner 2002m, 247.

⁵¹⁸ Hobbes 1996, 226.

⁵¹⁹ Skinner 2008a, 138–139.

⁵²⁰ Hobbes 1996, 225.

⁵²¹ Skinner 2008a, 152.

5.5.7. The Weight of the Features of T. H. Green's Negative Concept

In terms of necessary and sufficient conditions we could say that the absence of constraints is a necessary but not sufficient condition, while the achievement of self-realization is a sufficient condition. And, furthermore, we have to keep in mind that not all constraints are considered, only those which will interfere with the process of self-realization by the given agent. If we compare Hobbes's and Green's concepts, we might also say that for Hobbes the relative importance of the absence of interference is higher since it is the only condition in which the agent can achieve freedom.

5.5.8. The Speech Act Dimension of T. H. Green's Negative Concept

T. H. Green was active in politics and was indeed an influential educational and social reformer. Combining philosophy and practical life was not exceptional among British Idealists, who, unlike Hegel, presumed that philosophy was “integrally related to practical life and should be directed to improve the condition of society”.⁵²² According to Melvin Richter, Green's major achievement was “to transform liberalism by recasting it in the terms of an idealism adapted to the political practices and religious crisis of his time”. “From about 1880 to 1920, his political philosophy did more to shape university teaching and public policy in Great Britain than did J. S. Mill's utilitarianism”.⁵²³ Green's political efforts are clearly on the surface when he writes about liberty in “Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract”. His rejection of and attack against *laissez-faire* principles using the concept of freedom might perhaps be described as a rhetorical redescription of the concept of freedom in particular and the concept of liberalism in general. Green uses the positive value of ‘freedom’, but defines freedom in a way that certain legal constraints lose their status as restrictions on freedom. On the contrary, he argues, they will help people attain real freedom. In short, Green's argument is that the laws that help men to make best of themselves (i.e. to be free) do not set restrictions on real freedom, though he does not equate freedom with these laws. Examples of areas where restricting laws may contribute to real freedom are, among others, licensing, selling labour, and education. At the beginning of the lecture on “Liberal Legislation” Green is probably referring to debates in the House of Commons (published in *Hansards*) and especially to Lord Bradbourne's speech to the House of Lords when he repeats the arguments presented against The Employer's Liability Act. Bradbourne encouraged workmen to appeal to the law in questions of protection, and argued that workmen should be allowed to make a

⁵²² Boucher, David & Vincent, Andrew 2000, 10.

⁵²³ Richter 1991, 183.

voluntary contract with their employer and harshly criticised the state interfering with the freedom of contract between employer and the workman. This was the political context of Green's lecture and these were the political views that he opposed in his redescription of 'freedom'.⁵²⁴

Green is obviously operating in two fields: in academic philosophical analysis and in the daily politics of England. He seriously challenges the philosophical formulations of liberty in terms of the absence of constraints, but he is at the same time participating in politics by showing the practical implications of his concept of liberty. Just as Hobbes used the positive value of 'freedom' in general, so does Green when speaking about his formulation, the highest liberty. As does Hobbes when he speaks of other formulations, namely freedom as the freedom to do as one happens to will, Green is loading this kind of freedom with negative weight.

5.5.9. Weight of the Features of Quentin Skinner's Republican Concept

Internally there are no differences in the weights between different features of Skinner's concept of freedom. If republican liberty is compared to Hobbes's negative liberty, then the agent or subject of liberty is more specific. But comparatively the relative importance of features increases, if only because there are fewer features to share the whole weight.

Though there does not seem to be very much to write about concerning the weights of different features. We might say that adding the weight of the features to the components of our analyses seems to add to our understanding of the three concepts. They help us to mark important differences between them, since, for example, the feature of absence (of impediments) is a sufficient condition for Hobbes's negative liberty, but the absence (of interference) is a necessary condition for Green's positive liberty. However, paying attention to these differences does add to the problems of analysing the concepts of liberty in terms of the concept/conception distinction or in the spirit of restrictivism.

5.5.10. The Speech Act Dimension of Quentin Skinner's Republican Concept

Skinner's project of republican liberty is a project of rehabilitation. The above arguments are, to a large extent, taken from classical Roman thinkers: Livy, Sallust, and Tacitus and from the English "democratic gentlemen" of the seventeenth century.

⁵²⁴ For a more detailed recent study of Green's political activities and his influence, within British socialism, see Matt Carter 2004.

Yet at the same time he is also fighting on the systematic front as well. Among Skinner's recent contributions to the theme of liberty are two works from 2008. Both present different aspects of his Skinner's project. *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (based on Skinner's lectures in Oxford 2002–2003) is a work in historical scholarship in Hobbes studies, with only a very few references to modern debates. On the other hand the essay "Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power", is a direct intervention in contemporary debates among political theorists which includes only a short historical sketch of the history of the republican concept of freedom. This is no surprise since Skinner had previously emphasized that he was taking part in contemporary discussions. In the case of liberty, he is taking part in ongoing academic philosophical discussions as well as in discussions situated daily politics. Skinner states his aim very clearly: "I want to emphasise – that moral and political motivations have always affected my choice of objects for research [...] I want my work to be as historical as I can possibly make it, but I also want it to have some political point".⁵²⁵

The philosophical point of Skinner's studies is to bring a forgotten concept of liberty back to the surface. It is about taking part in modern discussions concerning the concept of liberty, which, according to Skinner have concentrated on the dichotomy between positive and negative concepts of liberty (with negative concepts winning the fight). These have themselves into "hegemonical" discussions on negative liberty that focus on the Hobbesian idea of liberty as merely the absence of constraints.⁵²⁶ Skinner insists that his historical account of the republican concept differs from other theories of liberty and offers an alternative perspective from which to reflect on liberty. He argues that general alternative accounts which are not products of mere imagination but appear in real historical records provide us with the "means of preventing our current moral and political theories from degenerating too easily into uncritically accepted ideologies". Moreover they equip us "with a new means of looking critically at our own beliefs in the light of the enlarged sense of possibility we acquire".⁵²⁷ This is clearly what Skinner is offering to contemporary discussion in "A Third Concept of Liberty" where he is debating with Gerald MacCallum, Isaiah Berlin, Ian Carter, John Gray, Jan Narveson, Felix Oppenheim, Hillel Steiner, Christine Swan and Adam Swift among others. Perhaps the most obvious example of Skinner participating in contemporary 'purely' philosophical debate is in the above mentioned "Freedom as

⁵²⁵ Skinner 2002l, 54.

⁵²⁶ In 2008b Skinner also defends the autonomy of the republican concept of liberty against Kramer's and Carter's claims that the republican concept of liberty brings nothing new to their purely negative theories of liberty. See Skinner 2008 94-100.

⁵²⁷ Skinner 2002l, 57. Skinner makes the same points about philosophical significance on other occasions. See e.g. Skinner 1998, 113-120 and 1984, 193-198 & 217-218. Originally Skinner formulates the argument about the use of historical studies helping to find alternatives to our prevailing beliefs in "Meaning and Understanding".

the Absence of Arbitrary Power”. There the historical analysis of republican liberty has a minimal, background role. Skinner primarily discusses “the most challenging questions raised by Ian Carter and Matthew Kramer”.⁵²⁸ According to Skinner, the general lesson to be noticed in academic philosophical contexts is “that there is no neutral analysis of such keywords to be given”⁵²⁹ and that “we cannot usefully ask in a straightforward way which of the various theories of liberty I have outlined is the correct one.”⁵³⁰

But Skinner also uses the “third concept” to aim at straightforwardly political targets. He published an abridged version of the lecture “A Third Concept of Liberty” in the *London Review of Books*. This version has an alternative ending in which Skinner states that it is deeply ironic that in Great Britain and the United States the current prevailing idea that (negative) liberty must consist of the absence of interference. This is especially in the case of United States. This is because it was “born out of the rival theory that negative liberty consists of absence of dependence”. According to Skinner the Continental Congress accepted 1776 the classical contention that “if you depend on the goodwill of anyone else for the upholding of your rights, it follows that – even if your rights are in act upheld – you will be living in servitude”.⁵³¹ Skinner goes on to regret that in our current predicament the discrediting of the republican idea of liberty is unfortunate, since

we are once again being urged to recognize, that in times of emergency, civil liberties must bow to national security. We are being urged, that is, to acknowledge that our liberties are held not as rights but by the grace of our rulers. These arguments are of course being put us in the name of freedom and democracy. But it is worth recalling that, according to the American Founding Fathers, and to the democratical gentlemen by whom they were so greatly influenced, this is to speak of the language of tyranny.⁵³²

I am not taking a stance on the matter whether Skinner is right or wrong in his political analysis, but his act could not be more political.⁵³³ Soon Skinner made an

⁵²⁸ Skinner 2008b, 83.

⁵²⁹ Skinner 2002m, 265.

⁵³⁰ Skinner 2003, 24.

⁵³¹ Skinner 2002o, 18.

⁵³² Skinner 2002o, 18.

⁵³³ The political speech act dimension of Skinner’s writings on liberty has been noticed also by other readers. For example in his review of Skinner’s *Liberty Before Liberalism* Ian Hampsher-Monk sets this work in academic context. The essay is Skinner’s inaugural lecture and reads it as a message to historians: “Choosing this subject for his inaugural lecture and saying what he does about the political relevance of historical inquiry within context of Cambridge’s historical tradition are clearly acts which confront the supposedly autonomous character of history. The intention behind elaborating the argument and publishing it for a wider audience must at least in part be a political one (...) a Regius

even more straightforwardly political use of the concept in “States and the Freedom of Citizens”, where he points to conditions in Britain. He urges the reader to consider “the current predicament of the British people” who find themselves “living more and more under asymmetric relations of power and powerlessness”. This is because the “triumph of free markets, with the concomitant collapse of trade union movements [...] has left successive governments subject to blackmail by multinational corporations while leaving the work-force increasingly dependent on the arbitrary power of employers”. At the same time the British people lack a written constitution and “accordingly remain bereft of any liberties that their Executive cannot decide to take away”. Skinner’s list of problems continues from the problems of ethnic minorities to “the passing of the latest Anti-Terrorism Act” which, according to him, jeopardizes “even the fundamental right of *habeas corpus*” as “there is now a power of detention, without charge of trial, on mere suspicion of having committed an offence”. All this presents a shift in balance: “away from the liberty of freedom and citizens and towards increasingly arbitrary forms of state authority”, and according to Skinner, “it is partly the acceptance of the view that freedom is undermined only by coercion that allows such systems of power to flourish and seem defensible.”⁵³⁴ In recent interview on the matter he repeats the same points at greater length:

As a number of commentators have rightly begun to complain, the citizens of many democratic societies are currently witnessing a marked erosion of their civil liberties. It seems to me, however, that this complaint is often presented at the wrong level, so to speak. It tends to be presented as a claim that our civil rights are increasingly being infringed. While this accusation is well-grounded, I want to argue that what should concern us more is the background of arbitrary and discretionary power increasingly wielded by modern executives. Not only does the possession of such power enable them to interfere with civil rights at will; the very fact that so much of their power is discretionary constitutes an affront to liberty in itself. It leaves us increasingly in a state of dependence upon the will -- and hence the mere goodwill -- of our rulers, thereby undermining the rule of law in a particularly insidious way.⁵³⁵

As a cure, Skinner suggests that “we could do much worse than begin reconsidering what it means to enjoy our freedom as citizens of modern states”.⁵³⁶ All in all, Skinner is using the rehabilitation of the republican concept of liberty very much in the same spirit as the classical republican thinkers he discusses in his essays. His aim is to

Professor of History evokes a predominantly anti-monarchical republicanism.” Hampsher-Monk 1998c 1187.

⁵³⁴ Skinner 2003, 25.

⁵³⁵ Skinner 2008c.

⁵³⁶ Skinner 2003, 25.

discredit the despotic actions of the rulers, who today claim to act in the name of freedom and democracy, and to call for a republican order to secure the freedom of citizens. Skinner's general interest in daily politics is lifelong. In an interview in *Helsingin Sanomat* (30.5.1997) Skinner reported that he had given rather generous amounts money to the British Labour Party and analysed the post-Thatcher U.K. after Labour once more came to power after its longest period in opposition. He ended by making an observation that it is the economy that commands politics and not the other way round. In the same interview Skinner also said he had been more or less a member of the Labour Party during his adult age. It is clear, therefore, that Skinner is eager to apply a republican concept of liberty to the analysis of current politics, and is not ashamed to draw implications from it. On the other hand, he is also addressing his argument to academic audiences and there he is trying to build a case for a coherent alternative theory of freedom.

Unlike Hobbes and Green, Skinner is not making claims that one kind of freedom is more true or more valuable than the others. He is trying to refute 'one concept of liberty theories'. His attitude toward negative and positive concepts seems to be rather neutral in relation to the republican concept, although he insisting that republican concept of freedom is a separate concept, or at least a separate theory.⁵³⁷ In general, at least in political interventions, republican liberty is employed with a positive normative load in order to criticize offences against it. Skinner is also attaching a positive weight to Hobbes's negative concept, although he is critical of the minimal nature, and of the hegemonic strands of the proponents of negative liberty. Concerning Green's positive concept, Skinner is simply stating that it is an independent and coherent concept of liberty.

5.5.11. Paradigmatic Case or Tradition?

If we take a look at these three articulations in the light of Gallie's seventh criterion, we may find it difficult to come upon a common single paradigmatic or original concept of freedom, especially when Hobbes's articulation is itself largely regarded as

⁵³⁷ Skinner sometimes hesitates on this matter: "[...] if a given term can be coherently used with more than one range of reference, so that it can be used to pick out more than one distinct phenomenon or state of affairs, then the term may be said to express more than one concept" (Skinner 2002m, 261) and "I am no longer arguing simply about the conditions necessary for maximising negative liberty, but about how to construe the concept itself" (Skinner 2002m, footnote 123), but Skinner also writes: "I deliberately speak of a rival theory of liberty here, rather than following Carter in speaking of a rival conception. It has become usual to follow John Rawls [...] in distinguishing between different *concepts* and different *conceptions* [...] I am not wholly clear, however, what difference this distinction is supposed to mark, and for me it is in any case enough to say that I have isolated a theory of negative liberty at once different from – an indeed a rival to – the theory that liberty consists in absence of interference" (Skinner 2002m, footnote 125, note that all quotations are from the same essay).

the original instance of negative liberty. But these concepts also stand in relation to each other, and Gallie's fifth criterion might be applicable in this case. Skinner argues explicitly against the domination of Hobbes's or the Hobbesian concept and, at least according to Skinner, Hobbes is arguing against the republican concept of liberty, despite the fact Hobbes refers to the 'democratic gentlemen' of the English Civil War era and not to the Romans. As Skinner shows, these gentlemen did derive their arguments from the Roman predecessors. Green does not mention Hobbes by name in the two essays mentioned above, although in *Principles of Political Obligation* he discusses Hobbes. Somewhat paradoxically Green's preliminary argument, even if it does not follow strictly, is at least parallel to Hobbes's analyses of the state of nature when he states, that

In one sense no man is so well able to do as he likes as the wandering savage. He has no master. There is no one to say him nay. Yet we do not count him really free, because the freedom of savagery is not strength, but weakness. [...] He is not the slave of man, but he is the slave of nature. Of compulsion by natural necessity he has plenty of experience, though of restraint by society none at all. Nor can he deliver himself from that compulsion except by submitting to this restraint. So to submit is the first step in true freedom, because the first step towards the full exercise of the faculties with which man is endowed.⁵³⁸

When we examine the *Principles of Political Obligation* we can easily establish the link between Hobbes and Green on the matter of freedom: "Again, it was held that in a state of nature men were 'free and equal'. This is maintained by Hobbes [...] Hobbes represents the freedom and equality in the state of nature as actual, and this state as being for that reason *bellum omnium contra omnes*".⁵³⁹ Green also states, when referring to Hobbes, that "if freedom is to be understood in the sense in which most of these writers seem to understand it, as a power to of executing, of giving effect to, one's will, the amount of freedom possessed in a state of nature, if that was a state of detachment and collision between individuals, must have been very

⁵³⁸ Green 1986, 199.

⁵³⁹ Green 1999, 40, 41.

small”.⁵⁴⁰ By now it also becomes evident that when Green writes about the wandering savage, he is writing with the Hobbesian concept of freedom in mind.

All of these figures, Hobbes, Green and Skinner, acknowledge rival concepts of liberty. Although Hobbes is very hostile to concepts other than his own, he expends considerable effort in demonstrating that his concept is superior. In this respect he considers other articulations worth of discussing even if only to refute them. But it would not be unfair to say that Hobbes’s attitude is not the best example of Gallie’s ideal of rational discussion: rivals seem to be treated more or less as dangerous fools. Green is more tolerant of other concepts. Although he considers his concept to be the most valuable, he does not find the negative concept of liberty totally valueless, and clearly sees it as a rational formulation, not as pure nonsense. With these points in mind we can clearly state that Skinner represents a paradigmatic case of rational discussion in Gallie’s sense. In acknowledging the rationality of all three contesting concepts, Skinner writes:

Perhaps the idea of liberty as absence of interference was truer to the society in which [Berlin] himself was writing, in which the ideal of freedom as self-perfection had come to be widely seen as a religious and collectivist nightmare from which the ‘free world’ had thankfully awoken. But in earlier periods the same ideal had been a dream, not a nightmare, and in many western societies of the present time there are new movements of religious faith in which the positive concept of liberty may well appear to answer to far deeper purposes than the negative idea [...] The question of which concept best answers to our purposes will always depend on what account – if any – we believe should be given for the normative character of human nature. But this is a question that our theologians as well as philosophers have been debating for centuries, and it does not seem at all likely that they will manage in the near future to reach a final agreement⁵⁴¹

⁵⁴⁰ Green 1999, 40.

⁵⁴¹ Skinner 2002m, 264–265.

As we have noted earlier Skinner says that understanding liberty means trying to understand the different roles the concept plays and has played in different historical and social contexts. And though this means that there are no neutral definitions, only different, contesting definitions, it is clear that the analysis of 'liberty' is an intellectual task worth pursuing.

Thus it can be said that there is a historical connection between Hobbes, Green and Skinner. They belong to the tradition of philosophical and political debate over the concept of liberty, and they all are aware of the tradition and the contestation that is taking place.

In regard to these three articulations, the historical relations are as follows:

1. Hobbes versus neo-Roman, or "republican", concept of liberty.
2. Green's positive concept versus Hobbes's, or a Hobbesian, negative concept.
3. Skinner's republican or neo-Roman concept vs. Hobbes's and a Hobbesian negative concept.

From the perspective of the history of concepts of liberty, this is very brief history. nevertheless one is able to mark a clear continuum and even a *revolution* in the sense of *returning* to the republican liberty, and the conflict between republican liberty and Hobbes's negative concept. A more complete history would establish more connections to and via other articulations. This history might be expressed in terms of influences, albeit negative ones, but it is enough to state here that it is a story of recognitions. As such it would fulfil Gallie's fifth criterion.

If we now proceed to set everything in a table it looks like this:

	Hobbes's negative	Green's positive	Skinner's republican
DEFINITION & WEIGHTS			
Agency			
agency as any movable body	X	–	–
agency as human member of society	–	X	X
Absence			
absence of interference	X _{sc}	X _{nc}	–
absence of arbitrary power	–	–	X _{sc}
End			
movement as end	X	–	–
self-realization as end	–	X _{sc}	–
sc = sufficient condition, nc = necessary condition			
SPEECH ACT			
positive load	X	X	X
intervention in daily politics	X	X	X
intervention in theoretical discussions	X	X	X
RECOGNITION (and contesting)			
(Hobbes's) negative	X+	X-	X0
(Green's) positive	–	X+	X0
(Skinner's) republican	X-	–	X0

- = negative, + = positive, 0 = neutral, expressing the attitude toward contesting concepts

If we take a look at the table, we may notice that certain features are actually common, e.g. the speech acts performed, although they could also be discussed in a more detailed way and could seem to be far less similar. However no one would accept the speech act dimensions as a sufficient common core for liberty. Also in the case of liberty, it is a contingent factor that the value dimensions do coincide. If a hardcore conservative ascetic was speaking about liberty, it could be that he would see liberty as a negative phenomenon. Moreover, if we had some other concept, e.g. patriotism or democracy as an example, then we would surely notice the difference in the normative load between individual uses.⁵⁴² It also seems that both Green and Skinner acknowledge Hobbes's, or at least a Hobbesian negative concept of liberty, but as can be seen, the attitude toward it varies. Hobbes is actively and rather militantly in favour of his concept and hostile to others, whereas Green considers the negative concept to have some value, but nevertheless regards it as an uncivilised concept of liberty. As such it does not have real value to society, or only a value, whereas positive liberty is real and valuable liberty. Skinner, for his part, is rather neutral concerning to the relation of different concepts. When we added "weight of features" in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions to the level of definition in the table, it actually caused divergence between the three concepts, and the development of potential similarities was stifled. But if we look at the table as whole, we are able to see that besides very weak common qualities within the level of definitions, there are other kinds of similarities that we could call relations and overlaps. Some of these are also visible at the definitional level: all the concepts share at least one feature with one of the other concepts. The bond is not very strong, but had we taken more examples from the history of the concept of liberty, there would be even more features like this. The level of recognition is especially helpful when we try to understand how these different concepts of liberty form a tradition of 'liberty', i.e., a continuity despite many differences. It is important, however, to notice the differences of attitudes in other recognised concepts.

I have presented one way of analysing differences and similarities, and continuities and discontinuities, in conceptual history. As already stated, this is not meant to be a comprehensive approach, nor is it a sufficient method. I regard it as a complementary approach to the range of other approaches that are available. I should like to think that the conceptual prism could be usefully applied finely along with the *semantic fields* – approach familiar from the German tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte*. If we added to the table the features that belong to semantic fields, such as neighbouring concepts (in our example 'citizenship', 'administration', etc.) and counter-concepts ('servitude', 'unfreedom', etc.), the tradition would probably become easier to establish, and we

⁵⁴² See the history of 'patriot' in Dietz, M. 1989. For the history of the concept of democracy see e.g. Hanson, R. 1989.

would also have a fuller picture of the differences. I acknowledge, of course, that my history of liberty has been somewhat schematic, and I am not suggesting that other conceptual histories should take precisely this form. What I have done, however, is to try to show as transparently as possible how different components can play their part and what these components are in order to give a clear picture of the framework that I am suggesting.

5.6. THEORETICAL SUMMARY OF THE CONCEPTUAL PRISM

Perhaps the best way to summarize the theoretical insights of the conceptual prism is to discuss some recent articles that pose a challenge to my views. I shall first discuss the family resemblance thesis.

It has been claimed by for example Beardsmore, Bellaimy and most recently Kuukkanen, that family resemblance account of concepts does not set any limits to a family resemblance concept's extension.⁵⁴³ Of these, Kuukkanen is considering the question directly from the point of view of conceptual history or history of ideas. It is important to acknowledge that this becomes a problem only if one is interested in the exact number of concepts of e.g. liberty; when one asks the question whether two or more people have the same concept of liberty or not. From my point of view this problem is not that important since the question whether the concept X1 is the same as X2 is too general. The answer to this question depends very much on the level of generality and abstraction of the discussion. At the most general level all the concepts can probably be said to be the same and on the most specialized and detailed they are all different. From my point of view the proper question is: to what degree and in what ways they are similar or different. It is important to remember that while there can be theoretical or semantic similarities and differences, for example, which features do the definitions of concepts share, there can also be pragmatic similarities and differences. Furthermore, I cannot see what new information it would add to a study to conclude after carefully laying out the differences and similarities between Hobbes's concept of liberty and T. H. Green's concept of liberty that they are the same or are really different concepts. Of course, it may be impossible to avoid using terms "the concept of liberty" and "concepts of liberty" in the level of speech. This would not be even desirable. One should just make clear in what sense one uses these terms. In my case, when I speak of the concept of liberty, I speak of liberty as a family resemblance concept, and when I speak in plural or refer to particular individual's concept of liberty, then I speak of members or a particular member of the family. This

⁵⁴³ See Beardsmore 1992, 142 and Bellaimy 1990, 31 and Kuukkanen 2008, 365-366. For example Hanna Andersen has tried to give a solution to this by applying Kuhn's interpretation of family resemblance. See Andersen 2000.

enables me to say that my case study above is a partial conceptual history of the concept of liberty and yet I can maintain that the history I have sketched consists of three different concepts of liberty. The question whether we can claim that it is a partial sketch for a history of the concept of liberty, of one concept called liberty, or should we call it something else is, from my point of view, purely semantic one.

The question whether two or more articulations of liberty are articulations of the same concept is too abstract if we do not discuss what the features are that make up the concept of liberty. This question needs to be tackled on meta-level i.e. we need to discuss what kind of concept of concept we are using to make the comparison. As Wittgenstein just speaks of "features", and does not describe what kind of features a concept may consist of, it becomes our duty to give an account of what kind of features or attributes we include. The conceptual prism acknowledges, for example, speech acts and a tradition of discussion as well as the relation to possible original examples.⁵⁴⁴ One of my main theoretical points is that the number of different levels of possible continuities and discontinuities is limited only by our imagination, and this means that we should remain open and not nail down our views concerning the ways of conceptual change and continuity.

From this we can move to another challenge presented by Kuukkanen. In "Making Sense Of Conceptual Change" Kuukkanen calls for a definition of concept of concept and holds that at least German *Begriffsgeschichte* if not conceptual history in general suffers from the fact that the basic research unit or object has not been defined: "unfortunately, though, as one of its spokespersons put it, it seems to regard any precise definition of 'concept' unnecessary, and moreover, it maintains that 'concept' is useful exactly because of its ambiguity."⁵⁴⁵ In another article published only in Finnish Kuukkanen is more demanding and states that it would be very strange if a discipline did not define its own basic concepts. Kuukkanen maintains that until this problem has been solved the foundations of conceptual history remain unclear.⁵⁴⁶ It should be clear that I do not share these views. I could agree with Kuukkanen if what he meant was that each conceptual historian has to make it clear what he is studying, what kind of conceptual changes, conceptual relations, conceptual features etc. he is targeting, but he seems to speak of the whole multidisciplinary discipline. When specifying conceptual prism I did not give a definition of concept of concept. I made a list of some features that can, at least in many cases, be detected in conceptual history. I would argue that this is one way of looking at concepts and tracking down conceptual changes. I maintain that concept of concept is an essentially contested concept and that it is up to each and every conceptual historian to consider how to

⁵⁴⁴ Discourse analysis could have much to add to this feature.

⁵⁴⁵ Kuukkanen 2008, 363.

⁵⁴⁶ See Kuukkanen 2006.

approach the conceptual elements of history. Indeed, it could be argued that this is what keeps the discipline alive.

I am using Skinner's three level typology of conceptual disagreements and Gallie's thesis to fill in the place for the features of concepts that family resemblance thesis leaves open. This is an original idea and so far has not been contested as such. More general challenges were discussed above. However, it might be worth to take a look at a recent article on the concept or concepts of liberty in which the author comes to a different conclusion than I by using different method in a way that can be said to pose a challenge to the idea conceptual prism. Efraim Podoksik's "One Concept of Liberty: Towards Writing the History of a Political Concept" (2010) is very interesting regarding this work since the article is discusses the concept of liberty, historical method and anachronisms.

In short, Podoksik's main arguments are that (1) "Western political discourse was dominated through history by only one concept of liberty, which can be described as 'soft negative' concept of liberty." (2) "This conclusion is absolutely consistent with the historical method" and (3) "those who insist on historicizing the split in the concept of liberty may themselves be guilty of anachronism."⁵⁴⁷ The moral of these arguments is that the history of liberty cannot "be written as a story of the replacement of one leading concept of liberty by another" or "a story of the cohabitation of two distinct but equally influential concepts". Instead "a more fruitful approach" is to write it "as story of the constant recurrence of one concept of liberty: liberty understood as the absence of significant restraint, or as the opportunity to live one's life as one wishes."⁵⁴⁸ If you have been convinced by my case study on the concept of liberty you may wonder how Podoksik can make such claims or if you are not convinced by my analysis then you probably just think that I must reject Podoksik's arguments and his conclusion straightforwardly. However, on many points I agree with him.⁵⁴⁹ On the other hand, Podoksik is not really interested in the concept of liberty but of the "leading" or "dominant" concept of liberty in *s longue durée*⁵⁵⁰ while I do not consider whether the concepts discussed are dominant or not. But I think that these complimentary considerations concerning the popularity of a given concept could be added to the conceptual prism to mark one possible point of change in history of the concept. So, one obvious difference between Podoksik's and my study

⁵⁴⁷ Podoksik 2010, 221.

⁵⁴⁸ Podoksik 2010, 240.

⁵⁴⁹ For example, I wellcome Podosiks argument that those who are reading past through analysis of Benjamin Constant's distinction between modern liberty and liberty of the ancients may commit an anachronism because Constant's interpretation of the past may not hold true.

⁵⁵⁰ Podoksik 2010, 222 and 236. Concentration on *longue durée* seems to lead him to consider more diachronic analyses than synchronic, which might pose a challenge to his views.

can be thus explained that we are not speaking about exactly the same thing. However there are some other points of disagreement at which I shall now take a look.⁵⁵¹

One difference between us, and I think that this is matter of perspective, is that when Podoksik speaks of "the very" meaning of a concept he speaks of its definition. He does not consider that other features could be taken into account when determining meaning of a given concept. He also contrasts applications of a concept with its meaning.⁵⁵² I am not sure how well this distinction holds up. But first, I would like to point out that there is no such thing as *the* meaning of a given concept. Different kinds of meanings were discussed in earlier chapters, and at this point, it is quite enough to state that concepts have a variety of meanings and that, following Mark Bevir, it has to be kept in mind that meanings are always meanings to somebody: there are no abstract meanings lying around somewhere in a non-human area. Also, one of my key principles is that concept of concept, which gives directions to our efforts to recover meanings of concepts, is an open and contested concept. The freedom and duty of all conceptual historians to take their own stand on this question cannot be overemphasized. Accordingly, as long as Podoksik does not make universal claims but speaks about his own perspective and approach and is willing to give his reasons why he has chosen this particular perspective instead of some other, I have no principled objection. Unfortunately it seems that he is making much stronger claim.

However, Podoksik does also consider some other factors than just definition. He just does not think that they belong to domain of the meaning of 'liberty'. Obviously popularity of given concept is one of his main themes as his argument concerns the leading concept of liberty but he also notes that the value attached to liberty has been lower and higher in different times.⁵⁵³ In the conceptual prism there is a feature called normative load, but I have considered only how the author of the concept values his concept and also how the author values the contesting concepts. It surely might be useful to take the context into account and see how a given concept is generally valued among the contemporaries. But I wonder what would be Podoksik's description in a case when the popular understanding and the understanding of the original author of the concept differ or in other words: when reception is different from the author's intentions.

⁵⁵¹ More could be said about Podoksik's treatment of Quentin Skinner and his historical sketch of "positive liberty". Podoksik seems to discredit Skinner's view that republican concept of liberty is not about absence of interference as "philosophically problematic" only by referring to Mathew Kramer's criticism on Skinner but he does not discuss Skinner's answer to Kramer (Skinner 2008a) which I consider decisive. Also when discussing "positive liberty" Podoksik does not mention T. H. Green who in my opinion poses an important challenge to him. Podoksik discusses only earlier thinkers.

⁵⁵² Podoksik 2010, 231.

⁵⁵³ Podoksik 2010, 240.

Podoksik calls his leading concept of liberty 'soft negative liberty' which he defines in the following way: soft negative liberty is "based on principle of absence of constraint" though this principle "can be applied differently in different circumstances."⁵⁵⁴ This makes me wonder that wouldn't it be more informative to say that this rather loose principle has been dominating the history of the concept of liberty rather than claim that a particular concept which applies this principle in various ways has been dominating the history of concept of liberty? But this leads to another point where Podoksik stops for a while to reflect on some other conceptual features than definition, namely whether this principle is sufficient "for the proper signification" of the concept of liberty. He concludes that it is. As you have seen I make the claim that there are differences in this matter. I will not go back to the reasons of our difference, which are due to our different interpretations of history. Instead, I just ask one question. Podoksik rightly says that we cannot expect *a priori* that this or any other principle is sufficient. His conclusion follows from his historical study, but wouldn't a difference between "necessary" and "sufficient" and "necessary and sufficient" criteria of proper signification mark a potential change in the meaning of a given concept and shouldn't they thus be counted as factors of the meaning of concept, even if it turns out that the difference in the case of "liberty" turns out to be only a theoretical one?

Another interesting point in the article is the point where Podoksik discusses Skinner's concept of republican liberty. He considers that to really formulate a new concept of liberty it has to be shown that the proponents really hold on to that concept and that they separate it clearly from other concepts of liberty. Podoksik argues that in order to do this one has to show that they were really not using this formulation in order just to "prevent imminent interference in liberties" which he thinks is what the democratic gentlemen in the seventeenth-century England did.⁵⁵⁵ One could point out that by this requirement Podoksik makes a demand which no longer belongs to the level of definition of concept and it seems that he is adding something else than the definition to the meaning of the concept, actually the use or application which he previously contrasted with the meaning. However my guess is that Skinner would reply to Podoksik that this is a rhetorical use of concept, this is what the "innovative ideologists" do: they invent, modify and use concepts rhetorically to achieve their goals.⁵⁵⁶ The fact that a concept is used rhetorically does not make it vanish.

At one point Podoksik marks a difference between liberty in the ancient and in the present world in terms of counter concepts without using the term and without

⁵⁵⁴ Podoksik 2010, 227.

⁵⁵⁵ Podoksik 2010, 226

⁵⁵⁶ See the section "Concept and Social World –relation" above.

referring to the practice of *Begriffsgeschichte*.⁵⁵⁷ Podoksik notes that in the ancient world liberty was seen as opposite to slavery, it "was first and foremost attached [...] to the distinction between slaves and the free", but today an attack on liberty would be "considered a violation of basic human and civil freedoms."⁵⁵⁸ For me this marks a change in the meaning of concept of liberty, but not for Podoksik. For him concepts marked by such difference are still the same soft negative concept of liberty.

So, it seems to me that after all, we do consider many similar points but besides some interpretational differences of history our concept of concept is the main cause of our different conclusions. I am sure that Podoksik would not have anything against the idea of taking a look at e.g. semantic fields (neighbouring concepts) and finding out what kind of changes or continuities we can find there. The findings just simply would not affect his conclusion on the question how many concepts of liberty there are since he would not consider those being a constitutive part of the meaning of "liberty". As you can see, Podoksik does consider a lot of changes and factors around the concept of liberty, and in my opinion his history of a political concept could be described actually as a history of changes in and around the concept, not "history of the constant recurrence of one concept of liberty" and that is not very far away from what I have done.

Finally, with the risk of repeating myself over and over again I would like to take up the line of questioning that seem to keep a good number of researchers occupied. The questions how many concepts and efforts of trying to see whether the articulations are the same concept or not do not seem very fruitful to me. As the final remark on the theoretical points of the conceptual prism I would like say that if one applies family resemblance thesis these problems vanish. Podoksik could spell out the continuities and discontinuities in the *longue durée* and abstain from making the problematic claim, which to a significant degree depends on how he defines the concept of concept, that there is just one leading concept of liberty.

⁵⁵⁷ However, on page 232 Podoksik does refer to the article "Freiheit" in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.

⁵⁵⁸ Podoksik 2010, 223-224.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The two complementary heuristic frameworks offered in this work form the core of the dissertation. The first one is constructed rather faithfully on Quentin Skinner's ideas, and offers a detailed clarification of his typology. I also add new dimensions to that typology in the light of Skinner's other pieces. The other, the conceptual prism, is built more freely on the bases of Skinner's, Wittgenstein's and Gallie's ideas. The Skinnerian typology of anachronisms, together with the considerations and explication of Skinner's methodological writings, form an analytical device for intellectual historians in general. They do not, however, constitute strict methodological instructions to be followed step-by-step in order to avoid anachronisms. Rather they are more like a framework against which a historian might compare his or her interpretation of an historical event. If an interpretation does not align with the framework, my suggestion would be to reconsider it. Perhaps, the historian will find some problems or reasons why a misalignment should be allowed; but applying the framework, will in any case raise the reflective level of one's interpretation. Indeed, I would like to emphasize that it does not seem possible to provide a universal solution to the question of how to avoid anachronisms. If such a solution were offered, in order to meet the demands of universal applicability it would probably be so abstract that it would lose all connection with the real world, and would have very little to offer to the practice of history.

In approaching the end of this work, it should be noted that my suggestions about using Skinner's methodological considerations more as heuristics than as an absolute mandate, would be contested by other readers, such as Mark Bevir and Robert Lamb if we were discussing about Skinner's intentions. But even if my reading is based on a misunderstanding of his intentions, it would not follow that the idea of a typology as a heuristic framework would be damaged. My claim here is that my presentation of Skinner's typology does provide a useable framework. I have demonstrated this in the case studies on Danto's Nietzsche and Tejera's critique of Danto, which were developed with the two preceding chapters on Skinner in mind. The application of the typology, and the methodological recommendations discussed before, enabled me to notice the actual anachronistic nature of Danto's interpretation and also Tejera's critique, and helped me to construct an historically more illuminating picture of Danto's action than Tejera's. I did note that Danto's project was, of course, anachronistic; but as the project was set within the context of explaining the textual material, it became clear to me that, in the first place, Danto's intention was to provide a consciously anachronistic interpretation. Danto did, however, also consider that Nietzsche might have aspired to provide a system of thought that coincided with his interpretation. In contrast, Tejera's critique is based on double standard: he

accused Danto of not allowing any dialogue between the past and present, but dialogue is exactly what Tejera does not allow between his own and Danto's work. In other words, my interpretation of Danto was more successful than Tejera's in terms of avoiding anachronisms, even though Tejera claims to be spelling out his critique from a historicist point of view.

The second framework, the conceptual prism, offers more in the way of concrete help, although in the final analysis, detecting, demarcating and determining different features of different concepts is not only an analytical task, but is also very much a matter of imagination. Regarding the relevance of the conceptual prism to conceptual history, some critics might raise the question if concepts can or cannot be the "same" if they share only family resemblances. As noted before, in my opinion, what matters are degrees of similarity or dissimilarity. In a very strict sense, one could claim that one cannot use the same concept twice; on the other hand, on a more abstract level, the more one is willing to address the matter, the easier it is to speak about one concept. The job of the conceptual historian, or the purpose of the history of concepts, is to trace conceptual changes and continuities. To spend any more than a brief time wondering whether these changes are taking place within one concept or if there are many different concepts would not be time well spent by the conceptual historian. In the task of tracing similarities and dissimilarities the conceptual prism is helpful. It enables us to make more precise distinctions between the different levels of meaning of a given concept. This deepens our sensitivity to historical discontinuities and helps us avoid anachronisms within conceptual history. Adapting this viewpoint to conceptual history allows us to set aside such questions as whether there are some kind of Lovejoyan unit-ideas or stable concepts which are out there waiting to be used. Rather, it enables us to concentrate on asking what kind changes are taking place. My case study on concepts of liberty suggest that anything that could be called a common core for all three concepts of liberty is very hard to find. At the same time, it helps to see that these concepts do form a tradition, and that Skinner and Green recognize that concepts of liberty other than ones they are discussing are rational. By way of contrast, Hobbes's argument seems to me more hostile to the idea that there could be rational concepts of freedom other than what he himself regards the as real concept of liberty. Regretfully, conceptual historians of political concepts⁵⁵⁹ seem to have neglected Wittgenstein's relevance. I have offered a way to use the idea of family resemblance as a heuristic frame for comparative studies in conceptual history. My contribution might contribute nothing new to Wittgenstein studies, but it does provide an example of applying family resemblance thesis which extends the area of

⁵⁵⁹ In the area of history of scientific concepts family resemblance thesis has been discussed to some extent. I have referred to these discussion only occasionally, since conceptual prism is better suitable to political concepts. One exception of researchers interested in political concepts (and ideologies) who takes advantage of family resemblance theses is Michael Freeden.

its application of in the direction of historical studies that Wittgenstein himself mentioned as a field of possible development.

W. B. Gallie has been discussed at some length by conceptual historians and political scientists interested in conceptual history. But my treatment of his work offers a new way to use it when doing conceptual history. Instead of asking if given concept is essentially contested, one should concentrate on the structure of contested concepts. This would allow us to make more precise distinctions in terms of potential levels of discontinuity. It would allow conceptual historians doing comparative studies to compare concepts more precisely. I have also discussed the rationality of the essentially contested concepts thesis, and have argued against those critics who maintain that Gallie's thesis involves a fall into radical relativism. I claim that the case is almost the opposite. It is a narrow understanding of rationality that prevents critics from noticing that there is an alternative way of judging the rationality of a discussion. In the end, we can still argue whether there are ways of understanding rationality (or perhaps science) other than theirs. In the same context, I have also discussed the distinction between concept and conception. I presented a criticism according to which this distinction, at least when applied to historical studies, involves two dangers. The first, a tendency to abstract a concept to a level at which it has very little to do with any historical articulations. The second, the effects of bringing to the surface common features of different 'conceptions' which are in some cases only marginal, though they may be central in others. Accordingly I suggest that the "concept/conception" division should be avoided when doing conceptual history. I also present three arguments against the related idea of restrictivism, and argue that it has no place in historical studies, and probably not within other kinds of conceptual studies.

The conceptual prism could, of course, be taken in various directions, since eventually its backbone, the family resemblance thesis, leaves open the question concerning what are the features of a given concept. Wittgenstein and his followers have not been very precise in this matter. I have taken up Gallie and Skinner in order to examine more closely some features, but there is no reason to limit their number. In the future, more features, such as counter-concepts could be taken up for analysis, and could provide a more detailed understanding of conceptual continuities and discontinuities.

In addition to the two frameworks, I have paid attention to important lines of demarcation which sometimes appear to have been overlooked, especially in criticisms of anti-presentist or anti-anachronistic approaches, although they have occurred before in different forms. My distinction between anachronisms as "sin" and as "original sin" serves to remind us that even though it is not possible to be absolutely sure that our interpretations are not anachronistic, we are not left in a total

vacuum. On the contrary, much critical work can and should be done to avoid anachronisms. I do acknowledge that the theme of anachronism as original sin has received too little attention in this thesis. Yet it does provide an interesting direction for future research.

The other related distinction that I have discussed very briefly is the difference between objective and non-anachronistic interpretations. This line of demarcation is important to keep in mind, since the criticism of anti-anachronistic approaches sometimes unconsciously takes the form of criticising objectivist approaches, rather than anti-anachronistic approaches, by simply stating that the historian will always have to make choices that take place in the here and now. A non-anachronistic interpretation does not mean that it is objective, in the sense that it was not motivated by some interest and did not include corresponding choices. A non-anachronistic interpretation is, of course, made from a particular perspective, but this perspective is not necessarily anachronistic.

As mentioned above, this dissertation includes a new philosophical reading of Skinner. It is probably the first work to provide a lengthy, systematic exposition of Skinner's overall philosophical views on methodology, especially regarding efforts to avoid anachronisms and the nature of anachronism. Thus far, these matters have been discussed in only a few articles or book chapters, and in much less detail. At the same time, my exposition also provides a systematic summary of many of the central themes in Skinner's methodological and philosophical essays and can be used as reference work about these themes. Regarding the question what Skinner has to say about anachronism, my study is to date the most comprehensive discussion on the matter, despite the fact that Skinner remains one of the major figures in debates concerning historical studies and anachronisms. My in-depth exposition of Skinner's typology of anachronisms in "Meaning and Understanding" is one of the very few analyses that pay attention to what Skinner has to say about the fact that in some ways we cannot escape our modern perspectives, and that this perspective is also necessary for our understanding of the past. This is the dimension that I call original sin. The conceptual prism is the first effort to apply all the three different levels of Skinner's levels of conceptual disagreements to history.

Avoiding anachronism is a challenging job. Though it might be the case that on some occasions avoiding them does not really matter, it clearly makes a difference whether one is using anachronisms consciously or unconsciously. The problematic nature of anachronisms is most evident when evaluating historical studies, but anachronism is far from being merely a question of purely historical interest. Historical argumentation is part of everyday political life, and it seems that it is never too late to posit a glorious past or discover a history of oppression which can be used to

legitimize current political aspirations. The power of historical argumentation is so strong that the temptation to present anachronistic interpretations is evident even within scholarly circles. Although one might sometimes successfully argue that in certain cases anachronistic uses of history are not problematic, at the least these should be acknowledged as anachronistic. Yet as most of the historians discussed in this work would agree, we should not despair. Together with acquiring information about the past, identifying potential places for historical discontinuities are the most important moves that historians make when trying to avoid anachronisms. I believe that the boundaries of these moves have not yet been reached.

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